

**Images in Prose and Film: Modernist treatments of gender,
education and early 20th century culture in Bryher's *Close Up*
essays, her volume *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* (1929), and her
autobiographical fiction**

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This thesis explores the thematic and stylistic patterns across the previously unexplored fiction and non-fiction work of the modernist author Bryher. More precisely, this study focuses on Bryher's three autobiographical novels: *Development* (1920), *Two Selves* (1923) and *West* (1925), and the film criticism she published in the film journal *Close Up* (1927-1933) and her volume *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* (1929).

Influenced by her experiences as a young woman at the turn of the twentieth century and World War I, Bryher formulated strong opinions on women's social status, education, and patriarchal society. These opinions and the style of prose that articulated these ideas in her novels translated into her film criticism and informed the author's understanding of the film medium and film art throughout the 1920s and 1930s. By placing Bryher's texts in the context of the modernist writing produced by others in her close circle, this thesis compares her work to the novels and film essays published by the Imagist poet H.D. and the novelist Dorothy Richardson. Thus, it highlights Bryher's crucial role as an editor of the film journal *Close Up* and challenges previous explorations' tendency to attach her ideas to the opinions about film articulated by other *Close Up* critics, such as her long-term companion H.D. or *Close Up's* chief editor, the Scottish artist Kenneth Macpherson.

Finally, this thesis's comparison between Bryher's novels and her film criticism traces the interpretation of these themes and the style of the author's prose across different genres and contexts. The variety of the texts' topics and registers expands Bryher's commentary of early twentieth-century society to early film culture and establishes her as a key figure of early British film criticism.

Contents

1. Introduction	6
• <i>Bryher and Nancy: Style and Thematic Concerns in Bryher's autobiographical prose</i>	7
• <i>Cinema for the Masses: Social Commentary and International Cinema in Bryher's film texts</i>	13
• <i>Beginning to Understand Bryher: This Thesis's Approach to Bryher's Modernist Texts</i>	21
2. The POOL Group: A literature review of existing discourses on Bryher's position in the POOL Group and <i>Close Up</i>, and her fiction prose	26
• <i>Bryher and H.D.: Prose, Poetry and Partnership</i>	26
• <i>Bryher and Dorothy Richardson: An Enduring Friendship</i>	36
• <i>Bryher's Film Texts: Close Up and Film Problems of Soviet Russia in the context of film literature of the early twentieth century</i>	43
3. Bryher's Autobiographical Novels: Discourses on Education and Social Critique	57
• Nancy and Bryher: The Two Selves of Bryher's Autobiographical Prose	59
• Women's development: Young Women's Education and Gender Stereotypes of the early twentieth century	83
• Hermione and Nancy: Modernist Femininity in Bryher's and H.D.'s Autobiographical Novels	100
4. A Sponsor, Editor, and Critic: Bryher and <i>Close Up</i>	111
• Bryher's role in <i>Close Up</i> : Sponsor, Editor, and Contributor	113
• Film in Education: Teaching Methodologies in Bryher's <i>Close Up</i> articles	

	124
• Bryher, H.D., and Dorothy Richardson	131
5. International Films: Bryher on German Film, Hollywood, and British cinema	153
• German Film: The Foundation of Bryher's film criticism	155
• Hollywood: An Industry of Conventions	170
• British cinema: A Discussion on Censorship, Film Production, and Spectatorship	182
6. <i>Film Problems of Soviet Russia</i>: Bryher's Approach to Film Literature	200
• <i>Film Problems of Soviet Russia</i> : A Manual on Soviet Film	203
• The Directors of <i>Film Problems of Soviet Russia</i> : Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Kuleshov and Room	216
• Film's Problems: Social Dynamics, Education, and Soviet Russia's Film Industry	236
7. Conclusion: <i>Bryher after Close Up</i>	250
8. Bibliography	286

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This thesis explores the thematic and stylistic patterns that inform the autobiographical prose and film criticism of the British modernist writer Bryher (1894-1983). The following thesis examines Bryher's first three novels: *Development* (1920), *Two Selves* (1923) and *West* (1925), and compares them to her articles published in the journal *Close Up* (1927-1933), and her volume *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* (1929). Its textual analysis focuses on the ways the novels' themes are shaped by Bryher's personal experiences in the 1910s and World War I, and connects them to the author's subsequent social commentary on twentieth-century life, articulated through her prosopopoeial alter-ego Nancy. The novels' dominant themes, such as Bryher's opinions on education and women's place in society, translate into her film texts in the 1920s and 1930s. Her *Close Up* articles and her volume on Soviet montage films, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, posit that film is not only an innovative art form but also a resolution to the artistic and social issues the author identifies in her three novels. Despite her role in founding the journal and her article contributions, Bryher's involvement with *Close Up* has largely remained over-looked in scholarly explorations of the POOL Group. Instead, studies of POOL's activities privilege other contributors, such as the Imagist poet H.D. (Hilda Doolittle, 1886-1961) or the novelist Dorothy Richardson (1873-1957). This thesis's engagement with Bryher's texts and position in the POOL Group is informed by three main aims: it establishes Bryher's understanding of the film medium and film art by tracing the stylistic and thematic parallels between her autobiographical novels and her film texts; it defines her role as a sponsor and editor of *Close Up* and distinguishes her contribution to the journal's engagement with film art in the context of *Close Up*'s other women critics, mainly H.D. and Dorothy Richardson; and it indicates how the thematic heterogeneity of her early fiction and non-fiction prose

defines her later works and foregrounds her as a commentator of twentieth-century life and culture.

Bryher and Nancy: Style and Thematic Concerns in Bryher's autobiographical prose

Bryher was born in 1894 as Annie Winifred Ellerman, daughter of the wealthy shipping magnate and investor in *The Times*, Sir John Ellerman (1862-1933), and his wife Hannah Glover. The author's first memoir, *The Heart to Artemis* (1963), describes Bryher's childhood as a period of isolation from public life in the Ellerman family home, an environment that shaped Bryher's early opinions on education and women's limited role in society.¹ In the 1910s the young author chose the pseudonym 'Bryher' after one of the Scilly Isles in Cornwall.² She never referred to the name 'Bryher' as a pseudonym and adopted it as her legal name by deed poll in 1950s.³ Her new name distanced her from her family's influence and wealth, and signalled her departure from the comforts of the Ellermans' upper-class milieu. The name 'Bryher' further helped shape the author's androgynous identity and established the figure who later became known for her patronage of numerous modernist authors and artists, several little presses, and other publications. The journey of the author's self-discovery was later fictionalised in her three autobiographical novels and her protagonist Nancy, as her texts served as sites of identity projection.

Scholarly investigations of the modernist circles recognise Bryher as the close companion of the American Imagist poet H.D. (Hilda Doolittle, 1886-1961), and the sponsor of little presses including the Paris-based Contact Press, POOL Reflections in Switzerland, and the Brendin Company, as well as the film company POOL Productions. Bryher's patronage of such enterprises ensured platforms for the works of other modernists apart from H.D. Financed

¹ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis* (London: Collins, 1963) 7-43.

² Ibid. 193

³ Ibid. 193

by Bryher, the Contact Press published the novels of her first husband, Robert McAlmon (1895-1956). Bryher's publishing activities also secured exposure for the film essays of the novelist Dorothy Richardson, the film critic and editor of *Life and Letters To-Day*, Robert Herring, (1903-975), the filmmaker Oswald Blakeston (1907-1985) and Bryher's second husband, the Scottish artist Kenneth Macpherson (1902-1971). A dedicated patron of the work of others, Bryher was also a modernist author and film critic in her own right. Her body of work includes fifteen novels, two volumes of memoirs, one volume of film criticism, two collections of poetry, over twenty articles published in *Close Up*, and numerous shorter pieces, as well as international publications on film. She also sponsored the POOL Group's efforts in filmmaking, which resulted in Macpherson's films *Monkey's Moon* (1927), *Wing Beat* (1928), *Foothills* (1928), and the only POOL film that remains in full, the feature-length *Borderline* (1930), where Bryher appears as the manageress of the hotel bar. However, this thesis concentrates only on Bryher's fiction and non-fiction prose of the 1920s and the early 1930s. Her novels' autobiographical roots indicate the origins of the author's opinions about twentieth-century culture that dominate the themes and style of her film criticism and later fiction prose. A closer examination of her ideas of this early period confirms her contributions to literary modernism and British film criticism, and allows her ideas about film to be separated from those of other POOL Group critics, like H.D., Macpherson or Richardson. Bryher's *Close Up* articles treat film as a modern tool for social reform that enables mainstream education and records the truth about everyday life. These ideas form the basis of the author's analysis of international cinematic practices such as German Expressionism and Soviet montage. Apart from her views on film's role in social reform and its application as an educational tool, Bryher's fascination with Soviet cinema counters British film critics' opinions on the works of Soviet montage filmmakers. Her interest in Soviet films, combined with her ideas about art film's social applications, sets her apart from the *Close Up* critics who consider film only in

aesthetic terms.

The dominant concerns of Bryher's three novels arise from her school memories and her life as a young woman during World War I. The autobiographical origin of the themes of education, social reform and women's position in society indicates the importance of the author's personal experience over her commentary of modern society. Nevertheless, the author distances herself from her protagonist and her opinions by giving her a different name: Nancy, and through the third-person narration that dominates the three novels. The separation between the author and the protagonist aided the detachment between the author, the Ellerman family, and their position in upper-class society, and hint at Bryher's scepticism of that same social group. In *The Heart to Artemis* (1963), Bryher recognises her family's apprehension of her critique of the state, private schools and girls' education.⁴ Since 'educational reform' was the 'topic of the moment' of *Development's* publication, it emerged as the narrative's strongest theme.⁵ This concern for education is voiced in the protagonist's commentary of the rules of Downwood school for girls. Another theme that derives from the novel's record of the superficiality of girls' education in the beginning of the twentieth century is this system's effect on the young protagonist's mind. The school's encouragement of obsolete gender stereotypes exemplifies institutions' role in the shaping of female identity according to patriarchal norms and the hindrance of women's potential for development outside domesticity. As the school's repressive order restricts Nancy's free will and imagination, its ways are likened to censorship of the mind. Thus, Bryher's first novel becomes a study into the ramifications of an unfair teaching environment and a society that assumes the school is not a place of learning but rather a mechanism that moulds young minds according to acceptable social models. These observations expand to war-time London in Bryher's second novel *Two Selves* and American

⁴ Ibid. 193

⁵ Ibid. 193

society in her third text *West*. The two novels follow the protagonist's journey across countries, spaces and societies as her personality changes. Nancy grows from an introverted school girl into an assertive young woman aware of her queer identity. All three novels develop a complicated metaphorical lexicon that hints at Nancy's homosexuality, which becomes deeply ingrained into the language of Bryher's prose and its discourses on homosexuality and women's relationships.

Nancy's psyche, moods and opinions become central to Bryher's narratives. The evolution of the author's prose across the three novels reflects the protagonist's transition from childhood to the insecurities of adolescence and then to adulthood. This parallelism between the author's prose and the protagonist's psyche is prompted by modifications in Bryher's writing style as the syntax of the texts' sentence structures mirror Nancy's mental states. For example, in *Development* the lengthy constructions of Nancy's seamless dreamworld are replaced by short statements that list the protagonist's daily routine once she joins Downwood school as a day-girl: 'The lesson was French', 'Half-term drew near', 'Outside the sun shone'.⁶ As *Development* treats Downwood school as a mandatory portal to one's assimilation into a feminine stereotype that excludes creativity or intelligence, the prose's stylistic shift signals the imprisonment of the girl's free mind and the eradication of her individuality. These themes translate into Bryher's later novels and become entwined with her observations on women's opportunities for education and employment during World War I in *Two Selves*. The author's concept of 'development' encompasses women's education and professional fulfilment according to their talents. These are both freedoms granted to young boys and men. However, women's opportunities for education and employment are limited to occupations suited to patriarchal gender stereotypes, like Eleanor's role as a secretary or Miss Cape's position with

⁶ Bryher, *Two Novels: Development and Two Selves* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000) 88, 95, 98.

a lady in Buenos Aires⁷. The increasingly fragmented and paratactic style of the prose of *Two Selves* is both a suggestion of the protagonist's constant movement across urban spaces of war, and an allusion to her limited experiences of these spaces as a young woman whose access to public places is restricted. This style persists in *West* where it mediates the dynamism of the protagonist's impressions of the New World as she encounters the prejudice and habits of American society. As it privileges her queer female perspective and silences men characters' voices, the third novel underscores the protagonist's problematic position as an independent woman in a society that still follows obsolete norms. The fragmented prose and emphasis on Nancy's visual impressions of her journey through the New World transforms *West* into a journal of Nancy's travels and her opinions of America.

The three novels' interpretation of the author's queer identity and personal experiences are additionally influenced by Bryher's interest in psychoanalysis and the concept of gender inversion. Her introduction to homosexuality can be traced to her acquaintance with the psychologist Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) who outlined his concept of gender inversion in his text *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*.⁸ Bryher's understanding of gender inversion is manifested in the division of Nancy's personality in *Development* and her 'two selves' in Bryher's second novel. The protagonist's 'two selves' are a recurring metaphor that denotes Nancy's struggle between the social role she is expected to fulfil and her queer identity in *Development* and *Two Selves*. The prose's fragmentation also implies the fragmentation of Nancy's identity, complicated by her homosexuality. In the end of *Two Selves*, Nancy's acknowledgement of her homosexuality positions her between the female and the male domain. While she is secluded within the feminine realm, her opinionated nature sets her apart from other women like her chaperone Helga, modelled on H.D., or their friend Anne Trollope, a

⁷ Ibid. 199-200, 245.

⁸ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 197.

reference to H.D.'s school friend, the poet Marianne Moore (1887-1972). As a result, her assertiveness and her opinions frustrate traditional social boundaries or the male authority that governs the artistic spaces of Greenwich Village in *West*.⁹

As Nancy's queer identity enables the protagonist's violation of established social boundaries, her behaviour is unlike that of other modernist women protagonists. A juxtaposition between Bryher's Nancy and Hermione, H.D.'s protagonist in the poet's autobiographical novels *HERmione* (1927) and *Asphodel* (1921-22), illustrates the contrast between the two authors' perceptions of modernist femininity and female homosexuality, and their divergent interpretations of autobiographical prose. Bryher's three autobiographical novels are not merely records of her life. Instead, they form the basis for the queer female worldview and social commentary that dominate her fiction and non-fiction prose of this period. By contrast, H.D. dwells on her traumatic experiences by devising fictional alter-egos for herself and those around her. She is Hermione in *Asphodel* (1921-22) and *HERmione* (1927), Midget in *Paint it To-Day* (1921), and Julia in *Bid Me to Live* (1960). The novels *Asphodel*, *Paint it To-Day*, and *Bid Me to Live* reflect on overlapping periods of the poet's life as she contemplates the trauma of World War I, H.D.'s failed marriage to the poet Richard Aldington (1892-1962), and her still-born child. Although published decades after they were completed, the poet starts composing her novels in the 1920s. This period coincides with Bryher's own experimentation with autobiographical fiction in *Two Selves* and *West*. The incorporation of the poet's memories, and the novels' episodic narratives and fragmented expressions suggest parallels in Bryher's and H.D.'s approaches to autobiographical writing. However, their investigations of the female mind articulate different versions of femininity and come to divergent conclusions about women's role in society. Their ideas about modernist femininity are also reflexive of the respective stylistic traits and ideological concerns that

⁹ Bryher, *West* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1925) 157-159.

define their other works, notably their film articles and reviews. By incorporating a comparison between their prose of the same period, this thesis demonstrates autobiographical fiction's role in each author's respective body of work and its connections to the themes of their film criticism. This comparison further reveals how personal experiences inform H.D.'s and Bryher's distinct approaches to understanding the film medium and the cinema-going experience, recorded in their *Close Up* articles.

Cinema for the Masses: Social Commentary and International Cinema in Bryher's film texts

As the sponsor and co-editor of *Close Up* Bryher played a crucial role in the establishment of the journal's distinct approach to film analysis in the context of other film periodicals in the 1920s. Her *Close Up* articles privilege the director's role in filmmaking and examine international film practices as a new artform rather than mere entertainment. A combination of film criticism and social critique, her articles extend their observations beyond film's artistic merits and fit avant-garde film practices into Bryher's existing ideas about education and the need for social reform. Filmmaking itself becomes an overarching theme for both Bryher's *Close Up* articles and her volume *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, since the author recognised film's potential as an industry and a valuable tool for culture production. Critical of the British film industry and Hollywood conventions, Bryher's film texts celebrate German Expressionism and Soviet montage practices for their realistic depictions of life's hardships, and their artistic and technical accomplishments. These cinematic movements are central to Bryher's discussions of film's role in education and her recommendations for films for children outlined in the articles 'Film in Education' and 'Films for Children'.¹⁰

¹⁰ Bryher, 'Film in Education' in *Close Up* Vol. I, No 2 (August 1927) 49-54; Bryher 'Films for Children' in *Close Up*, Aug 1928, III - 2, 16-20

Bryher's film articles reveal her support for amateur filmmakers and the film industry as a profitable business, essential for the national economy at a formative period for the industrial organisation of British filmmaking. Her articles outline her positions on film production, censorship and licensing, as they recount POOL Productions' filmmaking attempts. The articles 'How I would start a film club', 'How to rent a film', and 'A Certificate of Approval' criticise the industry's self-imposed control of film production and exhibition, and the government's legislation on film imports.¹¹ Both sets of institutional regulations jeopardise the British film industry, limit aspiring filmmakers' endeavours, and prohibit the exhibition of international films in Britain. Her knowledge of policies on film and her engagement with social issues differentiate Bryher's film texts from those of other *Close Up* critics. Although Bryher acknowledges the artistic dimensions of individual filmmakers' work, her articles also focus on young filmmakers' opportunities for professional development and film's potential to become an influential industry. This thesis's comparison between Bryher's articles and those published by H.D. and Dorothy Richardson in the same period additionally underscores the author's stance on film in education and censorship. Like Bryher's *Close Up* texts, H.D. and Richardson's film articles are informed by their personal experiences of cinema-going, and discuss film's aesthetic categories and the developing practices of film spectatorship in Britain. However, H.D. and Richardson consider film only as an artistic medium or a new form of entertainment, and neither of them posits film as a tool of social reform.

When Bryher and Kenneth Macpherson founded *Close Up* in 1927, Bryher's relationship with H.D. was already established as more than professional admiration. The young author met H.D. for the first time in 1918 in Cornwall, and supported her financially and

¹¹ Bryher, 'How I Would Start a Film Club', *Close Up*, II-6, June 1928, 30-36; Bryher, 'How to Rent a Film', *Close Up*, III-6, December 1928, 45-51; Bryher, 'A Certificate of Approval', *Close Up*, V-6, December 1929, 483-487.

emotionally through her illness and the difficult birth of her daughter Perdita in 1919.¹² In 1926 Bryher divorced her first husband Robert McAlmon, and in 1927 entered into a marriage of convenience with Kenneth Macpherson.¹³ Their marriage served as a disguise for H.D.'s affair with Macpherson and guaranteed Bryher's independence from her controlling family. In 1927 Bryher and Macpherson also adopted H.D.'s daughter Perdita.¹⁴ Their decision spared H.D. from legal issues after Aldington refused to register the child as his own on the basis of her affair with the composer and Perdita's father, Cecil Grey (1895-1951).¹⁵ Bryher also established a close friendship with the novelist Dorothy Richardson. Following an exchange of letters in 1923, Bryher visited Richardson in her flat near Marlborough Road station in St. John's Wood, London.¹⁶ From then on the two formed a friendship that lasted until Richardson's death in 1957.

This thesis's comparison between Bryher's film articles and H.D.'s and Dorothy Richardson's *Close Up* essays highlights their contrasting approach to film criticism. The women critics' distinct analytic approaches reveal their divergent interpretations of the medium's properties and functions, and the different concerns they harboured for the new art form. While Bryher considered it an answer to a number of social ailments, H.D. figured film in the context of the Hellenic metaphors of her Imagist poetry. Her reviews of G.W. Pabst's *Joyless Street* (*Die Freudlose Gasse*, 1925), Lev Kuleshov's *By the Law* (*Expiation/Po Zakonu/Po zakonu*, 1926), and Carl Theodor Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (*La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, 1928), dissect actresses' gestures and seek the mythological in the plots'

¹² Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 187-188, 190-192.

¹³ *Ibid.* 247.

¹⁴ Barbara Guest, *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and her World*. (New York: Doubleday, 1984) 179-180; Susan Stanford Friedman, and Rachel Blau Duplessis, *Signets Reading H.D.* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990) 56 Vivien Whelpton, *Richard Aldington: Poet, Soldier and Lover 1911-1929* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2014) 317, 321.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 234-237

¹⁶ Dorothy Richardson to Bryher, 1923, Bryher Papers GEN MSS 97 Series I Correspondence, Box 52, Folder 1911, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, p. 239

tragic settings.¹⁷ Not unlike Bryher, Dorothy Richardson uses film and the cinema space for a social analysis of the cinema-going public. However, the novelist focuses on the social stereotypes who frequent the cinema, questions of sound film, and the significance of film spectatorship for British society and the budding film industry in Britain. Her discussion of children's exposure to cinema takes a more cautious stance towards the film theatre's social environment than Bryher's ambitious plans for film as an educational tool.

Both H.D. and Richardson share an interest in the cinema-going experience, its effect on the spectator and the film medium's status as mass entertainment and an art form. H.D. recalls her trip to a small cinema in Lausanne in 'Expiation' (hereafter referred to as *By the Law*, after its original Russian title, *Po zakonu/ По закону*) in great detail before she embarks on her analysis of the film.¹⁸ Richardson documents the contrast between theatre and cinema audiences, and the London cinemas she attends in the articles 'The Increasing Congregation', 'The Cinema in the Slums' and 'The Cinema in Arcady'¹⁹. This comparison informs her opinion of the film medium's mass appeal and the divergent social milieux that comprise the cinema audience. Although Bryher does incorporate elements of her viewings of individual films, these are normally cinemas or other venues that exhibited the films she wanted to see, or companies and contacts who enabled her attendance to screenings abroad. Her observations move on to focus on films' effects on the audiences and herself, and link them to her concerns for education, censorship, and the need for social reform rather than discussions of the cinema as a social space. By examining the three authors' critical approach to film, this thesis also identifies different strands of film criticism in *Close Up* and underscores women critics' contribution to the journal's critical diversity and expertise.

¹⁷ H.D., 'The Cinema and the Classics: Beauty', *Close Up*, I-1, July 1927, 26-33; H.D. 'Expiation' *Close Up*, II-5, May 1928, 38-49; H.D. 'Joan of Arc' *Close Up*, III-1, July 1928, pp. 15-23.

¹⁸ H.D., 'Expiation', 38-49.

¹⁹ Dorothy Richardson, 'Continuous Performance VI Increasing Congregation', *Close Up*, I-6, December 1927, 61-65; 'Continuous Performance X The Cinema in the Slums', *Close Up*, II-5, May 1928, 58-62; 'Continuous Performance XII The Cinema in Arcady', *Close Up*, III-1, July 1928, 52-57.

Bryher's critical engagement with film develops further in her more substantial exploration of the Soviet film industry, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*. *Film Problems* is one of three specialised film books published by POOL Reflection in the 1920s. The others include a second edition of Eric Elliott's volume *Anatomy of Motion Picture Art* (1928) and Oswald Blakeston's *Through a Yellow Glass* (1928). However, unlike *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, *Anatomy of Motion Picture Art* and *Through a Yellow Glass* reflect on the technical processes of film production with chapters on the staging, framing, and capturing of the moving image.²⁰ These texts are explorations of the film's medium specificity and the applications of its properties in a technical context, unlike the socio-cultural commentary that underpins Bryher's study of Soviet film.

Nevertheless, Bryher's volume, alongside Elliot's and Blakeston's texts, can be placed in the context of modernism's desire to clarify film's nature as a medium of communication and artistic expression throughout the 1910s and 1920s. As modernist authors and critics reflected on film's purpose, their writing adumbrated the effects of the medium's mechanical nature on one's perception of reality in proximity to the recorded image. Virginia Woolf's essay 'The Cinema' (1926) exemplifies this attempt to define film as it disparages the new medium's imitation of the higher arts like theatre and literature.²¹ Her essay questions the reality of the recorded world by examining film's ability to produce a narrative once the 'devices' it has borrowed from other art forms are removed.²² Woolf finally concludes that once film has forsaken the tools of other arts, 'some unknown and unexpected beauty' remains to be 'transfixed' by 'its immense dexterity and enormous technical proficiency'.²³ Similar to H.D., Woolf dwells on the symbolic in film's projection of the recorded image, suggested in

²⁰ Eric Elliot, *Anatomy of Motion Picture Art* (Territet, Switzerland: POOL Reflection, 1928); Oswald Blakeston *Through a Yellow Glass* (Territet, Switzerland: POOL Reflection, 1928).

²¹ Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema', *The Nation and the Athenaeum*, July 1926, 381-383.

²² *Ibid.* 382.

²³ *Ibid.* 383.

her search for an ‘unknown and unexpected beauty’.²⁴

Contrary to explorations solely of film’s apparatus, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* is dedicated to a specific film movement. It discusses the Soviet film industry, its most prominent filmmakers and the dominant themes of their works. A parallel can be drawn between *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* and Caroline (C.A.) Lejeune’s approach to film in her book *Cinema* (1931), which treats individual filmmakers, actors, and movements of cinematic modernism as illustrations of the medium’s impact on audiences.²⁵ However, whereas Lejeune draws on the international film industry for her reflections on the new art, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* concentrates on a single film movement for its commentary on film as an artistic medium and broader observations on its place in twentieth-century culture and society. *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* extends the author’s ideas about education and social inequality expressed in her journal articles to its analysis of individual Soviet filmmakers’ work and the Soviet film industry. As observations on other international film industries remain reserved for Bryher’s *Close Up* articles, the book’s focus on a single film movement allows for a more detailed exploration of how film could contribute to the problems Bryher identifies in previous texts. Besides the pre-existing themes of the author’s novels and film texts, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* raises concerns about women’s image on screen and their role in filmmaking, as well as Soviet film’s depictions of Soviet culture and early twentieth-century society. An extension of Bryher’s engagement with the film medium and early twentieth-century film culture, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* allows the author to engage with topics beyond *Close Up*’s framework. Bryher’s film book therefore functions as a culmination of her engagement with film that synthesises the main thematic patterns of her fiction and non-fiction prose, and develops them further in the context of Soviet culture and film spectatorship in the beginning

²⁴ Ibid. 383.

²⁵ C.A. Lejeune, *Cinema* (London: Maclehouse, 1931)

of the last century.

Based on different film practices' purpose and applications, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*'s analysis of Soviet film distinguishes between Soviet montage as an editing technique, practised by directors like Lev Kuleshov (1899-1970) and Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948), and the newsreel, exemplified by the work of the Polish-born filmmaker Dziga Vertov (1896-1954). *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*'s analysis links montage to film's artistic aesthetics and the visual expression of narrative themes in Soviet films. By contrast, newsreels and documentaries are entangled with film's educational purposes and its ability to inform people. Contrary to the popular British perceptions of Soviet films, Bryher's text separates Soviet films from Soviet Russia's political context and focuses its observations on film depictions of Soviet society that may be relevant beyond the context of Soviet culture.²⁶ In the volume's very introduction, Bryher rejects the British censor's insistence on the 'terror and power' of Soviet films.²⁷ She posits that the British censorship on Soviet films and its viewing recommendations breach the citizens' freedom to do and, in the context of film viewership, see whatever films they consider appropriate or interesting.²⁸ Such restrictions once again act as a form of censorship, breaching one's liberty for education and, in Bryher's wider understanding of the modern citizen's liberties, development. With this argument, the author once again brings up the question of the Establishment's control over one's mind and place in society, raised in her commentary on women's position in society in *Development* and *Two Selves*.

Further comparisons between Bryher's fiction and non-fiction texts illustrate the conjunction between the dominant themes of Bryher's prose and the specificities of its style. As certain syntactic constructions and language become associated with recurring themes, these stylistic patterns transfer into the author's film texts where they define her relationship to

²⁶ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* (Territet, Switzerland: POOL Reflection, 1929), 11.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 11-12.

Soviet directors' films. Bryher's summaries of film plots in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* resemble the style of prose that records Nancy's experiences throughout World War I and her travels to America. Events are described but never explained. Characters' involvement is recorded but their motivation is never clarified. Instead, the novels' narratives rely on the characters' psyche and their pre-existing familiarity with the narrative world in order to convey their main concerns about education and society. This approach transfers into *Film Problems of Soviet Russia's* individual chapters on Soviet filmmakers as the text's demonstration of montage's artistic possibilities relies on meticulous plot summaries. Bryher's commentary on individual films implies her interest in film's storytelling mechanisms and montage editing, and the audience's responses to these narrative techniques. Each Soviet filmmakers' body of work is imbued with a theme that defines his films' narrative and visual style. A record of the films' narratives, Bryher's accounts of film plots emphasise the importance of film form and techniques for the viewing experience. While Bryher never dwells on the events that surround her viewing of individual films in the way H.D. does in her film reviews, her plot summaries indicate her impression of various cinematic techniques. A further parallel can be drawn between the subjectivity of Bryher's film summaries and the free indirect style of her novels' records of Nancy's experiences and thoughts. Although the novels' third person narration distances the author from the protagonist, the three texts relate events as Nancy experienced them in the same way Bryher's film reviews document film narratives as the author saw them. The texts' narrative voice extends the themes of the three novels to the author's relationship with film. Despite her attempts to dissociate herself from her narratives, the texts' autobiographical origins and the author's relationship and knowledge of the international film industry render both her novels and her film texts into visualisations of her personal experiences. The texts document the facts of the author's experiences while she, as the narrator's voice, provides the commentary that links each personal or film-viewing experience

to her main concerns.

Beginning to Understand Bryher: This Thesis's Approach to Bryher's Modernist Texts

In its engagement with Bryher's fiction and non-fiction prose of the 1920s and early 1930s, this thesis draws on the author's memoirs, *The Heart to Artemis* (1963) and *The Days of Mars* (1972), and her vast personal archive, preserved at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. Bryher's archive at the Beinecke can be traced to two main sources. Parts of it were donated by Bryher and H.D.'s friend, the American academic Norman Holmes Pearson (1909-1975), with whom the two maintained a close relationship after their collaboration on an exhibition on H.D.'s life and work in 1956 at the Sterling Library of Yale University.²⁹ Then in 1986, two years after Bryher's death, H.D.'s daughter and also Bryher's adopted daughter, Perdita Schaffner donated the rest of the author's personal papers to the library. The archive also contains Bryher's correspondence with H.D. from the start of their relationship until the poet's death in 1961, as well as the author's letters from Dorothy Richardson, Kenneth Macpherson, *Close Up* contributors, and international film institutions and filmmakers. Bryher's extensive correspondence, notes, and diaries provide an insight into the author's relationships with these various modernist figures and serve as the grounds for this thesis's study into the international network the author established during her involvement with *Close Up*. The author's collection of materials on education and children's psychology provides further context for this thesis's reflections on the author's opinions on education and the core concerns of her early prose.

Organised chronologically according to the publication history of the texts it explores, this thesis dedicates chapters to individual texts and periods of Bryher's work. The chosen

²⁹ Annette Debo, 'Norman Holmes Pearson: Canon-Maker', *Modernism/Modernity* 23 - 2, April 2016, 443-462.

chronological approach enables a study of the main themes of Bryher's prose as they evolved from their conception in her autobiographical novels in the first half of the 1920s to their transformation in the context of her film texts. Alongside its reflections on the novels' thematic concerns, this thesis also examines the ways Bryher's language and writing style mediate the protagonist Nancy's mind-set. It illustrates the prose's manifestation of the protagonist's psyche through comparisons of sections of Bryher's writing that document Nancy's thought processes at different stages of her life. The following observations on Bryher's novels are informed by the dominant discourses on the author/protagonist relationship in autobiographical fiction, the qualities of the autobiographical text and women's life-writing that appear in the works of Philippe Lejeune, Paul De Mann, Nancy Miller, and Susan Stanford Friedman, as well as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's study of dimensions of modernist life-writing. This theoretical network helps clarify the author's relationship to her autobiographical prose and her protagonist, and its role in the formation of the style of prose that dominates her film texts as well as her approach to film criticism. A comparison between Bryher's autobiographical novels and H.D.'s *Asphodel* illuminates this exploration's discussion of the authors' divergent depictions of modernist femininity. In its comparison of the poet's and Bryher's interpretations of the female psyche, this thesis incorporates concepts of female relationships and queer identity that can be found in Rachel Blau Duplessis's reflections on H.D.'s work and the idea of women's 'self-love' that she develops.³⁰ While Bryher records Nancy's experiences as a young woman, her thoughts are directed towards the protagonist's impressions of other characters and the world around her. H.D., by contrast, employs various fictional alter-egos in order to work through the traumatic memories of the war years. Each author's approach to the documentation of their own experiences and memories in their autobiographical prose

³⁰ Rachel Blau Duplessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985)

translates into their film texts and their relationship to the films they have seen, and therefore clarifies the differences between their film analysis and their respective relationships to the film medium and film spectatorship. While the poet H.D. remains focused on her own experiences and film's effect on her own mind-set, Bryher expands her observations beyond her subjectivity and argues for film's beneficial effects on other spectators or social causes. Female stereotypes and the authors' own experiences as women in the early twentieth century further inform their understanding of the cinematic depictions of femininity discussed in their *Close Up* articles.

Following its study of the major themes of Bryher's prose and her use of personal experience as the basis for her social critique, this thesis moves on to a closer exploration of the author's engagement with film. This thesis builds on existing scholarly explorations of *Close Up*, such as James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus's study of the journal or Marcus's individual reflections on Bryher's involvement in the POOL Group, by uncoupling Bryher's treatment of film from H.D.'s ideas about the new medium and the POOL Group's collective environment.³¹ It explores Bryher's individual role and contribution to *Close Up*, and traces the journal's development to the author's vast network of contacts. By comparing Bryher's approach to film analysis to the film criticism of other *Close Up* critics, including H.D., Dorothy Richardson, Kenneth Macpherson, and Robert Herring, this thesis outlines the author's own style of film writing and perception of film culture. Along with Bryher's opinions on the film medium's artistic and social purposes, this thesis clarifies her opinions of international cinematic movements like German Expressionism, her critique of Hollywood's genre conventions and her relationship to Soviet montage films in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*. This thesis situates Bryher's volume on Soviet cinema in the context of other film

³¹ James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus, ed., *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998); Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 319-403.

books published in the early decades of the twentieth century as a demonstration of *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*'s significance as a close study of a film movement, which was continuously denied exposure in Britain throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. A comparison between Bryher's volume and the film books published by Vachel Lindsay, Oswald Blakeston, and Eric Elliot illustrates Bryher's recognition of film not only as a mechanical medium of recording but also as a powerful tool of communication and a new art form. Bryher's own analysis of Soviet films is related to the filmmaking approaches taken up by the Soviet filmmakers Lev Kuleshov and Vsevolod Pudovkin in their treatment of the human psyche on screen and Sergei Eisenstein's understanding of cinematic interpretations of historic events and socio-political problems. The length and scope of her study of Soviet film also allows her to develop the critical approaches that originate in her *Close Up* articles and add new dimensions to her own analysis of international film. In its chapters on Bryher's film criticism, this thesis also outlines the author's position of film culture in Britain and the future of young filmmakers under the influence of censorship and prejudiced critics. Thus, her involvement with *Close Up*, the themes that define her journal articles, and the new ideas that *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* adds, confirm her contribution to British film criticism.

The main body of this thesis consists of four main chapters. The first chapter that follows the introduction and literature review is a close study of the autobiographical novels *Development*, *Two Selves*, and *West*. This chapter highlights the role of the author's personal experience in her fiction prose and foregrounds the main themes that translate in her film texts. Due to the extent of the author's financial, editorial and creative contributions to the journal, this thesis chooses to explore different dimensions of Bryher's participation in *Close Up* in two separate chapters. The second chapter is one of these two consecutive parts on Bryher's involvement with the journal. It defines Bryher's role in the journal's running until its final issue in 1933. Having demonstrated Bryher's importance for *Close Up*, this chapter moves on

to establish connections between the themes of her novels and her understanding of the film medium in relation to other *Close Up* critics. The third chapter of the thesis reflects on Bryher's treatment of various international cinematic movements and practices, like German Expressionism and Hollywood cinema, as well as her critique of British cinema and film censorship in Britain. This part of the thesis also compares her position on core issues of *Close Up*'s engagement with film, such as its position on sound film or its stance on the British censorship regulations, to the ideas articulated by other contributors such as Robert Herring and Kenneth Macpherson. Having outlined the core themes of Bryher's work and her approach to film analysis, this thesis then moves on to examine Bryher's close study of Soviet cinema and its film industry in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* in a separate chapter. Apart from her interpretations of Soviet directors' films and techniques, this chapter also foregrounds the author's ideas about women's role in films, both on screen and in film production. Her consideration of Soviet women's depiction on screen and role in their national film industry demonstrates yet another theme that translates from her novels and into her film criticism, and which is distinctly informed by the personal experiences as a young woman in early twentieth-century society, articulated in her novels a decade earlier.

CHAPTER 2

The POOL Group: A literature review of existing discourses on Bryher's position in the POOL Group and *Close Up*, and her fiction prose

Bryher often appears in scholarly explorations of the life and work of H.D. or Dorothy Richardson. However, these studies create a limited perspective of her contributions to both modernist literature and film criticism. As a result, she is usually presented as a companion or a sponsor who depends on other women writers for her creative ideas and opinions. Alongside its exploration of Bryher's prose and film texts, one of this thesis's main aims is to outline ideas that are unique to her work, and are unrelated to the concerns articulated by other *Close Up* critics. The following summary of existing discourses on H.D.'s and Dorothy Richardson's life and work, and previous critical explorations of *Close Up*, provides a framework for this thesis's further investigation of Bryher's texts. The following overview also indicates the limited understanding of Bryher's own fiction and non-fiction works, and her contribution to *Close Up*'s reputation as an international journal on film, as well as the significance of *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* as an early publication on Soviet filmmaking.

Bryher and H.D.: Prose, Poetry and Partnership

Bryher and H.D.'s companionship has become the subject of multiple scholarly explorations. As these studies consider Bryher to be a supporting character in the poet's life, their descriptions of Bryher's relationship to H.D. discourage from rigorous critical engagement with the author's work. Vincent Quinn's early account of H.D.'s life presents Bryher as the young companion who saw an opportunity to escape her old-fashioned patriarchal home in her relationship with the poet.¹ Although Quinn acknowledges Bryher's later success as an author,

¹ Vincent Quinn, *Hilda Doolittle (H.D.)* (New York: Twayne, 1967) 28.

her writing career is barely mentioned and she is established as the poet's loyal admirer. Barbara Guest's exhaustive record of H.D.'s work and experiences follows a similar outline as once again Bryher is presented as a supportive friend.² However, Bryher's strained relationship with her family and the Ellermans' dislike of their daughter's companion made H.D. 'apprehensive' and instilled feelings of 'guilt' in the poet at every family visit.³ With this difficult relationship in mind, Guest presents Bryher's interest in H.D. as the poet's way to ensure her support for herself and Perdita.⁴ Janice Robinson explores the complexities of this companionship by building on Bryher's image of a concerned friend and an admiring fan of Imagist poetry. Instead of the arrangement that Guest describes, Robinson posits that it was Bryher who was possessive of H.D. and the two women remained mutually distrustful of each other, as H.D. struggled to keep Bryher away from her personal affairs.⁵ H.D. considered Bryher to be a 'tragic personality', unable to truly commit to anyone because of her own complicated personality.⁶ While these initial biographical accounts present the complexity and ambiguity of Bryher and H.D.'s relationship, they fail to consider Bryher's figure beyond her position as the poet's sponsor and consoler, and never dwell on her own work in detail.

Although Guest mentions *Development* and Bryher's historical novels published in the 1950s, her account of the author's work is brief.⁷ Despite the controversial critical reception of Bryher's first novel, Guest describes it as an 'unexpected success'.⁸ Although publications like *The Bookman* and *The Telegraph* praised the novel, other reviewers condemned its critique of education.⁹ While the novel indeed went into a second edition, Bryher's family also

² Guest, *Herself Defined* (1984).

³ *Ibid.* 117.

⁴ *Ibid.* 120.

⁵ Janice Robinson, *H.D.: The Life and Work of an American Poet* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 262-264.

⁶ *Ibid.* 262.

⁷ Guest, *Herself Defined* 115.

⁸ *Ibid.* 129.

⁹ *Weekly Telegraph* (July 18, 1920) and 'Development' in *Bookman* (August 11, 1920) Bryher Papers GEN MSS 97 Series II Writings Box 82, Folder 3112, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript

disparaged the novel's critique of the Establishment.¹⁰ Joanne Winning summarises the novel's reception in her introduction to the combined edition of *Development* and *Two Selves*, where she draws attention to the connections between 'lesbian sexuality, masculinity and writing' coded in the work of modernist women writers.¹¹ According to Winning, for women modernists writing meant the evocation of a masculinity, which otherwise they did not possess.¹² The process that Winning identifies affects Bryher's novels in two ways: first, Bryher herself adopts not simply a *nom de plume* but a new name in order to distance herself from her family and their social milieu, and second, she then establishes this new persona as an influential sponsor, publisher, and author. Writing also appears as an occupation in *Development*'s narrative where it is Nancy's final goal and defines her realisation of her true homosexual identity.¹³ The events of *West* further expose Nancy to the literary scene of Greenwich Village where she argues over the merits of American and English literature with the other characters. A reminder of Bryher's path to becoming an author, this parallel between Bryher's and Nancy's relationships to writing hints at the novel's autobiographical roots.

The novels' revelation of Nancy's queer individuality and the slow path to her homosexual awakening are influenced by Bryher's interest in psychoanalytic theories and gender inversion. Although Bryher and H.D. shared an interest in psychoanalysis, so far only H.D.'s work has been examined in the context of psychoanalytic theories. Susan Stanford Friedman suggests that the poet's friend Frances Gregg exposed H.D. to psychoanalytic theories as early as 1911.¹⁴ Friedman bases her observations on H.D.'s autobiographical novel *HERmione* (1927) and points out the German psychoanalytic books *Hermione* is given by

Library, Yale University.

¹⁰ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 193-194.

¹¹ Joanne Winning, 'Introduction,' in *Two Novels: Development and Two Selves* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000) xxxv.

¹² *Ibid.* xxxv.

¹³ *Ibid.* xxxv.

¹⁴ Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) 17.

Fayne Rabb, a reference to the real-life Gregg.¹⁵ However, the poet became truly involved in psychoanalysis in the post-war period due to Bryher's enthusiasm for the new theories.¹⁶ In 1919 the two reached out to the psychoanalyst Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), seeking help for H.D.'s fragile mental state.¹⁷ Later, H.D. underwent analysis with Mary Chadwick in 1931, with Hanns Sachs in the winter of 1931-1932, and finally with Sigmund Freud in 1933-1934.¹⁸

The poet's sessions with Freud were arranged by Bryher, who wrote to him as early as 1927 when she and Macpherson met him for the first time.¹⁹ Freud accepted H.D. as his patient in 1932, initially under the pretext that she was Bryher's 'cousin'.²⁰ The poet's sessions started in March 1933 and were later described in H.D.'s *Tribute to Freud* (1956).²¹ Friedman argues that H.D.'s 'deconstruction of the unconscious and reconstruction of the self' and Freud's own interpretation of the unconscious as a series of hieroglyphs strongly influenced the style of 'reflection rather than action' in H.D.'s prose of the 1940s and 1950s.²² This reflexivity is evident in the woman protagonist's internal monologues, dominating H.D.'s autobiographical novels *Bid Me to Live*, *HERmione*, and *Asphodel*. These monologues comment on the narrative events' impact on the female psyche and underscore the women protagonists' point of view. H.D.'s prose dissects her characters' actions down to the symbolism of small gestures and the importance of colour and movement, as the poet establishes women's limited position in patriarchal society through other characters' actions in relation to her women protagonists. Although Friedman acknowledges the significance of the

¹⁵ Ibid. 17.

¹⁶ Ibid. 18.

¹⁷ Phyllis Grosskurth, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography* (London, Melbourne, New York: Quartet Books, 1981) 294-295.

¹⁸ Ibid. 18-19.

¹⁹ Sigmund Freud to Bryher, September 7th, 1927, Bryher Papers, Box 11, Folder 449.

²⁰ Sigmund Freud to Bryher from November 13th, 1932; Sigmund Freud to Bryher from November 27th, 1932, Bryher Papers, Box 11, Folder 450.

²¹ Susan Stanford Friedman, *Analyzing Freud: Letters from H.D., Bryher, and their Circle* (New York: A New Directions Book, 2002) 29-49.

²² Friedman, *Psyche Reborn*, 54-55.

female psyche's response to patriarchal oppression in Bryher's autobiographical trilogy, she only briefly compares Bryher's and H.D.'s novels. Her analysis points out the contrast between Bryher's 'rebellion' against the established norms and H.D.'s 'suffering' with her difference in a patriarchal world.²³ Friedman also posits that Nancy's dual identity is constructed by Imagist poetics within a narrative structure.²⁴ She summarises the influence of H.D.'s Imagism over Bryher's prose by proposing that Nancy's resistance to the patriarchal norm is realised by her perfunctory acceptance of the established order and a rebellion expressed through her divided personality and interest in poetry.²⁵

Despite their recognition of Bryher's own work, these texts suggest limited engagement with Bryher's own autobiographical prose. H.D.'s narratives, and her ideas about the female psyche and early twentieth-century society, are privileged over those articulated in Bryher's prose. A similar approach is applied to Bryher's and H.D.'s contributions to the film journal *Close Up*. Bryher's articles are considered an extension of H.D.'s ideas about film. In their volume on *Close Up*, James Donald, Anne Friedberg and Laura Marcus dedicate a section to H.D.'s rubric 'Cinema and the Classics' and Dorothy Richardson's series of articles 'Continuous Performance,' but very little attention is paid to Bryher's involvement and contributions to the journal.²⁶

In her analysis of H.D.'s *Close Up* essays, Laura Marcus reflects on the poet's fascination with individual films, her involvement in filmmaking through POOL Productions, and her opinions on the relationship between cinema and psychoanalysis.²⁷ H.D.'s critical reviews never summarise films from beginning to end.²⁸ Instead the poet inserts her observations on specific scenes or actors' performances alongside her comments on the overall

²³ Ibid. 37.

²⁴ Ibid. 35.

²⁵ Ibid. 35.

²⁶ Donald, Friedberg and Marcus, *Close Up 1927-193*, 96-148; 150-210.

²⁷ Ibid. 96-104.

²⁸ Ibid. 96-104.

viewing experience, including the cinema location, the audience, and film's treatment of the diegetic world.²⁹ In her review of Kuleshov's *By the Law*, the poet admits that she was late for the viewing and only entered after a third of the film had been screened.³⁰ Her attention was drawn to the performance of the Russian actress Aleksandra Khokhlova whose 'worn-down, sea-wind battered' body epitomised the film's wild beauty.³¹ The text's metaphorical references and its focus on performance signal the importance of film's effect on the psyche in the context of H.D.'s analysis. This leads to Marcus's conclusion on H.D.'s perception of film's mechanism: she considers films to be 'celebrations of light' rather than narratives performed by actors for the viewer's delight.³² The poet's film articles investigate the impact of the recorded image's projection into the physical space and the experience of witnessing the narrative develop in the physical presence of the audience, and refrain from in-depth studies of commercial aspects of the film industry or discussions of technique.

An example of this approach is H.D.'s discussion of the physical gestures and appearance of Maria Falconetti's Joan, and their role in the depiction of human consciousness in Carl Theodore Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*³³. H.D.'s review reflects on the actress's gestures and their mediation of Joan's mood, as well as on their effect on her impression of the film:

Do I have to be cut into slices by this inevitable pan-movement of the camera, these suave lines to left, up, to the right, back, all rhythmical with the remorseless rhythm of a scimitar? ... Do we have to have the last twenty four hours' agony of Jeanne stressed and stressed and stressed, in just this way, not only by the camera but by every conceivable method of dramatic and scenic technique?³⁴

²⁹ Ibid. 96-104.

³⁰ H.D., 'Expiation', 38-39.

³¹ Ibid. p. 48

³² Donald, Friedberg and Marcus, *Close Up 1927-1933*, 98.

³³ H.D., 'Joan of Arc', 15-23.

³⁴ Ibid. 19.

The poet indicates a parallel between the camerawork and the rhythm of the editing's intercutting of frames that affects her perception of the narrative action, and then elaborates on her feelings towards the film. By intertwining film narrative with film technique and its effect on her as a spectator, H.D. records a series of personal impressions of individual films. Instead of objective film reviews, the poet's film articles become essays on her own motivation for attending film screenings. These personal accounts elicit the traumatised female psyche in the poet's prose and her tendency to work through personal trauma in her novels, exemplified by the incorporation of her memories from World War I as Julia's personal tragedy in *Bid Me to Live*. Her emotional strife is the narrative's driving force as the protagonist undergoes a transformation in her attempt to overcome the loss of her child, her husband's adultery, and the neglect of her lovers. These similarities between her prose and film reviews imply that the poet perceives the practice of film spectatorship and the film projection itself as an emotional but healing experience. In her exploration of film culture's development in the early twentieth century, Marcus draws attention to an episode in *Bid Me to Live* where Julia visits the cinema as proof of the extent to which the poet immerses herself in film culture.³⁵ Marcus compares the language of H.D.'s film articles and the terms Roger Fry uses in his discussions of Gordon Craig's theatre designs.³⁶ Her juxtaposition posits that H.D.'s use of the Hellenic imagery typical of her Imagist poetry illustrates the poet's search for a specific aesthetic to define film's effects.³⁷ H.D. aims to outline an aesthetic of 'mass and light used to create emotional responses' that is specific only to the film medium, just as Fry develops an aesthetic, definitive of the tools of theatre.³⁸ This argument can be applied to the rest of the *Close Up* critics as each of them seeks a context for their own understanding of the film medium and its properties.

³⁵ Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 361.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 362.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 361-362.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 362.

Some of their film plot summaries are defined by personal experience, as is the case with H.D., or comparison with other art forms, and claims on the experimentation with the medium, like Kenneth Macpherson's regular editorials.

Parallel to founding *Close Up*, the POOL Group also established the film production company POOL Productions. The company produced four films, all directed by Kenneth Macpherson. These include *Wingbeat* (1927), which features Bryher's brother John, *Foothills* (1929), and the unpreserved *Monkey's Moon* (1929). POOL's artistic experimentation culminated in the feature-length film *Borderline* (1930), also directed by Macpherson. Despite Bryher's financial contributions, interest in filmmaking, and appearance in *Borderline*, scholarly explorations of the film tend to highlight H.D.'s involvement in the films and her *Borderline Pamphlet*, published in 1930. H.D.'s appearance in *Foothills* and *Borderline* gives further grounds for associations between her ideas about the new medium and POOL's filmmaking experiments.

In *Foothills* H.D. portrays a city woman who starts an affair with a young man in the country. The two are subsequently discovered by the city woman's fiancé who follows her out of the city. A reference to the narrative of F.W. Murnau's *Sunrise* (1927), the film's plot and visual style demonstrate German Expressionism's influence on the group's understanding of film art. Under the pseudonym Helga Doorne, H.D. also appears in *Borderline* where she plays Astrid, the wife of Thorne (Gavin Arthur). Jealous of her husband's affair with the mixed-race girl Adah (Eslanda Robeson), she drives both Adah and her lover Pete (Paul Robeson) out of the community by fuelling the public's racist outburst. *Borderline* is a celebration of the various cinematic practices the group discusses on the pages of *Close Up* like German Expressionism and Soviet montage. The film's avant-garde style, fragmented narrative, and disjointed editing caused controversial opinions in the year of its release and have already become subjects for several scholarly explorations. However, these explorations draw on Macpherson's directorial

ideas or H.D.'s performances for their analysis, and overlook Bryher's appearance in the film and her contribution to its production. Thus, their interest in film is once again privileged over the ideas of other POOL critics and filmmakers, including Bryher.

H.D.'s articles on Soviet film and her portrayal of Astrid in *Borderline* are central for Caroline Maclean's critical essay on *Borderline*.³⁹ Maclean seeks out the influence of Sergei Eisenstein's montage theories on the disjointed editing of *Borderline* and reflects on its impact for the film's narrative.⁴⁰ Her analysis of *Borderline*'s relationship to Soviet filmmaking is refracted through H.D.'s interest in Soviet cinema and the poet's writing on Aleksandra Khokhlova's character in *By the Law*, Edith. Similarly, Maggie Humm maps out parallels between Eisenstein's and H.D.'s understanding of the hieroglyph's significance in film.⁴¹ Both of them consider that the hieroglyph's capacity to encapsulate both 'the process of composition and the concept of plurality' is definitive for the individual shot's ability to produce meaning within the film.⁴² H.D.'s performance in *Borderline* is also the subject of discourses on gender studies, psychoanalysis and racial representation, such as Jean Walton's study of the connections between race and the psychoanalytic theories of pathology and neurasthenia that inform *Borderline*'s style and performances.⁴³ Walton refers to H.D.'s *Close Up* texts and her prose, as well as her interest in psychoanalysis, as she reflects on the film's visualisation of 'white fantasies of racial difference'.⁴⁴ On the assumption that race is unimportant for the POOL Group, Walton questions the film's need to introduce Pete and Adah as racially different from the rest of the characters and H.D.'s insistence on describing Adah as 'of partial African

³⁹ Caroline Maclean, "'The Magic Force that is Montage': Eisenstein's Filmic Fourth Dimension, *Borderline* and H.D.", *Literature & History*, 21-1 (Spring 2012) 44-60.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Maggie Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002) 143-144.

⁴² Ibid. 144.

⁴³ Jean Walton, 'Nightmare of the Uncoordinated White-Folk: Race, Psychoanalysis and *Borderline*', *Discourse*, 19-2 (Winter 1997)

⁴⁴ Ibid. 91.

abstraction' in the *Borderline Pamphlet*.⁴⁵ H.D.'s *Borderline Pamphlet* was written and published a year after the poet ceased her contributions to *Close Up*. The text was published by the Mercury Press rather than POOL Reflection, and was intended as a response to the critics' controversial reception of the film. In her text, H.D. defends the film's disjointed narrative and Macpherson's artistic decisions, and elaborates on the concepts that inform the film's characters.⁴⁶ Annette Debo continues the racial discourse on *Borderline* in her discussion of the plot's development after Astrid's death and underscores the significance of Paul Robeson's character Pete's fate for the film's critique of racial abuse.⁴⁷ Susan McCabe extends the analysis of Pete in the film by comparing him to the figure of the femme fatale.⁴⁸ Her interpretation sees the rest of *Borderline*'s microcosm, including Astrid, overwhelmed by his presence, exemplified by Robert Herring's pianist who keeps a photograph of Pete on his piano.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Pete's effect on Astrid is realised in her pathological hate towards African-Americans and her actions against both him and Adah.⁵⁰

Although most of the texts on POOL's activities filter their perception of the group's dynamic and work through H.D.'s interpretation of these events, some of them briefly acknowledge Bryher's contributions. In her study of *Borderline* and H.D.'s *Close Up* articles, McCabe recognises Bryher's sponsorship for POOL's projects and her appearance in *Borderline* as the bar manager.⁵¹ However, the significance of her role in the film and her opinions of the new medium remain overlooked. Jayne Marek notes Bryher's editorial contribution to *Close Up* and her role in the formation of the careers of other modernist

⁴⁵ Ibid. 94.

⁴⁶ H.D., *Borderline: POOL Film with Paul Robeson* (London, Ilford, and Chelmsford: The Mercury Press, 1930)

⁴⁷ Annette Debo, 'Interracial modernism in avant-garde film: Paul Robeson and H.D. in the 1930 film *Borderline*', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 18-4 (2009).

⁴⁸ Susan McCabe, 'Borderline Modernism: Paul Robeson and the Femme Fatale', *Callaloo*, 25-2 (Spring 2002) 639-653.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 646.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 646.

⁵¹ Ibid. 646.

writers.⁵² She places Bryher alongside Marianne Moore's regular publications in *The Dial* (1840-1929), Katherine Mansfield's work for *Rhythm* (or *Blue Review*, 1911-1913), and Harriet Shaw Weaver's patronage of *The Egoist* (1914-1919) and *The Egoist* press.⁵³ Although she summarises Bryher's engagement with *Close Up* and sketches out her 'multi-generic approach to film writing' that crosses 'national, artistic and sexual boundaries', Maggie Humm's reflections on women modernists' engagement with film similarly eschews in-depth discussions of Bryher's position on film.⁵⁴

In *The Tenth Muse*, Marcus recognises Bryher's administrative position in the journal and examines her role in the context of the overall themes running through *Close Up*'s engagement with film.⁵⁵ Marcus admits the importance of the network of film critics and filmmakers Bryher establishes through her regular trips to Berlin for the journal's materials on European avant-garde films.⁵⁶ However, these connections to the European film industries and *Close Up*'s engagement with Soviet film are presented as the group's collective interest in the film movement and not as Bryher's individual contribution to the journal's popularity.⁵⁷ Bryher's more marginal articles, such as her texts on film clubs, amateur filmmaking, and her pieces in the journal's 'Comment and Review' sections, remain unacknowledged, thus excluding one of the journal's key founders and contributors.

Bryher and Dorothy Richardson: An Enduring Friendship

Apart from explorations of H.D.'s life and work, Bryher often appears in biographical accounts of the novelist Dorothy Richardson's life. Born in 1873, Dorothy Richardson was one of four

⁵² Jayne Marek, 'Magazines, presses, and salons in women's modernism' in *Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers*, ed. Maren Tova (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 71-74.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 71-74.

⁵⁴ Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures*, 174-176.

⁵⁵ Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, 319-403.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 325-336.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 336-343.

daughters in a family ruined by their father's business ventures.⁵⁸ In 1891 Richardson became a governess and a teacher at a school in Hanover, Germany.⁵⁹ Following her mother's death in 1895, she moved to Bloomsbury, London in 1896. After a series of jobs as a secretary, receptionist, and an assistant to several dentists, she became a prominent novelist.⁶⁰ Her best known work is the serial novel *Pilgrimage* (1915-1935), which articulates her worldview through the eyes of her protagonist Miriam Henderson. Nevertheless, throughout her life, Richardson rejected any parallels between Miriam and herself, and distanced herself from her protagonist's experiences.⁶¹

In *The Heart to Artemis*, Bryher describes her first meeting with Richardson in 1923 when, after an exchange of letters, she visited Richardson and her husband the illustrator Alan Odle (1888-1948) in their flat near Marlborough Road Station, St John's Wood, London.⁶² Gloria Fromm's biography of Richardson includes a similar account of Bryher's visit.⁶³ Similar to Bryher's depiction in H.D.'s biographical accounts, Fromm presents Bryher as the sponsor who funded Richardson and Odle's journeys abroad and hosted them in her home in Switzerland.⁶⁴ Fromm traces Bryher's inspiration for Nancy and her opinions on freedom of the mind to Richardson's Miriam, indicating that both heroines are sceptical towards the opportunities afforded to women and society's dismissal of their intellectual potential.⁶⁵ *Pointed Roofs* (1915) and *Backwater* (1916) prompted Bryher's admiration for Richardson as Miriam and the other women characters reminded her of Downwood and her yearning for

⁵⁸ Gloria G. Fromm, *Dorothy Richardson: A Biography* (Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois Press, 1977) 16

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 18-19.

⁶⁰ Gloria G. Fromm, *Windows on Modernism: Selected Letters of Dorothy Richardson* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1995) 1.

⁶¹ Joanne Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000) 70.

⁶² Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 238-241; Dorothy Richardson to Bryher, 1923, Bryher Papers, Box 52, Folder 1911.

⁶³ Fromm, *Dorothy Richardson: A Biography*, 155.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 157-158.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 155

freedom.⁶⁶ Bryher references Richardson's work on several occasions in *The Heart to Artemis* and aligns her year of birth with the time when 'Dorothy Richardson's Miriam was a secretary', further indicating her admiration of Richardson's character and *Pilgrimage's* influence on her own prose.⁶⁷

Similar to Nancy's inability to fit into Downwood's community of school girls, Miriam is anxious about the other teachers and the girls she is supposed to mentor in *Pointed Roofs* (1915). Richardson writes about Miriam's dislike of both men and women, and her dread at the prospect of getting along with other girls as a governess.⁶⁸ She identifies herself as a misanthrope like her 'pater' who loathes men and women.⁶⁹ By doing so she draws a parallel between herself and her father. Miriam's connection to her father's behaviour aligns her with Nancy's difficult relationships with both girls and boys, and her split self. Joanne Winning's interpretation of the correlation between the two protagonists focuses on Nancy's 'two selves' and Miriam's duality.⁷⁰ Her analysis of the two characters places their dualistic natures outside the context of the psychosexual.⁷¹ She sees Richardson's attempt to distance herself from her protagonist as a process of 'twinning subjectivity' that renders Miriam 'a screen onto which Richardson can project social and sexual dissent'.⁷² This approach is similar to Bryher's own treatment of Nancy as her novels' protagonist turns into a prosopopoeial tool for the author's socio-cultural analysis. The parallels that Fromm and Winning recognise in their comparisons of the heroines indicate the influence of Richardson's writing over Bryher's prose and the construction of her fictional doppelgänger as a young woman of the early twentieth-century society.

⁶⁶ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 238.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 7.

⁶⁸ Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage: Pointed Roofs, Backwater, Honeycomb* (J.M. Dent and Sons and the Cresset Press, 1938) 31.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 31.

⁷⁰ Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson*, 69-70.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 69-70.

⁷² *Ibid.* 69.

Richardson and Bryher formed a deep friendship that can be traced through their detailed correspondence. Apart from Bryher's financial help, the two authors' friendship was sustained by their mutual interests in psychoanalysis and film. When Bryher first wrote to Richardson about her plans to start *Close Up* in 1927, the novelist announced that she was 'thrilled' at the prospect of the 'film paper'.⁷³ Apprehensive at Bryher's initial invitation to contribute to the journal, Richardson later conceded.⁷⁴ Explorations of Dorothy Richardson's *Close Up* articles underscore the importance of censorship, psychoanalysis, and modes of spectatorship for the novelist's understanding of the film medium. Maggie Humm reflects on these topics in her summary of Richardson's involvement with *Close Up*.⁷⁵ Elsewhere, she also notes Richardson's involvement in *Close Up*'s Censorship petition against the government's restrictions on certain films in 1929.⁷⁶ In Humm's analysis, Richardson's texts emerge as deeply personalised accounts of film's impact on the female psyche that summarise feminist themes.⁷⁷

Laura Marcus, Jane Garrity, and Susan Gervitz reflect more extensively on Richardson's choice to gender film and the other themes of her film essays. Marcus emphasises that unlike other *Close Up* contributors like Robert Herring, an established film critic for the *Manchester Guardian*, or Oswald Blakeston, a cinematographer, Richardson had no connections in the film industry, and was inexperienced as a film critic.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, she was enthusiastic about the new medium and compensated for her lack of technical knowledge with a unique view on film culture. Unlike the rest of the journal's critics, her opinions are formulated on the basis of film as popular culture rather than art. Richardson reflects on

⁷³ Dorothy Richardson to Bryher, 1927, Bryher Papers, Box 52, Folder 1915.

⁷⁴ Dorothy Richardson to Bryher, July 1927, Bryher Papers, Box 52, Folder 1915.

⁷⁵ Maggie Humm, 'Women Modernists and Visual Culture' in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers*, ed. Maren Tova (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 151-152.

⁷⁶ Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures*, 140.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 177.

⁷⁸ Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, 350.

different audience's responses to cinema and the evolution of their relationship with the new medium.⁷⁹ Marcus posits that Richardson, just like H.D., moves towards the definition of a cinema aesthetic through the language she uses to write about film.⁸⁰ The novelist treats film as an 'ongoing process of projection and spectating' unlike the single theatre performance.⁸¹ The 'cinematic' is a mode of spectatorship that extends beyond the individual film or artist, and into the wider social space of the cinema theatre.⁸² Richardson's treatment of film as a mode of seeing rather than a singular art form infiltrates her writing of Miriam's consciousness.⁸³ Marcus argues that the protagonist's consciousness is a sequence of 'shifting patterns of light and darkness' that are 'analogous to Richardson's descriptions of the "essence" of cinema as "light and shadow in movement"'.⁸⁴ Other interpretations of the cinematic in the text of *Pilgrimage* include Jane Garrity's observations on the novel's narrative construction. Garrity's analysis refers to existing discourses that draw parallels between the possibility to pick up Miriam's story from any point and the title of Richardson's *Close Up* rubric 'Continuous Performance', a reference to back-to-back film screenings that allowed viewers to enter and leave as they pleased.⁸⁵ Garrity further posits the film apparatus influenced the novels' impression of Miriam's consciousness.⁸⁶ The cinema provided the novelist with a 'spatialised model of femininity', in which Miriam's perspective acts as the 'roving eye of a camera' in relation to the 'reader's unstable position'.⁸⁷ As the narrative progresses, the reader is only informed about events that Richardson's protagonist witnesses but nothing else. These

⁷⁹ Laura Marcus, 'Continuous Performance: Dorothy Richardson' in *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*, ed. by James Donald, Anne Friedberg and Laura Marcus (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998) 150-151.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 151.

⁸¹ Ibid. 151.

⁸² Ibid. 152.

⁸³ Ibid. 153-154.

⁸⁴ Marcus, 'Continuous Performance: Dorothy Richardson', 154.

⁸⁵ Jane Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England: British women modernists and national imaginary* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003) 89.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 91

⁸⁷ Ibid. 91.

cinematic terms structure the text's commentary of society and its stereotypes of femininity. The parallels between Richardson's film articles and *Pilgrimage* continue in the novelist's gendering of silence as female, and sound and speech as male.⁸⁸ According to Marcus, femininity marks the Being and masculinity denotes the Becoming in the history Richardson maps out for the new medium.⁸⁹ The novelist's interpretation of this conceptual binary reveals her scepticism towards evolutionary forms of femininity such as the 'New Woman'.⁹⁰ This scepticism also translates into her perception of the 'revolutionary' quality that other critics often attribute to the new medium.

Richardson's engagement with modes of film spectatorship continues in her discourses on film's effect on the viewer. She defines the experience as a single visual continuity, which is the result of the mind's processing of the visual image and its external elements, such as captions that are rendered into an 'inner monologue' by the viewer's consciousness.⁹¹ Marcus connects Richardson's interpretations of the 'inner monologue' and models of 'distraction' and 'attention' to the ideas articulated by Eisenstein, the German cultural theorist Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and the Russian literary scholar Boris Eikhenbaum.⁹² These comparisons once again define the novelist's understanding of film as a continuous experience that remains uninterrupted by other elements of the film screening, including musical accompaniment, commentary, and captions.

Susan Gervitz's analysis of Richardson's understanding of the cinematic continuity suggests a link to Eisenstein's theories, whereby both Richardson and Eisenstein consider it an 'expansion from literature'.⁹³ Gervitz argues that for both of them the cinematic image evokes

⁸⁸ Marcus, 'Continuous Performance: Dorothy Richardson' 156.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 157.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 157.

⁹¹ Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, 354.

⁹² Ibid. 354-357.

⁹³ Susan Gervitz, *Narrative Journey: The Fiction and Film Writing of Dorothy Richardson* (New York, Washington, San Francisco/ Bern, Frankfurt am Mein, Vienna Paris: Peter Lang, 1996) 38; 62-64.

a desire inherent to the one produced and satisfied by the act of writing, complicated by their understanding of the distinction between ‘snapshots and movies’ and film art.⁹⁴ A connection between Richardson’s concept of the unified continuous performance and Eisenstein’s theories of the filmic unity explain her theory.⁹⁵ According to Eisenstein, film goes back to recreate a pre-existing unity that has been broken up by the act of recording.⁹⁶ In this case, the film narrative connects the viewer and the screen through the film’s ‘taking of space’ by continuously projecting the recorded moment into the physical world.⁹⁷ This ability to restore the recorded moment back into space separates film from ‘the movie’, which is merely harmless entertainment, and reinstates the continuous performance of the recorded moment in time and space.⁹⁸

These explorations of Richardson’s film articles acknowledge Bryher and Richardson’s deep friendship and her encouragement of the novelist’s involvement in film criticism but fail to recognise the importance of Bryher’s facilitation of the novelist’s entry into film criticism. By involving her with *Close Up*, Bryher not only ensured another regular contributor for the journal but also provided a platform for Richardson’s ideas about the new medium. Richardson’s rubric ‘Continuous Performance’ is an extension of the novelist’s critical engagement with modernist culture, since her articles venture beyond the safety of literature and into a new art form that was unfamiliar to her. Her letters to Bryher reveal a deep interest in the new art, which she would not have pursued further if it had not been for *Close Up*. As Humm points out, Richardson became a valuable member of the POOL Group with her organisation of the Censorship petition. Once admitted into the group’s inner circle, she also suggested other potential contributors to Bryher, including the analyst Barbara Low (1877-

⁹⁴ Ibid. 59; 63.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 67.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 67.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 67.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 58.

1955).⁹⁹ In September 1927 Low published an essay on film's effect on children in *Close Up*, which became the third piece on this topic in the journal alongside the articles Bryher and Richardson composed.¹⁰⁰

Although they acknowledge the shared thematic concerns of their prose and the similarities in their protagonists, existing explorations of Richardson's *Close Up* articles overlook the proximity of Bryher's and Richardson's concerns about film. Their similar understanding of films emerges from divergent perspectives. Bryher's film essays offer analysis of international cinematic practices and individual filmmakers' works, and provide detailed advice on filmmaking. Richardson's rubric explores a subjective opinion of the cinema-goer's experience and an understanding of film that emerges from popular culture. However, like their prose, their film essays share concerns on film's social functions, its effect on children and role in education, and its place in relation to women that is different from H.D.'s Hellenic interpretations.

Bryher's Film Texts: Close Up and Film Problems of Soviet Russia in the context of film literature of the early twentieth century

This thesis's focus on *Close Up* calls for an understanding of the journal's place in the development of early film criticism. The journal's significance as a film theory publication can be justified by an examination of its history in the context of other film publications that appear in the 1910s and 1920s, and discourses on international film. Although there are a few scholarly explorations on *Close Up* as an individual journal, it is widely considered in relation to other little magazines and film publications that became platforms for twentieth-century modernists.

⁹⁹ Dorothy Richardson to Bryher, 1927, Bryher Papers, Box 52 Folder 1915.

¹⁰⁰ Barbara Low, 'Mind-growth or mind-mechanisation? The Cinema in Education,' *Close Up*, I - 3 (September 1927) 44-52; Bryher, 'Film in Education,' *Close Up*, I - 2 (August 1927) 49-54; Bryher, 'Films for Children,' *Close Up*, III - 2 (August 1928) 16-20; Dorothy Richardson, 'Films for Children,' *Close Up*, III - 2 (August 1928) 21-27.

Therefore, there are two dimensions to *Close Up*'s formation as a film theory journal: the little literary magazines that published modernists' work and early film criticism, and the POOL Group's interest in the new medium, its art form and its desire to define its distinctive nature.

Robert Scholes provides an overview of the various magazines that originated in the 1910s and the networks of writers, editors, and benefactors, who supported them.¹⁰¹ His records of the evolution and functions of the little magazines highlights the main figures of early twentieth-century modernism, such as Harriet Monroe, Harriet Shaw Weaver, Ezra Pound, Ford Madox Ford, Margaret Anderson, and Rebecca West.¹⁰² Jayne Marek's account of women-led little presses and magazines pays tribute to Bryher's importance in this context, as a woman who founded three little presses and sponsored two journals, *Close Up* and *Life and Letters To-day*.¹⁰³ The rise of film's popularity in Europe prompted the emergence of numerous publications dedicated to film culture. Laura Marcus cites titles such as *Le Film* (1914-1919), *Ciné pour Tous* (1919-1923), *Cinémagazine* (1921-) and *Cinée* (1921-1923), as the prototypes for similar magazines, which appeared in France in the same period.¹⁰⁴ Titles such as *Kinematograph Weekly*, *The Cinema* and *The Bioscope* appear in her account as examples of the British trade journals that discussed the technical aspects of filmmaking.¹⁰⁵ By contrast, the publications *The Pictures*, *The Picturegoer*, and *The Picture Show* published film reviews alongside gossip and interviews with film stars.¹⁰⁶ However, these publications discussed film in the context of its mass entertainment status or in purely technical terms, while one of the founding principles of *Close Up* was its aim to change the direction of film criticism in the 1920s. Kenneth Macpherson's editorials set the journal's analytic approach to international

¹⁰¹ Robert Scholes, *Modernism in the Magazines: An Introduction* (New Haven and London: Clifford Wulfman, Yale University Press, 2010)

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 10-11, 13-14.

¹⁰³ Marek, 'Magazines, presses, and salons in women's modernism' 71-74.

¹⁰⁴ Marcus, *The Tenth Muse* 237.

¹⁰⁵ Marcus, *The Tenth Muse* 237.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 237.

films and its refusal to accept popular cinema that adheres to conventions intended to other artforms. His introductory editorial from August 1927 outlines the journal's aims, as he denounces parallels between film and other artforms like theatre because of their familiarity with formative traditions of 'the old'.¹⁰⁷ Film's strength is in its lack of history and established traditions.¹⁰⁸ Instead, its emergence in the modern era with a set of mechanical properties that are still unfamiliar to both audiences and artists makes it the new artform of modernity and modernism. Aware of the public's unfamiliarity with its conventions and properties, *Close Up* accepted the challenge to inform people of 'the facts' of filmmaking and film art.¹⁰⁹ The journal maintained this mission throughout its full run. The covers of its March and April 1928 editions proclaim it as 'The Official Guide to Better Movies!', and 'An International Magazine Devoted to Film Art' in August 1928.¹¹⁰ The POOL Group's desire was to write about film in more artistic terms and develop an aesthetic specific to film criticism, as Marcus points out in her analysis of H.D.'s contributions to *Close Up*.¹¹¹

The early numbers of *Close Up* include short pieces of prose and poetry that were more typical of the literary magazines in the period. Examples include Gertrude Stein's pieces 'Mrs Emerson' and 'Three Sitting Here', Parts I and II, as well as the two-part short story 'In the Old Days' by Charlotte Arthur, the Irish actress and poet who portrays the barmaid in *Borderline*.¹¹² The journal also publishes H.D.'s poem of two parts 'Projector'.¹¹³ This thesis suggests that the publication of these pieces may be a result of the POOL Group's attempts to

¹⁰⁷ Kenneth Macpherson, 'As Is' *Close Up*, I - 2 (August 1927) 8.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 8.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 6.

¹¹⁰ See *Close Up*, II - 3 (March 1928); *Close Up*, II - 4 (April 1928), *Close Up*, III - 2 (August 1928).

¹¹¹ Marcus, *The Tenth Muse* 361.

¹¹² Gertrude Stein, 'Mrs Emerson,' *Close Up*, I - 2 (August 1927); 'Three Sitting Here Part I,' *Close Up*, I - 3 (September 1927); 'Three Sitting Here Part II,' *Close Up*, I - 4 (October 1927); Charlotte Arthur 'In the Old Days Part I,' *Close Up*, IV - 4 (April 1930); 'In the Old Days Part II,' *Close Up*, VI - 5 (May 1930).

¹¹³ H.D., 'Projector (a poem),' *Close Up*, I - 1 (July 1927) 46-51; 'Projector II (a poem),' *Close Up*, I - 4 (October 1927) 35-44.

utilise their network of connections in order to provide initial content for the journal's early issues as well as a platform for the literary experiments of their close circle. These pieces, especially Stein's and Arthur's short stories, are unrelated to the journal's overall discussion of film. Therefore, they connect *Close Up* to the earlier tradition of literary magazines and imply that should there have been no interest in the journal's main function, it could still have had a place amongst the multitude of other literary publications already on offer in the period.

Close Up's determination to discuss film as an art form rather than mere entertainment emerges from a changing perception of the film medium in an increasingly mechanised experience of daily life in the early twentieth century. This urgent need to redefine cinema's artistic and social parameters can be linked to the struggle to reconcile film's mechanical and artistic properties with the opposition of high art and entertainment. Previous discussions of film's mechanism intertwine cinema's emergence with discussions on urbanity, modernity, and modernist perceptions of life. Film is treated as an urban medium in Walter Benjamin's reflections on city life where he lists cinema as one of the many modes of entertainment available to the flaneur.¹¹⁴ Film's infiltration of daily life alters the urbanite's worldview forever as the camera's dissection of the hidden details of modern life ensures 'comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives' and assures us of 'an immense and unexpected field of action'.¹¹⁵ An extension of the mechanism of photography, the film camera is endowed with the psychoanalyst's ability to delve into the motivations of unconscious acts such as a 'person's posture' and the 'act of reaching for a lighter or a spoon'.¹¹⁶ Anne Friedberg builds on film's relationship to urbanity by intertwining cinematic imagery with urban modes of behaviour. Referring to Walter Benjamin's texts on film's mechanism, she draws parallels between the

¹¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006) 68.

¹¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York and London: Schocken, 1969) 236.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* 237.

shop window and the cinema screen.¹¹⁷ The shop window becomes a ‘site for identity construction’, a projection of wish-fulfilment that is simultaneously visualised and denied by the glass placed between the framed image and the shopper.¹¹⁸ This function is compared to the big screen that projects views in the physical space of the cinema and simultaneously retains their unattainability.¹¹⁹

The images projected on the cinema screen shape society’s ideas of modern life in the early decades of the twentieth century. Lynne Kirkby compares the discussions surrounding film mechanism’s controversial status to society’s initial scepticism towards other signs of the mechanisation and modernisation of life, like the emergence of the railways. In her comparison, Kirkby underscores early filmmakers’ desire to show off film’s ability to capture motion.¹²⁰ This is exemplified by the numerous films of moving trains produced in the late 1890s, the 1900s, and the early 1910s.¹²¹ Their experimentation with the new medium’s ability to record movement and the passing of time later extends to other modes of transportation.¹²² These metaphors of urban dynamism are depicted on the screen by the genre of the ‘city film’, which ranges from the avant-garde interpretations of Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Symphony of a City* (1927) and Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) to King Vidor’s *The Crowd* (1928). Film becomes yet another ‘shock of modern life’, similar to the railway’s symbolism of the increasing mechanisation of late nineteenth-century lifestyle and early twentieth-century urbanity.¹²³ The appeal of the cinematic aesthetic and its effect on modernist art and literature has been previously discussed by Christian Metz, Ben Singer, and Andrew Shail.¹²⁴ As he

¹¹⁷ Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 66.

¹¹⁸ Friedberg, *Window Shopping*, 66.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 66.

¹²⁰ Lynne Kirkby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997) 19.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 133-142.

¹²² *Ibid.* 133-142.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 59.

¹²⁴ Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. by Michael Taylor (New

elaborates on cinema's aesthetic of shock, or 'sensationalism' as he describes it, Singer justifies its popularity with the middle- and lower-classes' susceptibility to spectacles, previously controlled by moral austerity.¹²⁵ The commercialisation of the spectacle and the thrill it provokes in the audience becomes a product of the 'heightened stimulation of the modern environment'.¹²⁶ Singer's comments resonate with Georg Simmel's description of the city man as an individual of 'heightened awareness and a predominance of intelligence' who seeks new thrills that are reflexive of the urban environment.¹²⁷ The urban subject finds these thrills in cinema's reproduction of the sensorial experience of modern life. Christian Metz further posits that the cinematic impression of reality is rooted in film's ability to record movement that gives 'the feeling of concrete life and the perception of objective reality'.¹²⁸

What emerges from these explorations of cinema's place in the modern environment, and is subsequently articulated by Kirkby, is film's quality of a 'democratic' medium.¹²⁹ Anyone can be recorded on film, just as film can be projected to anyone. Its status as mass entertainment renders it available to the public irrelevant of their social status, gender or age. *Close Up* critics like Bryher and Richardson supported film's democratic dimension in their observations on film audiences, spectatorship, and censorship. In her 'Continuous Performance' articles, Richardson records her impressions of different cinemas in the 'slums' or the 'arcady', and the different stereotypes she notices in the audience.¹³⁰ This sense of equality in the cinema is further developed in Bryher's articles on film in education and the

York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Andrew Shail, *The Cinema and the Origins of Literary Modernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012).

¹²⁵ Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*, 62-67; 97.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 97.

¹²⁷ Georg Simmel, *Simmel on Culture*, ed. by David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000) 176.

¹²⁸ Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, 7-9.

¹²⁹ Kirkby, *Parallel Tracks*, 32-36.

¹³⁰ Richardson, 'Continuous Performance X Cinema in the Slums,' 58-62; 'Continuous Performance XII Cinema in Arcady,' 52-57.

films children ought to be allowed to watch. *Close Up* critics' joint attack on government censorship is yet another expression of the strive for democracy inspired by film's universal appeal. The journal's overall stance suggests there should be no limitations to what films are exhibited or made, and anyone should be allowed to see any film as an exercise of their freedom as citizens and individuals. Equally, there should be minimal control on filmmaking and policies should be altered in favour of budding filmmakers and film clubs. These arguments become the topics of several of Bryher's articles, as well as her commentary on the British perceptions of Soviet cinema in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*.¹³¹

As cinematic realism becomes synonymous to movement, this visual dynamism translates to other art forms. Sara Danius explores how film's technology altered common methods of art production and therefore the perception of the modernist work of art.¹³² Danius demonstrates this further by reflecting on the new technology's effect on modernist literature in the works of Marcel Proust and James Joyce.¹³³ David Trotter similarly examines the connection between modernist literature and cinema. He highlights what he considers a simplistic approach by analogy that has been undertaken by investigations of modernist literature's relation to cinema in modernist studies.¹³⁴ This approach is based on the assumption that a novel is structured like a film with 'its "close-ups", its "tracks" and "pans", its "cuts" from one "shot" to another'.¹³⁵ In his analysis of the works of James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf, Trotter suggests an approach that considers the impression of the protagonist's subjectivity in the narrative rather than the construction of the texts themselves. A cinematic consciousness that governs the narrative allows for the description of multiple viewpoints of

¹³¹ Bryher, 'How I Would Start a Film Club,' 30-36; 'How to Rent a Film'

¹³² Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002) 34.

¹³³ *Ibid.* 91-146; 147-188.

¹³⁴ David Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007) 1.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* 1.

the same events as in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925).¹³⁶ The 'dislocated approach' of Woolf's record of Clarissa Dalloway's life events can be explained by the 'queer sensation' that the author recognises in film.¹³⁷ What Woolf realised and recorded in her subsequent essay 'The Cinema' in 1926 is that the life events recorded on film continue beyond the camera's frame.¹³⁸ These events originate before the start of the recording and continue after its end. Although the spectators witness only a fraction of the events, they accept their realism due to the cinematic impression of reality.¹³⁹ This becomes the basis for Woolf's experiment with Clarissa Dalloway's consciousness, the narrative's movement between narrative events, and its record of multiple viewpoints of these events of the present unfolds.

Similar to Woolf, Bryher chooses to attach her narratives' focal point to Nancy's consciousness in her novels. However, while Woolf's text moves between the perspective of several characters, the focus of Bryher's novels is attached only to one character. Published in 1925 like Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, Bryher's *West* records Nancy's journey across the New World and follows her as she moves between different cities, spaces, and communities. The text records only what the protagonist sees and thinks, and nothing else. There are no additional viewpoints of the narrative events as in *Mrs Dalloway*. While this renders the novel's impression of the New World into a subjective record of the protagonist's view, it also exemplifies Trotter's observation on cinema's influence on modernist prose. As she is the main narrative agent, the text never records anything beyond Nancy's observations. In the same time, the reader assumes that the events continue without Nancy's presence in a given space as the text only records a certain episode of the protagonist's experiences.

These discourses on cinema's mechanical nature, its influence on modernist prose and art, and its relationship to problems of democracy and censorship can be aligned to *Close Up*

¹³⁶ Ibid. 169.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 164-169.

¹³⁸ Woolf, 'The Cinema,' 381-383.

¹³⁹ Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism*, 168-169.

critics' perception of the new medium. Bryher herself is particularly active on questions of censorship, education and international film. International film and censorship became prominent topics of discussions among British critics in the 1910s and 1920s as part of the regular film screenings organised by the London Film Society. Although many of the titles the London Film Society shows were delayed or heavily censored, their programmes included a variety of European avant-garde films. Their selection ranged from German Expressionist works like Pabst's *Joyless Street* to Soviet films like Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* and Pudovkin's *Mother*.¹⁴⁰ European avant-garde film's controversial place in the context of British social and government politics has not remained unacknowledged by critical studies of early film culture. James C. Robertson's enquiry into the history of the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) reveals the circumstances that led to foreign films' censoring on British screens.¹⁴¹ He connects the state's hostility towards Soviet films with the Labour party's marginal majority in the British government.¹⁴² The social upheaval following the nine-day strike of May 1926 feeds into an overwhelming scepticism towards depictions of social revolution on the screen such as the mutiny on board the *Battleship Potemkin*.¹⁴³ These moods are noted by Bryher's initial response to critics' perception of Soviet film in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* and form the basis of her attack on censorship policies.¹⁴⁴ The restrictions that are applied to *Battleship Potemkin* extend to Pudovkin's *Mother* and are eventually negotiated by Ivor Montagu in 1928.¹⁴⁵

Despite the general anxiety over Russian government policies in the early decades of the twentieth century and their depiction on screen, there was still a keen interest in Russian

¹⁴⁰ *The Film Society Programmes 1925-1939* (New York: Arno Press, 1972) 97-99; 130-131.

¹⁴¹ James C. Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema: British film censorship in action, 1913-1975* (London: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 29.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 29-30.

¹⁴⁴ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 11-12.

¹⁴⁵ Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema*, 34-35.

culture in British society. Caroline Maclean explores British attitudes towards Russian avant-garde art in the 1910s and 1920s, and Russian modernism's impact on British culture in this period.¹⁴⁶ Maclean claims that Russian art attracted British society with its 'deep Slavic soul, clothed in mysticism, romanticism and religion'.¹⁴⁷ Based on this notion, her overview of the relationship between Russian and British culture encompasses the visual arts and theatre, as well as the impact Russian novels had on modernist prose.¹⁴⁸ In their exploration of Russian-British cultural relationships, Rebecca Beasley and Phillip Ross Bullock signal a shift in the British interest in Russian culture in the early 1920s. They argue that the British society's interest in Russia was sustained by the necessity to know the enemy following the political changes in Russia.¹⁴⁹ Rebecca Beasley offers an insight into the growing influence of Russian literature and its various interpretations by British intellectuals.¹⁵⁰ Her exploration of the teaching and use of the Russian language in academia sheds light onto the growing interest in Russian literature in the end of the nineteenth and beginning of twentieth century. Philip Ross Bullock investigates the perception of Russian music in British music halls at the turn of last century.¹⁵¹ By tracing the evolution of modernism in Russian music, Bullock's text demonstrates its influence on the international stage and its impact on other strands of music before the events of the October Revolution.¹⁵² Despite its allure, Russian music's reception in British society is informed by the opposition between academic institutions' scepticism and the

¹⁴⁶ Caroline Maclean, *The Vogue for Russia: Modernism and the Unseen in Britain 1900-1930* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015)

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 29.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 26-68; 69-102.

¹⁴⁹ Rebecca Beasley and Phillip Ross Bullock, *Russia in Britain, 1880-1940: from melodrama to modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 5.

¹⁵⁰ Rebecca Beasley, 'Reading Russian: Russian Studies and the Literary Canon,' *Russia in Britain, 1880-1940: from melodrama to modernism*, ed. Rebecca Beasley and Phillip Ross Bullock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 163-188.

¹⁵¹ Phillip Ross Bullock, 'Tsar's Hall: Russian music in London, 1895-1926,' *Russia in Britain, 1880-1940: from melodrama to modernism*, ed. Rebecca Beasley and Phillip Ross Bullock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 114-129

¹⁵² Ibid. 114-129.

support of people who work against such institutions and the culture of appreciation they advocate.¹⁵³

Claire Warden extends existing discourses on the British interest in Russian culture to the influence of Russian theatre on the British stages in the early decades of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁴ In her focus on *Red Sunday*, a play by Hubert Griffith that premiered in London in June 1929, Warden illuminates the British perception of Russian theatre and culture in the end of the 1920s. Society's moods changed from avid interest in Russian culture to hostility and all depictions of either Imperial Russia or references to the October Revolution were censored. These explorations highlight British modernists' general interest in Russian modernism despite British society's discomfort with the political terms of Russian modernist aesthetics and their origins.¹⁵⁵ Russian modernism originated prior to the October Revolution and was then transported and disseminated by small immigrant communities who chose to flee to London in the 1910s.¹⁵⁶ In addition to the introduction of Russian modernist aesthetics through minorities in London, organisations like the London Film Society aided the popularity of Soviet film and culture even further. The society invited Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin to London where the filmmakers lectured on the artistic properties of film and Soviet montage practices.¹⁵⁷ Eisenstein arrived in London in November 1929 on an invitation from Ivor Montagu and Jack Isaacs.¹⁵⁸ In his biography of Eisenstein, Ronald Bergen claims that these lectures from 1929 influenced the development of British documentaries¹⁵⁹.

Soviet filmmakers' prominence in the European avant-garde results in a series of

¹⁵³ Ibid. 117.

¹⁵⁴ Claire Warden, 'Moscow, Saint Petersburg, London: Hubert Griffith and the Search for a Russian Truth,' *Comparative Drama*, 49 - 1 (Spring 2015) 1-21.

¹⁵⁵ Beasley and Bullock, *Russia in Britain, 1880-1940*, 7-8.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 11.

¹⁵⁷ Laura Marcus, 'The Tempo of Revolution: British Film Culture and Soviet Cinema in 1920s,' *Russia in Britain, 1880-1940: from melodrama to modernism*, ed. Rebecca Beasley and Phillip Ross Bullock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 228.

¹⁵⁸ Ronald Bergen *Eisenstein: A Life in Conflict* (Little, Brown & Company, 1997) 165.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 167.

articles that record *Close Up* critics' opinions on Russian film. Apart from the journal's 'Russian number' in September 1928 and the critics' observations on Soviet film, Soviet filmmakers and correspondents published their own essays in *Close Up*.¹⁶⁰ A close friend of Macpherson and Bryher, Eisenstein published six full-length articles in *Close Up*. These include the two-part essay 'The Fourth Dimension of the Kino', 'Film Imagery', and 'The New Language of Cinematography', all translated from Russian by Ivor Montagu and with introductions by Macpherson.¹⁶¹ Eisenstein's partner Pera Attasheva submitted updates on Soviet film as the journal's regular Russian correspondent. Unlike Eisenstein who focused on film theory and more abstract reflections on the new medium, Attasheva concentrated on the latest film releases and the development of the Soviet film industry.¹⁶² In October 1928, Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Eisenstein's cinematographer Grigori Alexandrov published a statement on sound film that articulated their understanding of the incorporation of sound in film and which became part of the journal's broader debate on sound film.¹⁶³ The preponderance of articles submitted to the journal by Soviet filmmakers confirms previous explorations' insistence on Soviet film's status as one of the major filmmaking practices discussed in *Close Up*. However, the networks through which the *Close Up*'s Soviet contributors were attracted remain unexamined.

The connections and contacts that Bryher cultivated during her involvement with *Close Up* become the sources she used for the detailed accounts of Soviet films and the Soviet film industry's organisation in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*. Unlike other film books of the

¹⁶⁰ *Close Up*, Vol. III - 3 (September 1928)

¹⁶¹ Sergei Eisenstein, 'The New Language of Cinematography,' *Close Up*, IV - 5 (May 1929); 'The Fourth Dimension of the Kino Part I,' *Close Up*, VI - 3 (March 1930); 'The Fourth Dimension of the Kino Part II,' *Close Up*, VI - 4 (April 1930).

¹⁶² Pera Attasheva, 'A Soviet Film Star,' *Close Up*, IV - 2 (February 1929); 'Stump of an Empire,' *Close Up*, V - 5 (November 1929); 'News of the Soviet Cinema,' *Close Up*, VII - 3 (September 1930)

¹⁶³ S. Eisenstein, V. Pudovkin, and G. Alexandrov, 'The Sound Film: A Statement from the USSR,' *Close Up*, III - 4 (October 1928) 10-13.

period, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* concentrated on an individual film movement that was unwelcome in British film theatres in the 1920s. Soviet film with its little-explored cinematic practices becomes a site for Bryher's critique of society and the state, while *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* turns into a valuable early source on Soviet film for western critics. Paul Rotha cites it in his overview of film, *Film Till Now: A Survey of World Cinema* in 1930, only a year after its publication.¹⁶⁴ Although texts that mention Bryher's body of work note the publication of *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, its impact for British film criticism has remained unexplored on its own.¹⁶⁵ Instead, the volume is explored alongside the aims and content of *Close Up*. Laura Marcus recognises *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* for its commentary on Soviet films but highlights prevalent criticisms that fault the text for its treatment of Russian cinema as 'harmless'.¹⁶⁶ This is because, as Marcus describes it, Bryher tries 'to steer a middle line politically' by suggesting that Soviet films need to be detached from Soviet politics.¹⁶⁷ As a result, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* addresses some of the controversies that surround the exhibition of Soviet films, but largely focuses on the author's own agenda. Bryher's text includes references to other national film industries' appropriation of the film medium and uses examples from the successful incorporation of film in daily life and education in order to illustrate its own ideas about the new medium. However, these dimensions of *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* have remained unexamined so far and the text is generally considered alongside *Close Up*'s overall concerns about cinema. Although *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* engages with some of the concerns articulated in Bryher's *Close Up* articles, this failure to detach her volume from her shorter pieces leaves dimensions of the author's engagement with

¹⁶⁴ Paul Rotha, *Film Till Now: A Survey of World Cinema* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930) 111.

¹⁶⁵ Rosalind Cosandey, 'On Borderline,' *The British Avant-Garde Film: 1926 to 1995: An Anthology of Writings*, ed. Michael O'Pray (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1996) 49; Guest, *Herself Defined*, 191.

¹⁶⁶ Marcus, 'The Tempo of Revolution: British Film Culture and Soviet Cinema in 1920s,' 233-235.

¹⁶⁷ Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, 338.

the new medium unrecognised. This thesis's separation of Bryher's *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* from other books on film and from the author's own journal articles allows for a closer analysis of the volume's ideas about Soviet film and film's application beyond the purely artistic aims of the European avant-garde. Such a close study of the author's film texts also allows for this thesis's parallels between her autobiographical novels and her critical texts on film art. Therefore, the thesis not only sheds light on the work of a woman modernist who has been overlooked by other critical studies, but also foregrounds a series of critical texts that have so far evaded academic exploration.

CHAPTER 3

Bryher's Autobiographical Novels: Discourses on Education and Social Critique

Prior to her three autobiographical novels of 1920-1925, Bryher published a collection of poetry titled *Region of Lutany* in 1914 and a critical essay on Amy Lowell's experimentation with Imagist poetry in 1918.¹ However, the novels *Development* (1920), *Two Selves* (1923), and *West* (1925) remain the most substantial works of the beginning of Bryher's literary career. Each novel is based on a different period of her life: *Development* records her childhood and school years, *Two Selves* documents her memories from World War I, and *West* contains an outline of her journey to the New World. In all three texts Bryher questions the principles of modern society through the eyes of her protagonist and alter-ego, Nancy. At the time of their publication, the novels' core themes proved controversial and became subject to critics' discussions on the author's identity, the motivation of her social critique, and Nancy's personality as a protagonist. Bryher never refuted her novels' autobiographical connections but also never fully acknowledged them. Nevertheless, the third-person narration and the indirect style of the novels' record of the protagonist's thoughts suggest the author's desire to retain anonymity for herself and her influential family, and distance Bryher's authorial figure from Nancy's controversial opinions. These stylistic elements cast a veil of fiction on Nancy's ideas and posit that they are a product of the protagonist's experiences rather than the author's own life. Therefore, the author's attempts to dissociate herself from her protagonist raise the need for a clear definition of the author/protagonist relationship and the identity of the voice who articulates the texts' main ideas alongside this chapter's detailed discussion of Nancy's social critique. A clear delineation of the author/protagonist dynamic across the three novels clarifies

¹ Winifred Ellerman, *Region of Lutany* (Lindon Chapan and Hakk, 1914); W. Bryher 'Amy Lowell: A Critical Appreciation' (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1918)

the implementation of the author's personal experience and perspective in the novels' thematic concerns. As Bryher extends the same approach to her film texts, this highlights the origins of the thematic and stylistic patterns shared by her fiction and non-fiction texts.

The major concerns articulated in the novels are the problems of education, and social and gender stereotypes in early twentieth-century society. There are two levels in the novels' engagement with the topic of education: on the first level, the novels criticise obsolete teaching methodologies and comment on education's accessibility for the society beyond a certain social group; and on the second, they illustrate the effects of dated institutional dogma on a young woman's psyche. As the concept of education is extended beyond the academe and into daily life, it enters the three novels' discussion of the social norms that govern gender dynamics and stereotypes of femininity in early twentieth-century society. Downwood's obsolete restrictions and academic aspirations act as censorship on Nancy's freedom and imagination, a concept Bryher's essays on film develop in relation to British society's perception of international film. The Establishment's institutional influence over young minds is treated as one of the many obstacles young women face in the early twentieth century, alongside the hindrances associated with their own gender. The novels' discourse on femininity is developed through Nancy's observations on women's limited opportunities for work and education, or 'development' in Bryher's own words, and is intertwined with an opposition between Nancy's homosexuality and the stereotypes she is forced to follow. The protagonist's queer identity complicates her position in a patriarchal society that is still hostile to independent women and fails to understand female homosexuality. Nevertheless, Nancy's homosexuality enables her to leave the domestic space that is associated with traditional heterosexual femininity at the time, and enter the public space ruled by masculine authority.

This chapter maps out the dimensions of the three novels' social commentary and its dominant themes. By clarifying the author/protagonist relationship of Bryher's three novels, it

traces Nancy's opinions to the author's own experiences and ideas, and delineates the role of personal experience in the formation of the novels' core themes. The subjectivity and themes of her fiction prose later form the conceptual framework that defines the author's understanding of film's properties and social purpose. In order to further illustrate the importance of autobiographical fiction to the author's approach to film analysis evident in her film texts, this chapter compares her novels to H.D.'s autobiographical text *Asphodel*. Both *Close Up* critics and authors of autobiographical fiction, Bryher and H.D. engage with discourses on modernist femininity and a critique of patriarchy's effect on the female psyche. Their novels' divergent views on society and autobiographical fiction result in contrasting perceptions of film's mechanical medium and film spectatorship, and two different approaches to film criticism. Unlike previous academic explorations, which examine Bryher's ideas in relation to her companionship with H.D, this chapter uncouples Bryher's opinions from the poet's persona and foregrounds her individual contribution to literary modernism.

Nancy and Bryher: The Two Selves of Bryher's Autobiographical Prose

Bryher's first novel *Development* attracted critics' attention upon its publication. Reviews of the novel commented on its 'vigorous onslaught' of the fictional Downwood school, and questioned the foundations of its critique of the English school system.² While some critics considered the novel 'an impressionist study of education', others, like James Douglas of *The Daily News*, described the novel's critique as 'exaggerated'.³ Bryher's protagonist Nancy proved just as controversial as the novel's views on education and society: press reviews regarded her as 'a lonely self-centred, very unhappy little girl' and an 'insufferable prig', and rebuked her selfishness and ingratitude.⁴ Unlike other girls of the period, Nancy is granted a

² 'Cramped School Girls,' *The Daily Mail*, June 26th 1920, Bryher Papers, Box 82 Folder 3112.

³ 'Nancy by James Douglas' in *The Daily News*, July 14th, 1920; 'Development' in *The Pall Mall* August 26th, 1920, Bryher Papers, Box 82 Folder 3112.

⁴ 'Development' in *The Daily Telegraph*, July 16th 1920 and 'Development' by A.M. in *The*

privileged childhood and a chance for education.⁵ However, she shows only contempt for the institution that has given her this valuable opportunity.⁶ Exhibiting the conformity to social stereotypes that Bryher criticised, James Douglas condemned the protagonist's behaviour: 'If you wish to be fairly happy in this world you must not be unconventional. You must learn to be or pretend to be like everybody else... School is the place for schooling.'⁷ His words demonstrate the extent to which Victorian attitudes still governed *fin de siecle* society. Douglas's review encourages the stereotypes that produce a fractioned and unequal society that not only fails to understand the faults of the educational system but also refuses to adopt a more modern approach to social dynamics. The only remaining review of the second novel, *Two Selves*, similarly describes Nancy as an 'egoist'.⁸ Despite its praise for the protagonist's 'exacting standard' and her ability to read people, it emphasises her immersion in her own 'little world' and the novel's 'tiresome' subject.⁹

Contrary to these responses, reviews of *West* (1925) viewed Nancy more favourably. Critics described her as 'a thoroughly nice and intelligent girl' and a 'young Englishwoman', 'formidable' and with 'a pronounced individuality'.¹⁰ Such a change in critical responses is indicative of the development of Bryher's protagonist. Having acknowledged her differences from other women characters in the novels, Nancy grows from an introverted girl into an outward-looking young woman. She negotiates her place in a male-dominated society as a young woman, whose critique of the New World is received with praise for her humorous

Manchester Guardian, July 23rd 1920; 'Nancy by James Douglas' in *The Daily News*, July 14th, 1920, Bryher Papers, Box 82 Folder 3112.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ A.N.M., 'Two Selves by Bryher,' *Manchester Guardian* January 18th, 1924, Bryher Papers, Box 88 Folder 3256.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ 'Piquant novel of America,' *The Christian World*, February 26th 1925; 'West,' *The Times Literary Supplement*, February 26th 1925, Bryher Papers, Box 88, Folder 3277.

remarks upon the novel's publication in 1925.¹¹

In their attempts to place *Development* in a familiar context, critics identified the novel's autobiographical origins and compared it to other examples of autobiographical fiction, including Marie Bashkirtseff's published journals *I Am the Most Interesting Book of All: The Diary of Marie Bashkirtseff* and Alec Waugh's novel *The Loom of Youth* (1917).¹² In their comparisons, critics, reflected on separate dimensions of Bryher's novel, such as its author/protagonist dynamics or its focus on education. A Russian artist and a socialite, Marie Bashkirtseff (1858-1884) kept meticulous journals throughout her youth and adult years. Published in French in 1887 and later translated in English, Bashkirtseff's daily entries include the family's travels across Europe and her observations of the European upper class and aristocracy. Critics' comparisons of Bashkirtseff's journal and *Development* were based on similarities of the two authors' lifestyles and their access to upper-class society. Indeed, certain parallels can be drawn between the texts. Both texts give insights into these young women's privileged lives and discuss the difficulties they posed. Nancy and Marie both hope to realise their artistic potentials: Marie aspires to be a 'great artist' and Nancy wishes to be an artist and a writer.¹³ However, *Development* and Bashkirtseff's diaries differ in their use of biographical material and the depictions of the two protagonists. Bashkirtseff's reflections on the Babanin family life, their affairs and high society gossip, are recorded chronologically and in great detail. Void of social commentary or social reform, the text is a representation of Marie's family and her thoughts about their lifestyle, underpinned by a young girl's romantic

¹¹ 'America from a new angle', Bryher Papers, Box 88, Folder 3277.

¹² Rebecca West, 'Development' *The New Statesman* August 7th, 1920, Bryher Papers, Box 81 Folder 3111; James Douglas 'Nancy' in *The Daily Telegraph*, July 7th, 1920, 'Nancy by James Douglas' in *The Daily News*, July 14th, 1920 and 'Development' in *Women's Leader*, October 1st, 1920; A.M. 'Development' in *Manchester Guardian* July 23rd, 1920; 'Development' in *National Outlook*, September 1920, Box 82 Folder 3112.

¹³ Marie Bashkirtseff, *I am the Most Interesting Book of All: The Diary of Marie Bashkirtseff Vol. 1*, trans. Phyllis Howard Kernberger with Katherine Kernberger (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1997) 1.

worldview. Although she mentions her language and piano lessons, these are not endowed with particular significance and Marie often disregards her education in favour of social events or gossip.¹⁴ Though a *bildungsroman* that follows the formation of the protagonist's subjectivity through childhood, adolescence and her school years, *Development* appropriates biographical material as the basis for a social critique that permeates the following two novels. Unlike Marie, the introspective Nancy considers education to be central for each individual's development and ignores social occasions and norms.

While *Development* and Alec Waugh's *The Loom of Youth* are both depictions of private schools and their impact on the formation of a young person's identity, the novels treat their protagonists and their ideas about education differently. Bryher's personal notes from the period comment on Waugh's depiction of society's pre-war moods, an indication of his novel's influence over the author's own social critique.¹⁵ A record of the daily routine at a boy's school, *The Loom of Youth* follows its protagonist Gordon, as he progresses from a new boy to an adolescent in a milieu that was accessible to only certain fractions of 1910s society.¹⁶ However, Waugh never criticises the school or the other schoolboys in the way Bryher's novels do, and in his own memoir claims to have been 'excited by the atmosphere of competition' that Sherborne school encouraged.¹⁷ Unlike Waugh, who developed the narrative term by term and confirmed its autobiographical roots, Bryher is uninterested in the school's order or its privileged milieu.¹⁸ She disparages Downwood's routine, the teachers, and the schoolgirls, by pointing out the inadequate methodologies and superficial results of girls' education.¹⁹ While *The Loom of Youth* names and describes all the schoolboys, *Development* only identifies three

¹⁴ Ibid. 23-24.

¹⁵ See 'Mixed 8' Bryher Papers, Box 72, Folder 2873.

¹⁶ Alec Waugh, *The Loom of Youth* (London: Mayflower Books, 1928 [1917]). Citations refer to the 1928 edition.

¹⁷ Alec Waugh, *The Early Years of Alec Waugh* (London: Cassell, 1962) 28.

¹⁸ Ibid. 39-40.

¹⁹ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 99.

of the others girls: the head girl, Lydia, and two of the other schoolgirls, Eleanor, and Doreen. Although Eleanor and Doreen are Nancy's friends, they are never described in full. They are indistinguishable from the other schoolgirls and vulnerable to Nancy's critique of their behaviour as young women. The thematic and structural contrasts between *Development* and *The Loom of Youth* also indicate the authors' relationships to their respective protagonists. Waugh's exhaustive descriptions of Gordon's experiences mark the author's distance from the protagonist. The narrative voice is that of an objective observer and commentator who passes no judgement on the characters' actions, while the lengthy descriptions illustrate the formation of a young boy's identity. By contrast, *Development* is characterised by the extreme personalisation of Nancy's feelings and opinions by Bryher's narrative voice. Despite the distance introduced by *Development*'s indirect third-person narration, the boundaries between fiction and autobiography blur and therefore compromise the objectivity of Bryher's critique.

Although Bryher's *Development* was also often compared to Dorothy Richardson's serial novel *Pilgrimage*, these comparisons were not rooted in the novels' autobiographical elements but rather focused on their protagonists. Rebecca West's review of *Development* claims that Nancy's 'solemn reverence for her own sensory impressions' is typical of Richardson's protagonist Miriam Henderson but appears 'far more pretentious' in Bryher's novel.²⁰ In *The Daily News* James Douglas speculates that the novel might even be written by Richardson under a pseudonym.²¹ This thesis has already discussed the existing contemporary comparisons between Nancy and Miriam, which draw on the heroines' dual identities, both as expressions of 'gender dysphoria' and as instances of a split in the author's subjectivity that enables the novel's social commentary.²² Richardson's *Pilgrimage* is a record of a young

²⁰ West, Review of *Development*, *The New Statesman*, August 7th, 1920, Bryher Papers, Box 81 Folder 3111.

²¹ 'Nancy by James Douglas' in *The Daily News*, July 14th, 1920, Bryher Papers, Box 82 Folder 3112.

²² Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson*, 69.

woman's life in the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, and like Bryher's novels, it comments on the social stereotypes and norms with which Miriam struggles. Bryher's self-confessed admiration for Richardson's work also indicates the potential influence of *Pilgrimage* over Bryher's narrative approach.²³

The critics' attempts to seek out texts similar to Bryher's novel underscore the conceptual complexity of her work and the author/protagonist dynamics in action. Narrated in the third person, all three novels create the impression that the author is simply a commentator of the protagonist's experiences. The free indirect style of the narration disguises the fictional events' origin by distancing the author from the protagonist's thoughts. However, Bryher's disguise can be easily undermined by the parallels between her novels' narratives, the events she recorded in her first memoir *The Heart to Artemis* and her personal notes. In *The Heart to Artemis*, Bryher recalls someone reading the children's book *Swiss Family Robinson* to her multiple times until she teaches herself to read.²⁴ This episode is followed by a wreck on the nearby beach, which the author, still a small child, finds exciting.²⁵ These events appear in the very first chapter on Nancy's childhood in *Development*, indicating the author's use of past experiences.²⁶ The parallels continue in the incorporation of Bryher's network of acquaintances, friends and family members in her novels. In both *The Heart to Artemis* and *Development*, the protagonist is introduced to a girl called Sylvia as a potential friend.²⁷ Another figure who appears in the novel is H.D. as the poet, who Nancy meets in the end of *Two Selves* and as Helga in *West*, where she accompanies Nancy on her trip to America. *Development* and *Two Selves* later introduce the author's parents, and Bryher's school-friend Dorothy Petrie Townshend as Nancy's Downwood acquaintance Eleanor. These parallels are

²³ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 238.

²⁴ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 13-14.

²⁵ Ibid. 14-15.

²⁶ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 21-23.

²⁷ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 26-29.

further reinforced by Bryher's own research notes on Queenwood, kept at her personal archive.²⁸ As records of the school's history, these not only suggest the author's interest in the school despite her critique but also indicate the prototypes of Downwood's school mistresses in Bryher's own teachers. The similarities between the author's memoir and her novels provide grounds for a more detailed definition of the novels' author/protagonist relationship and the reasons for Bryher's purposeful dissociation from Nancy.

In the context of existing theories on autobiographical prose, Bryher's novels and their protagonist exemplify Philippe Lejeune's 'autobiographical pact': a set of principles, and their variations, that need to be present in order for a text to be identified as autobiographical.²⁹ Lejeune negates the differences in the analytic approaches to autobiography, an autobiographical novel, and a fiction novel, and suggests that all methods of analysis of the autobiographical text can also be applied to the fiction novel and vice versa.³⁰ If one's analysis is limited to the main text, the methods of investigation of the structure, content, or interpretation could be identical, regardless of the text's autobiographical origins or fictional elements.³¹ However, the relationships between textual elements become complicated once the author assumes a pseudonym and the text is transformed into a site of identity creation.³² The pseudonym separates the author from the person whose experiences are reflected in the text. The author is the figure, who is responsible for the text's creation, and whose existence in the reader's world confirms the veracity of the autobiographical text's origin.³³ Although they may share experiences, the author is also different from the autobiographical protagonist, who is fictional and therefore could not have written the text.³⁴ Instead, the autobiographical

²⁸ See 'Queenwood', Bryher Papers, Box 72, Folder 2880.

²⁹ Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989)

³⁰ *Ibid.* 13.

³¹ *Ibid.* 13.

³² *Ibid.* 11-12.

³³ *Ibid.* 11-12.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 12.

protagonist is a product of the author's fictionalisation of their own memories and experiences. Therefore, the author and the protagonist are separated from each other by their divergent relationships to the autobiographical text.

Bryher's novels exhibit this division insofar as the identity assumed by the author is different to the one she devises for the protagonist. The author's choice of the name 'Bryher' negotiates issues that arise from the author's origin and social milieu, her novels' function, and her reputation as a queer female author. In line with Lejeune's treatment of the autobiographical text as a site of identity creation, the new name allowed the author to create an identity that was different from the upper-class stereotype for which she was prepared and detach her from the milieu she criticised. The non-gendered name 'Bryher', which the author later adopted as her legal name, further places her in a long tradition associated with women writers who wished to conceal their femininity.³⁵ In different periods of literary history, women writers like George Eliot (born Mary Anne Evans, 1819-1880) or George Sand (born Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin, 1804-1876) disguised their identities as women in order to write the narratives they wanted. Just as it ensured her literary status and spared her from dismissal as a woman writer, Bryher's new name allowed her to work, travel, and socialise with the company of her choice, free from social and family constraints in real life. Therefore, changing her name was an act of identity creation in real life that shaped the author's existence beyond the stereotypes that restricted her. Her authorial name also separated her from her protagonist Nancy, in spite of the novels' autobiographical dimensions. The two names and identities, one real and one fictional, were yet another precaution that allowed Bryher to safely articulate her opinions and ideas under the pretext that these were Nancy's fictional comments rather than her own worldview.

Apart from the parallels between the three narratives and the experiences recorded in

³⁵ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 193.

her memoir, the autobiographical quality of the three novels is also evident in the sense of familiarity with the narrative world and its characters that typifies the prose's indirect style. This familiarity is underscored by a lack of detail or clear introduction of characters and locales in the narrative world: characters' involvement in the narrative is assumed and never discussed as they enter and exit Nancy's life, while their relationship is never clearly defined. While the texts provide enough detail to further the narratives, the narrative progression of all three of Bryher's novels depends on Nancy's actions, decisions, and movements. Instead, the novels develop other characters through Nancy's opinions of them, thus concentrating the narrative focus on Nancy's psyche. Although Nancy's parents exert parental authority over the protagonist through their decision to send her to Downwood, their relationship is never developed in detail. Instead, their presence is manifested in the voices that inform the protagonist of her school enrolment in the end of *Development*'s first part, 'Epic Childhood'.³⁶ Her mother's voice pleads for patience during a family visit to a museum.³⁷ Similarly, the text assumes the parents' presence again on a trip to Italy: 'They had wandered out to Italy in early December with the possibility of further voyage before them'.³⁸ However, there are no episodes dedicated specifically to them in the novel and their significance for the protagonist's life is mediated only through their voices or implied presence in the novel's description of family travels and their critique of Nancy's lifestyle in *Two Selves*.

Characters of specific importance, who are previously unknown to the protagonist, are described through a series of metonymic metaphors. While they hint at details of their appearance or behaviour, these metaphors reveal Nancy's impressions of these characters and, by the nature of her connection to the author, Bryher's personal relationships to their real-life analogues. H.D.'s description as the poet in *Two Selves* is saturated with metaphors to nature

³⁶ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 79-80.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 32.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 40.

and allusions to the sea, reminiscent of her Imagist poetry: her ‘tall figure’ is a ‘spear flower’ with ‘eyes that had sea in them’.³⁹ The choice of imagery here may also be interpreted as a token of Bryher’s admiration of *Sea Garden*, H.D.’s collection of Imagist poetry of 1916. In a letter from 1918, Bryher mentions ‘Loss’, ‘The Helmsman’, and ‘The Shrine’ as the poems that impressed her most⁴⁰. She describes ‘Loss’ as a poem of ‘an early, almost a pre-Homeric age’ even ‘if only for the first line’⁴¹. In this context, the first line of the poem’s first stanza: ‘The sea called’, evokes the ‘sea’ Nancy recognises in the poet’s eyes in the closing sentences of *Two Selves*, and confirms the influence of H.D.’s Imagist poetry over the images of Bryher’s prose.⁴² *West* offers no other description of H.D.’s doppelgänger, Helga, as the text assumes she is familiar to Bryher and therefore Nancy, thus rendering further descriptions unnecessary. The narrative’s reliance on Nancy’s knowledge of the narrative world ascribes a sense of omniscience to the text’s narration of her experiences. *West* takes the same approach in its depiction of Anne Trollope, modelled on the poet Marianne Moore. Anne is a ‘Dactyl’ with ‘Jurassic eyes’ who arrives ‘disguised in an Alpine hat, a frog-green coat and skirt’.⁴³ The text’s adoption of the nickname ‘Dactyl’ further underscores the novel’s autobiographical connections: Marianne Moore often signed her letters to Bryher as ‘Dactyl’ or ‘Pterodactyl’, which was her nickname in the complicated system of pet names of Bryher’s circle.⁴⁴ Her use of the same nickname in *West* alludes to another level of intimacy as the real details of Bryher’s impression of Moore emerge as the traits of this particular character.

The novels are not only products of the author’s reflections on twentieth-century culture, but may also be treated as sites of identity creation in another sense, whereby Bryher’s

³⁹ Ibid. 289

⁴⁰ Bryher to H.D., 1918, Bryher Papers, Box 3, Folder 80.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² H.D., ‘Loss’ in *Collected Poems 1912-1944*, ed. by Louis L. Martz (A New Directions Book: 1983) 21.

⁴³ Bryher, *West* 145.

⁴⁴ See Bryher Papers, Box 37, Folder 1357.

identity as a young woman and author are shaped by Nancy's opinions. The mechanism whereby the novels substitute Bryher and the modernists of her circle for their fictional analogues may be further clarified through Paul de Man's position on autobiography, its author and its protagonist. Paul de Man posits that autobiography is a 'figure of reading or of understanding that occurs... in all texts' rather than a separate genre, as Lejeune similarly suggests.⁴⁵ The connections that may be identified between a text and its author are merely the result of 'reflexive substitution' where the author becomes 'the subject of his own understanding'.⁴⁶ De Man's theory renders a text's authorship even more explicit: if any text can be autobiographical, then the author, the text's narrator and the protagonist are interchangeable.⁴⁷ The relationship between the three narrative agencies is determined in the process of reading the text.⁴⁸ The texts' register and the distance this register introduces between the author and the protagonist are irrelevant, just as the author's pseudonym or chosen name within the text are merely 'topological substitutions' for the same person.⁴⁹ As the autobiography becomes a site of self-projection and evaluation, the alternative identity that the author creates for their convenience or disguise, in the narrative or outside of it, functions as a prosopopeial tool for the author's examination of their own life and relationships.

The autobiographical elements of the three texts invest the novels with psychological elements of the author's journey of self-discovery expressed through their articulation of Nancy's psyche and motivated by the Bryher's interests in psychoanalysis. These reflexive dimensions connect the three novels to the little-examined tradition of the 'new biography' that emerges in the 1920s, which Laura Marcus defines by its emphasis on psychologically complex characters.⁵⁰ Conscious of psychoanalysis's influence on modernist literature, authors

⁴⁵ Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as Defacement' *MLN*, 94 - 5 (December 1979) 921.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 921-922.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 991-922.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 922

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 922

⁵⁰ Laura Marcus, *Dreams of Modernity: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Cinema* (Cambridge and

considered that the psychological complexity in the depiction of the fictional life of another is equal to their own psychological complexity.⁵¹ Their aspirations to write about complex characters blurred the boundaries between fiction and autobiography as they based their protagonists and their experiences on real life.⁵² Marcus's analysis of this sub-genre reminds us of de Man's understanding of autobiographical literature and the substitutional nature of the author and protagonist he identifies. Hermione Lee's reflections on early twentieth-century life-writing similarly note the influence of psychoanalysis and Freudian theories on rethinking modernist biography that resulted in biographical texts' 'acute sense of that "variance", of the gaps and contradictions within human beings'.⁵³ The combination of theories and literary genres uncovered 'what lay buried and hidden beneath the publicly functioning, and malfunctioning, self'.⁵⁴ Interchangeable with the author's identity and her journey of self-discovery, Nancy is reflexive of these trends. Any detachment between the two is introduced merely for the sake of the author's dissociation from her family's background and as a form of detachment between the protagonist's controversial position on issues of social importance.

Nancy fulfils the prosopopeial function that de Man recognises in the autobiographical protagonist as she journeys across different spaces and voices Bryher's social critique on particular periods of her life. The third-person narration becomes irrelevant insofar as the function of the three novels is concerned and Nancy is merely Bryher's disguise against the world she criticises. As the novels offer versions of the author's opinions about the society she inhabits, Nancy's complexity as a protagonist provides an insight into the state of the author's psyche in different periods of her life, complicated by the increasing awareness of her queer identity. The texts' discourses on femininity range from social transactions between characters

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 135.

⁵¹ Ibid. 135.

⁵² Ibid. 135.

⁵³ Hermione Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 72-79.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 79.

to passages that describe Nancy's psyche as a queer young woman. Previous explorations of women's autobiographical texts have prompted discussions on the subjectivity these texts articulate. Nancy Miller draws on Lejeune's definition of autobiography when she seeks a female perspective in autobiographical prose.⁵⁵ As the autobiographical text involves a degree of exposure of the self, women need to deconstruct their identities and construct a new self.⁵⁶ In Miller's words, 'the female autobiographers know that they are being read as women' because their narratives sign-post distinctly female experiences such as marriage and child-birth.⁵⁷ However, the feminine nature of such events counterpoints the formation of the female writer and her resistance to the traditionally male authority that governs literary conventions.⁵⁸ In order to avoid such censorship, the 'staging' of the female autobiographical self instead centers itself around the act of writing as a woman.⁵⁹ However, Bryher eluded dismissal as a female writer by adopting a gender-neutral name that concealed her identity as a woman and ensured that her novels' focus would be their social commentary. Besides its author's obscure gender identity, the concept of femininity in the novels is additionally complicated by Nancy's rejection of popular female stereotypes. The novels never describe Nancy as a girl or a young woman unless they articulate her refusal to adhere to patriarchal restrictions. These are always imposed on the protagonist by one of the numerous voices that remain unnamed as a demonstration of others' invasive control on her position in society. Her critique of society's treatment of women and explicit manifestations of Victorian femininity are underpinned by her difficult relationship to girls in her childhood and her desire to be a boy, articulated across both *Development* and *Two Selves*.

Nancy's strained relationships with women and her problematic perception of

⁵⁵ Nancy K. Miller, *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 49.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 49.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 50-54.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 54.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 54.

patriarchal masculinity are sketched out in two episodes. Her conflict with the little girl Sylvia exposes her lack of affinity to the gender to which she is supposed to belong. Sylvia's description as a 'strong assertive child' or the 'speaker' with 'jam-stained fingers' highlights the protagonist's disgust and 'half-frightened amazement' at the prospect of Sylvia's companionship.⁶⁰ As the episode of the children's acquaintance ends with a quarrel over Nancy's tricycle, it marks the beginning of the protagonist's strained relationship with her own gender and foregrounds her critique of the schoolgirls of Downwood.⁶¹ *Two Selves* establishes Nancy's future relationship with men as equally complicated. During her fencing lesson, Nancy is forced to duel with Major X, 'a giant over six feet'.⁶² The duel's description implies the protagonist's anger with male authority and its dismissal of her abilities, as Nancy's sword skills are 'battered' by the 'heavy English guardsman with his "pardon" and "sport"'.⁶³ The verbs used to describe the Major's actions suggest the weight of his blows on Nancy's small figure, intended to disparage the protagonist's attempts at a traditionally male sport. The text describes his 'hammering' as he 'lunged' and 'beat' Nancy.⁶⁴ From Nancy's point of view, Major X is a collective image of the men who populate the public space where she is unwelcome. An illustration of the detachment between traditional masculinity and modern femininity, his behaviour exposes the threat that independent and queer femininity poses on masculine authority.

Nancy's strained relationships with both genders and her scepticism towards gender stereotypes posit a sense of gender-neutrality that she inherits from Bryher's own choice to construct an alternative identity to Annie Winifred Ellerman. The first chapter of *Development* informs us that Nancy's 'one regret was that she was a girl'.⁶⁵ The description of her childhood

⁶⁰ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 26-27.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 27.

⁶² *Ibid.* 205.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 206.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 205.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 24.

years never positions her as a little girl. During her family's travels across Europe and Egypt Nancy is never forced to adhere to any gender stereotypes. Instead, she is treated like a child whose urges for adventures and books are interpreted as the whims of a precocious mind but nothing else. Throughout its descriptions of the family's travels, the text always refers to Nancy as the 'child' but never as a girl. As the text's focus is a mediation of the protagonist's psyche, the introduction of this gender neutrality suggests that this is how Nancy perceives herself. She identifies herself by her intelligence and her interests rather than her gender. This gender-neutrality becomes the core of Nancy's identity and foregrounds the shock of the protagonist's induction to Downwood school and the sudden necessity to behave like a girl.

The juxtaposition between Nancy's identity and the rest of the school girls explicitly signals her queer identity. Although the protagonist truly embraces her homosexuality in the end of *Two Selves*, her 'queer' individuality is introduced as a symptom of her non-conformity to the established female/male binary in the first novel and permeates the subjectivity of the later two novels. In *Development*, Nancy's homosexuality is metaphorically exposed when the Downwood girls describe the protagonist as 'queer': 'The first days over, most dubbed her "queer" and left her alone'.⁶⁶ The descriptive 'queer' connotes two meanings in *Development*. Firstly, it acts as an epithet that denotes Nancy's peculiarity. Unlike the other Downwood girls, she is interested in books and has travelled across Europe and the Middle East. She dares oppose her teachers and regularly quarrels with the games mistress when she is forced to go to drill.⁶⁷ The omission of the other girls' reactions to Nancy's insubordination suggests their compliance to the school's order and their insignificance to the narrative. Nancy questions the school's established routines and the teachers' competence.⁶⁸ In response to the girls' mockery, she composes French verses and recites them until her 'tormentors... slunk off, abashed and

⁶⁶ Ibid. 90.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 91.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 95.

alarmed by the strange sounds, like a herd of savages'.⁶⁹ Secondly, the adjective, framed by quotation marks in the novel's original text, hints at the protagonist's sexuality, which develops in Nancy's two selves in Bryher's second novel. The beginning of *Two Selves* proclaims: 'Two Selves. Jammed against each other, disjointed and ill-fitting.'⁷⁰ These words describe the protagonist's dual self: one that adheres to the stereotype she is imposed, and another that urges to be her true self. Nancy's 'true' self and her urge to have a 'friend' become expressions with coded meaning in Bryher's texts. Her 'true' self is her gender identity and her friend is the poet whom she meets in the end of the second novel. These are metaphors for the concept of female homosexual love that is otherwise never explicitly stated in the texts. Similarly, there are no hints at physical love between the two characters. Instead, Helga is treated as Nancy's chaperone in *West* as the novel supports conventional female stereotypes. The truth about Nancy's homosexuality is further exposed through the language of the three novels and the gradual suppression of men's voices in the novel.

The incorporation of the author's gender identity in the novels complicates her social critique and the broader narrative subjectivity of her writing. As a result, Bryher's prose may also be analysed through discourses on gender identity, which as scholars like Gillian Hanscombe, Virginia L. Smyers and Alex Goody point out, still permeate investigations of women's writing.⁷¹ Goody demonstrates that gender is still a central component of academic studies in modernist women's writing in his investigation of the works of Djuna Barnes, Mina Loy and Gertrude Stein. In his comparison of their texts, he emphasises Djuna Barnes's treatment of women's bodies and female sexuality, the 'mixture of futurist and feminist ideas' in Loy's poetry, and the evolution of Stein's dynamic linguistics.⁷² However, Bryher's

⁶⁹ Ibid. 95.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 183.

⁷¹ Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers, *Writing for Their Lives: The Modernist Women 1910-1940* (London: The Women's Press, 1987); Alex Goody, *Modernist Articulations: A Cultural Study of Djuna Barnes, Mina Loy and Gertrude Stein* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

⁷² Ibid. 27-56

autobiographical fiction poses a problem to such an approach as it never defines Nancy's gender identity directly but connotes its unconventionality through a set of linguistic codes and metaphors. Instead, Nancy's homosexuality is labelled as her queerness throughout *Development* or her sensitivity in *Two Selves*: both indicators of her non-conformity to Queenwood's rules and her gender identity.

Although it results in the concealment of Nancy's homosexuality, the language that denotes her differences from the rest of the school girls also labels her as an other in the wider network of women characters in Bryher's texts. Hanscombe and Smyers reflect on this concept of otherness in the broader context of early twentieth-century society's attitude towards women writers. They treat women's strive to become writers as symptomatic of women thinkers' interpretation of women's liberation not so much as a civil matter but rather a cultural problem.⁷³ According to their analysis, the woman writer 'risks losing out as a woman' because women in the early twentieth century still 'wrestled with... shackles... as enslaving as the petticoats' including elements of traditional female identity such as 'chastity, monogamy, marriage, child-bearing, heterosexual conformity, economic dependence and intellectual infantilisation'.⁷⁴ Their choice to be someone different from the identity pre-destined for them by society renders them an 'eccentric, or a neurotic... or a lesbian'.⁷⁵ The otherness that Hanscombe and Smyers recognise in women's choice to become writers in the early twentieth century is similar to the marginality that scholars like Nancy K. Miller identify in women's autobiographical prose, discussed elsewhere in this thesis. Their acknowledgement of the narrow classification of female experiences and therefore women's prose forces women writers to negate preconceptions of femininity and deconstruct their identities. Their attempts result in an identity caught between established norms of femininity and an alternative femininity, not

⁷³ Hanscombe and Smyers, *Writing for Their Lives*, 3-4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 3

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 4

recognised by society and thus categorised as other. The struggle of the woman protagonist suspended between society's expectations and her own yearnings becomes similarly a central concept of Renée Dickinson's commentary on female subjectivity in the novels of Virginia Woolf and Olive Moore.⁷⁶ These discourses on the uncertainty of gender dimensions of female identity may be connected to the three novels' projection of concealed queer identity and its significance for Nancy's complex subjectivity as both a protagonist and the chief narrative perspective of all three texts.

Brian Loftus continues the discussion of queer identity's relationship to life-writing by claiming that homosexuality problematises the autobiographical text since queer autobiography is a literary phenomenon 'without a base for reference'.⁷⁷ In support of his argument, Loftus refers to Sidonie Smith's treatment of the autobiographical text as a record of 'the historical forces that pressed persons into certain subjectivities'.⁷⁸ Such narratives commonly reiterate the 'official histories' of the universal subject's development according to socially-accepted conventions.⁷⁹ The universal subject is traditionally male, while the female subject inhabits the narrative's margins.⁸⁰ A symbol of motherhood and lost innocence, the female subject is part of the 'mess and clutter' of the 'nonidentical' that needs to be replaced with signs of the universal male subject's success.⁸¹ Smith's reflections indicate the assumption that the autobiographical subjectivity can only be traditionally male or female. Meanwhile, queer subjectivity is forced to remain silent for centuries and any expression of its point of view is controlled by the very institutions that ensure its silence.⁸² These assumptions about

⁷⁶ Renee Dickison, *Female Embodiment and Subjectivity in the Modernist Novels: The Corporeum of Virginia Woolf and Olive Moore* (New York: Routledge, 2009)

⁷⁷ Brian Loftus, 'Speaking Silence: The Strategies and Structures of Queer Autobiography,' *College Literature* 24 - 1 (February 1997) 31.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 31.

⁷⁹ Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) 19.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 11.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 19.

⁸² *Ibid.* 31.

narrative subjectivity and gender illuminate critics' struggle to define Nancy's identity in the early reviews of Bryher's novels, which discuss her identity and relationship to Bryher's persona as female and dismiss any manifestations of her queerness or sensitivity.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick reflects on the emergence of queer identity in literature in her *Epistemology of the Closet*.⁸³ Although her explorations are limited to male authors like Oscar Wilde, Herman Melville, and Marcel Proust, she connects modes of sexuality to the concept of knowledge.⁸⁴ A binary that gained prominence in the late eighteenth century, knowledge/ignorance became interconnected to notions of sexuality: knowledge meant 'sexual knowledge', just as ignorance connoted 'sexual ignorance'.⁸⁵ The interconnected binary of knowledge and sexuality is reflected in the double meaning that underpins Nancy's 'queer' identity: her precociousness and her homosexuality. In *Development*, Nancy's intelligence and curiosity leads to her being labelled 'queer' by the other girls. Equally, the protagonist criticises the girls' 'general ignorance' of historical events and their complacency to the school's order in *Development*.⁸⁶ Although at this point of the narrative Nancy has yet to acknowledge the marginality of her gender identity, her queerness is clearly related to her intelligence. By contrast, heterosexual modes of femininity are linked to ignorance and dull complacent existence. The same pattern continues in *Two Selves* where the protagonist disparages her school friends' limited interests while she searches for a 'friend' who would recognise her sensitivity.⁸⁷ Eleanor knows 'no more than one's self' and Doreen only cares about fishing.⁸⁸ Neither of them can be her intellectual equal as is illustrated in Nancy's conversation with Eleanor about the post-war future. Nancy realises Eleanor's resignation to the established limitations on women's opportunities in society and her acknowledgement that nothing can

⁸³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (London: Penguin, 1994)

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 73.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 73.

⁸⁶ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 99.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 186.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 186.

change.⁸⁹ Unlike Eleanor, Nancy is not ready to forsake her rebellion against the Establishment because that would force her to abandon her true self and embrace social stereotypes.

The implementation of female homosexuality in Nancy's development as a protagonist alters the worldview the novels articulate. Although the concept remains underdeveloped in *Development*, Bryher's first novel is published in 1920 but written in 1919. At this point Bryher was already familiar with Havelock Ellis's theory on gender inversion.⁹⁰ Bryher discovered that she shared a number of interests with Ellis that included Elizabethan poetry, modern French literature, psychoanalysis and 'colour hearing'.⁹¹ While she claimed to have read Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* and discussed it with him only once, the understanding of homosexuality that emerges from her novels can be aligned to Ellis's description of gender inversion.⁹² Despite the claims Bryher makes in *The Heart to Artemis*, her discussion of psychoanalytic theories and sexuality with Ellis can be traced throughout her correspondence with him through the late 1910s and early 1920s. In his letters, Ellis recommended publications and journals on psychoanalysis that fed into Bryher's interest in psychoanalytic theories and the transformations of men and women.⁹³ He occasionally started his letters to her with the address 'Dear Boy', an indicator of his recognition of her homosexuality.⁹⁴ A letter from 19 December, 1918, addresses Bryher's interest in gender and gender transformation.⁹⁵ Ellis's letter reports that 'Mrs Aldington' has informed him of Bryher's interest in 'transition & cross-dressing in women' and points out pages 244-250 of his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* for his opinion on the topic.⁹⁶ His letter from March 1919

⁸⁹ Ibid. 245-249.

⁹⁰ Grosskurth, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography*, 295-296.

⁹¹ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 197-199.

⁹² Ibid. 197.

⁹³ See Bryher Papers, Box 10, Folders 413-420.

⁹⁴ Havelock Ellis to Bryher, August 14th, 1919 and August 16th, 1919, Bryher Papers, Box 10, Folder 413.

⁹⁵ Havelock Ellis to Bryher, December 19th, 1918, Bryher Papers, Box 10, Folder 413.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

informs Bryher that he has sent a list of titles of papers that might be relevant to her interests alongside the last chapter of *Development*: ‘... I have hunted out some papers on the subject & am sending them in a separate envelope for you to look at... together with the last chapter received of “Development”...’.⁹⁷ Sent in the year before the publication of Bryher’s first novel, this letter suggests that Ellis read at least parts of *Development* before it went to print. His suggestions that Bryher consults different texts on gender and psychoanalysis further confirm his influence over *Development*’s depiction of Nancy’s queer identity. Bryher and Ellis’s conversation on gender formation continued in 1919 and the early 1920s.⁹⁸ In a letter from February 1921, Ellis recommends a number of journal titles that might interest Bryher: ‘the American Journal of Psychology’ and ‘The Psychoanalytic Review’.⁹⁹ He continues: ‘The Journal of Abnormal Psychoanalysis... is, I believe, still good though I never see it;... The Psychoanalytic Review (also American) I do not recommend; it is too academic & technical.’¹⁰⁰ These fragments of the author’s correspondence with Ellis reveal the resources that shaped Bryher’s understanding of gender identity formation and translated into Nancy’s subjectivity.

Published in the period 1897-1910 as one of the first volumes of Ellis’s theories, *Sexual Inversion* presents inversion in both men and women as a narrower term than homosexuality.¹⁰¹ Ellis defines homosexuality as one’s attraction towards multiple people of the same gender that is dependent on circumstance rather than the individual, while inversion is an individual’s affection towards a specific person of the same sex.¹⁰² As this urge for same-gender companionship can be encouraged by one’s surroundings, it manifests in spaces such

⁹⁷ Havelock Ellis to Bryher, March 3rd, 1919, Bryher Papers, Box 10, Folder 413.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Havelock Ellis to Bryher, February 13th, 1921, Bryher Papers, Box 10 Folder 414.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* Vol. II (New York: Random House, 1936) 1-6; 216-219.

¹⁰² Ibid. 1.

as girls' schools and convents in the case of female inversion.¹⁰³ These circumstances are recreated in Bryher's novels as hints to Nancy's inversion. The novels devise a metaphorical terminology that connotes the protagonist's 'two selves', her 'sensitivity', and the 'friend' whom she seeks throughout the second novel. Her scepticism towards other girls aids the formation of the gender-neutral identity defined by childhood precociousness. Despite her teachers' and parents' attempts to integrate her in Downwood's community, Nancy refuses to accept the identity this community enforces upon her. Although she is placed in an exclusively female environment in Downwood, Nancy never recognises any of the girls there as a 'friend' who understands her sensitivity. Despite her friendships with Eleanor and Doreen, she is also critical of the two girls. Her only 'friend' is the poet whom she meets in the end of *Two Selves*. Their 'friendship' fits into Ellis's established concept of gender inversion as the attraction between two specific individuals of the same gender. Gender inversion is coded in the special connection Nancy seeks in other individuals. It renders their companionship superior to Nancy's friendship with the other girls and is a reflection of the author's understanding of her own identity and her relationship to H.D.. In the same time, Nancy suffers the hostility of men in the later two novels when she tries to infiltrate traditionally male spaces and discussions. As she moves away from the Victorian models of femininity that her family and schoolteachers try to impose on her in Queenwood, Nancy confronts the masculinity of the fencing hall and the open streets of war-time London in *Two Selves*, and the foreign manners of the literary salons of Greenwich Village in *West*.

Therefore, Nancy's complicated relationships with both genders renders the definition of Bryher's protagonist and the novels' subjectivity as purely homosexual or lesbian impossible. Influenced by the author's own understanding of her gender identity as more fluid than dominant gender definitions and Havelock Ellis's theories on gender inversion, the

¹⁰³ Ibid. 1.

narrative subjectivity of the three novels lies in the field that Susan Stanford Friedman identifies as ‘beyond gender’.¹⁰⁴ In her discussion of feminist literary criticism, Friedman indicates a shift from gender as a widely-established framework of inquiry to new treatments of identity that chart new ‘positional, locational, spatial’ territories in feminist studies’.¹⁰⁵ Friedman differentiates these new categories against Elaine Showalter’s notions of gynocriticism and gynesis, two reactionary practices that Showalter outlines in response to male-dominated theories of modern literary criticism.¹⁰⁶ In the context of Showalter’s commentary on feminist literary studies, gynocriticism undertakes historical explorations of women’s writing by focusing on characteristics of language and cultural networks of race, class and nationality.¹⁰⁷

Gynesis, by contrast, rejects the temporal restrictions imposed on feminist criticism and goes on to explore women’s writing beyond the women’s space, an imagined realm from where women write and speak.¹⁰⁸ Unlike gynocriticism, gynesis still might offer some approaches to Nancy and the subjectivity of Bryher’s novels since it aims to conquer the ‘space of the Other, the gaps, silences and absences of discourses and representations’.¹⁰⁹ The focus of gynesis takes into consideration the voices of those who remain on the margins of society, similar to Nancy who fails to identify with traditional domestic femininity and needs to assert herself in masculine spaces. Nevertheless, gynesis relies on pre-established structures of gender and femininity for its analysis, and is thus rendered unsuitable for this study’s reflections on Bryher’s novels and their challenge to conventional definitions of gender. Nancy’s rejection of

¹⁰⁴ Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton, 1998) 17

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 17

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p. 18

¹⁰⁷ Elaine Showalter, ‘Women’s Time, Women’s Space: Writing the History of Feminist Criticism,’ *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 3, 1-2 *Feminist Studies in Literary Scholarship* (Spring-Autumn 1984) 36

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 36

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 36

traditional femininity is contradicted by her admiration of certain individuals of her own gender and her struggle against masculine authority in the text. This translates in the narratives' subjectivity as it avoids the problem of defining Nancy's gender identity and thus perpetuates its protagonist's otherness. The narrative voice that dominates the three novels belongs to neither genders and it is instead what the text identifies: queer. It is a voice that evades traditional gender categories and positions the protagonist in the realm beyond gender that Friedman describes. This unfixed quality also relates the various constructs that inform Nancy's identity to Hélène Cixous's conclusion on the subjectivity of modernist fiction: a 'combination of the threshold and the unknown'.¹¹⁰ Nancy's is a modernist subjectivity that 'vacillates, between no one and all of its possible individualities', as the fragmentation of modernity translates into the protagonist's consciousness and the otherness of her gender identity.¹¹¹

The protagonist's sexuality and subjective narrative voice start off as familiar through a set of established modes of normative late-Victorian heterosexual femininity that are gradually rejected as Nancy, and Bryher herself, explores the possibilities of an unfixed identity. The novels' third-person narration, the author's new name and Nancy's fictional guise facilitate Bryher's detachment from the subjectivity encouraged by her family's privileged milieu and shape a new second identity. The author discovers this identity through the act of writing as she records events of her life and explores the impact these had on her. Looking back on her experiences, the author reconstructs her identity and comes to terms with her homosexuality. Through her fiction she acknowledges the relationships that are truly important to her but still resists unambiguous definitions of her gender identity. The ideas invested in the three texts are informed by the author's own experiences and are additionally modified by the

¹¹⁰ Hélène Cixous, 'First Names of No One,' *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (New York: Routledge, 2003 [1994]), 28. Citations refer to the 2003 edition.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 28.

particular subjectivity that the three novels project. As the author's experimentation with different genres of prose continued throughout her literary career, the themes and approach transferred to the subjectivity that informs her film texts and her later historical novels of the 1950s and early 1960s. The prevalent themes that inform Bryher's literary work then become the concept of education, queer femininity, the enduring quality of Victorian gender and social stereotypes, and the intergenerational clash between these obsolete values and women's growing prominence in early twentieth-century society.

Women's development: Young Women's Education and Gender Stereotypes of the early twentieth century

The discussions on educational reform that prevailed in the period of *Development's* publication render Bryher's novel a timely exploration of the problem of education and underpin critics' controversial reviews of the novel.¹¹² Shortly after *Development's* initial publication in 1920, the publisher Clement Shorter wrote to Bryher and suggested a reprint with a foreword by Amy Lowell in the hope that this would attract further attention to the book.¹¹³ Education became an enduring theme in Bryher's fiction and non-fiction work, and a lifelong interest for the author, who collected information on teaching methodologies and national education systems long into the 1970s.¹¹⁴ Bryher's press POOL Reflections picked up on the popularity of the topic of education with another novel: *Why Do They Like It?*¹¹⁵ Authored by Bryher's younger brother, Sir John Reeves Ellerman II (1909-1973) under the pseudonym 'E.L. Black', *Why Do They Like It?* was published in 1927 with introductory notes by Bryher and Dorothy Richardson. *Why do They Like it?* bears more similarities to Alec Waugh's *The Loom of Youth* in its narrative and views on the English school system than

¹¹² Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 193.

¹¹³ Clement Shorter to Bryher, August 13th, 1920, Bryher Papers, Box 81 Folder 3108.

¹¹⁴ See Bryher Papers, Box 122 Folders 4281-4283.

¹¹⁵ E.L. Black, *Why Do They Like It?* (Darantiere: 1927)

Bryher's *Development*. Similar to *The Loom of Youth*, *Why do They Like it?* records a child's impression of life in a public school and exposes the dynamic and hierarchy amongst the school boys as well as the nature of the relationships this environment encourages.

Although *Why do They Like it?* remains largely overlooked in explorations of literary discussions of the problem of education so far, the characters and their relationships imply the novel's autobiographical nature. Ellerman's authorial position in relation to his protagonist James resembles the author/protagonist dynamics of Bryher and her fictional alter-ego Nancy. As studies of the public school environment, underpinned by notions of homosexuality, the novels expose the social milieu and governing principles of these private institutions. *Why do They Like it?* follows James Freeman who leaves Grey's preparatory school to enrol in the prestigious Nelson college, based on Malvern College, which Ellerman himself attended. Ellerman's reference to Malvern College can be aligned to Bryher's decision to incorporate her school Queenwood in *Development* as Nancy's school Downwood. *Development's* record of Nancy's rebellion becomes part of the novel's broader critique of oppressive gender structures and social stereotypes. Meanwhile, *Why do They Like it?* explores the result of one's adherence to such norms. Unlike, Nancy, James Freeman conforms to the established rules and hierarchy at Nelson school. The psychological transformation that he undergoes under the influence of the school's strict routines moulds him into the appropriate stereotype of a young man and helps him assimilate into the group of boys who become his friends. However, this transformation is also the processes that *Development* criticises. His adherence to rules and expectations strips him of any individuality or ability to reason for himself, making him envious of the independent lifestyle of his sister Elsie and her husband John.¹¹⁶ Prototypes for Bryher and her first husband Robert McAlmon, Elsie and John have 'individuality, freedom' that

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 99.

James realises he will never enjoy.¹¹⁷ Having followed an external authority for so long, he is unable to make decisions on his own. As a result, he is bound to follow the path society has chosen for him and never question it. The hierarchy of Nelson's schoolboys is a metaphor for the workings of a wider social milieu outside the school. As he accepts boys' hierarchy, James adopts the stereotypes and rules of this social group. His control over his life and future diminishes as his dependency on the other boys increases and their friendships evolve. Nancy refuses to accept the analogous process for girls, as adherence to social expectations and stereotypes benefits boys more than girls. The general expectation that boys would join a well-established profession allows more prospects for future development than the assumption that girls would be sent back to either the family home or their new husband's home after they leave school. Her refusal to accept the role society has chosen for her draws attention to the limited opportunities presented to young women after they leave school.

Society's refusal to accept women's freedom to make independent decisions is demonstrated in the episode where the decision to start at Downwood as a 'day girl' is made for Nancy by her parents.¹¹⁸ An adaptation of *Queenwood*, Downwood, constitutes a collective image of girls' schools at the turn of the century. Having originated in the nineteenth century, these schools transferred their outdated teaching methodologies and strict routines into the new twentieth century. In her exploration of the history of girls' schools in England, Christina De Bellaigue attributes these institutions' popularity to middle-class parents' aspirations for social mobility.¹¹⁹ The origin of girls' schools can be traced back to similar institutions established in France, just as Bryher's *Queenwood*.¹²⁰ Bryher's personal notes chronicle *Queenwood*'s establishment in France and move to England in 1870.¹²¹ Although the school was established

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* 99.

¹¹⁸ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 79.

¹¹⁹ Christina De Bellaigue, *Educating Women: Schooling and Identity in England and France, 1800-1867* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 15.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 15.

¹²¹ 'Queenwood', Bryher Papers Series II Writings Box 72 Folder 2880, Beinecke Rare Book

in England a few years after the period of De Bellaigue's consideration, its earlier French counterpart places it in the historical context of these old-fashioned institutions and their popularity in the middle-classes.

Queenwood's history and routines are further described in the memoir of Dorothy Petrie Townshend, formerly Dorothea Petrie Carew. A close friend from Bryher's school days, Townshend became co-editor of *Life and Letters To-Day* alongside Robert Herring.¹²² Her autobiography claims that the school was first found in Caen, Normandy in 1864.¹²³ The principals at time of Bryher and Townshend's studies there, Miss Chudleigh and Miss Johns, who also appear in Bryher's notes, bought the school from the founder's daughter in 1899.¹²⁴ Although Townshend's recollection of the school's minor rules never evokes the oppressive atmosphere of Bryher's memoirs and autobiographical prose, its proximity to the descriptions of the daily routine and lessons resemble the accounts in *Development*.¹²⁵ The alignment of their accounts reinforces the autobiographical quality of Bryher's novel as well as the parallels between these routines and the enduring Victorian stereotypes in this period. Queenwood's school uniform is modelled on women's fashion at the time.¹²⁶ French language and literature form a substantial part of the girls' lessons, but only a group of six or eight girls taught by the French mistresses in the school can actually speak French.¹²⁷ Although the school's routines and curriculum reflect society's expectations of young educated women, the lessons' superficiality evoke the 'domestic character', which schools of this period favoured over academic vigour.¹²⁸ Schools' belief that domesticity stimulated female education reflected the

and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹²² Dorothea Petrie Carew, *Anything Once: An Autobiography* (Penzance, Cornwall: Wordens of Cornwall, 1971) 109-110.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 35.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 35; 'Queenwood', Bryher Papers, Box 72, Folder 2880.

¹²⁵ Carew, *Anything Once*, 34-40.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 37.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 36.

¹²⁸ De Bellaigue, *Education Women*, 15.

common assumption that a young girl's education was merely complimentary to her role in the domestic space and her support for her husband.¹²⁹

Nancy's distress at her arrival at Downwood is implied in the text's description of the school grounds as 'one of the coldest, bleakest places she had seen'.¹³⁰ Related through the consonantal expression 'incessant noise', the environment's sensory shock translates into her psyche and disrupts her thoughts.¹³¹ The school's spartan interiors are in sharp contrast to Nancy's vivid dreams as her solitary existence is interrupted by the schoolgirls' questions about her background.¹³² Devoid of personality or freedom of expression, the other schoolgirls are dressed 'all in white blouses and blue skirts, their hair tied back with an enormous bow', a nod to the uniforms that Townshend describes.¹³³ Although three other girls are mentioned in the course of the novel, the absence of clear descriptions for each girl in the text indicates their lack of individuality. Nancy's rejection of Downwood's 'accepted point of view' marks her as the agent of a new transgressive form of femininity that cannot be restricted by the obsolete Victorian notions of domesticity and heterosexuality that Downwood perpetuates. Nancy's different personality is underscored by her 'sensitivity', a coded word for the homosexuality that remains to be discovered in the first novel and acknowledged in the second. The necessity to keep her true identity hidden, even before she herself has realised it, distances her from everyone. Her separation from her own gender is further underscored by her statement that she should 'not try to find a friend' from within her family's circle or the schoolgirls.¹³⁴ After their initial curiosity, the other girls ignore Nancy once they realise she is unable to integrate in the school's microcosm. The solitude, the repetitive regime and the monotony of her lessons merge Nancy's Downwood days into the second definitive period of her young life. An abrupt change

¹²⁹ Ibid. 19.

¹³⁰ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 83.

¹³¹ Ibid. 83.

¹³² Ibid. 83-85.

¹³³ Ibid. 83.

¹³⁴ Ibid. 289.

in language and sentence construction signals the contrast between Nancy's experience of childhood and her school years, and the evolution of Bryher's prose as separate periods of the protagonist's life are recorded in different style.

The child Nancy's dreams and urges for adventure are narrated in long complicated structures in the novel's first part. The memories of her family travels and the dreams of her infant days form a single stream of thought:

Best of all she loved the hours when, ranging the contents of her Noah's ark carefully, two by two, upon the floor, her mother spoke of gondolas and palaces and streets where girls let down a basket from the upper windows to draw up letters or carrots, of a city ruined by molten lava ages and ages ago, and of a museum there where lay the bread baked, the lamp used, the day of its destruction, now crusted to hard metal with the volcanic liquid, which Nancy herself would see some day, when she was just a little bigger.¹³⁵

The sequence of images alludes to the freedom of the protagonist's imagination in this period as the language draws on her mother's voice, unknown streets, an ancient city and a museum. She is free to think and do whatever she wants. The novel describes her games in similarly long constructions:

Troy, represented by a large mud pie, occasionally was taken in the garden, usually on an autumn morning when the gardener made a bonfire, because the smoke was the burning city, and the sparks looked like falling towers from the two steps at the end of the lawn which were the Greek ships putting out to sea.¹³⁶

Nancy's imaginary world is constructed of intertwining images of reality and dreams as the child adapts the real world to suit her imaginary games informed by the books she reads and the museums she visits. Her childhood perceptions of Greek mythology and ancient history

¹³⁵ Ibid. 25.

¹³⁶ Ibid. 36-37.

are articulated in the same style of prose. Having procured a history book, Nancy imagines Hannibal:

That at her own actual age had begun a career which, but for the cupidity of an effeminate Carthage, might have changed the story of the world, the audacity of that march through an undiscovered country, across the Alps - the stumbling, dying elephants, a memorial of their passage - almost to the gates of Rome, quickened and ripened a love of history, ever to be of her elemental roots of life.¹³⁷

Unconscious of her childhood freedom and preoccupied with her adventures, the child Nancy takes this period for granted and is oblivious of the existence of another world beyond her childhood freedom. In her formative years she relies on the safety, peace and stability of the domestic environment, and is unburdened by social stereotypes and expectations of her. The protagonist's unencumbered freedom comes to an end when the school's schedule is imposed on her days. The change in her routine is reflected in the prose's style as the long sentences of Nancy's dreams are replaced by short sentences that record the school routine. The increasing fragmentation of her thoughts, and Bryher's prose, alludes to the ways the rigid school methodologies hinder Nancy's imagination and intelligence. Paratactic structures indicate the 'mechanical regularity' of the school's routine by juxtaposing images of Nancy's day: 'The lesson was French,' 'The morning was a nightmare', 'Then came a walk, two by two'¹³⁸, implying repetition and infinity, devoid of childhood freedom.

The text's compression of Nancy's school days, events, and feelings into an undifferentiated period of physical, spiritual and intellectual entrapment connotes the protagonist's unconscious repression of these memories as particularly painful and traumatic. The routine's concise descriptions are also metaphors for the lack of substance in the lessons

¹³⁷ Ibid. 37.

¹³⁸ Ibid. 88-89; 99.

and school activities, contrary to Downwood's emphasis on good exam results. Inexperienced in formal education, Nancy considers herself more accomplished than the other girls. Even before entering Downwood she sees herself as 'possessing at fifteen the intellect of a woman of twenty'.¹³⁹ However, Downwood's methodologies are not intended to develop the girls' knowledge and intelligence. The absurdity of the school's routines and stereotypes is underscored by the superficial level of its teaching methodologies and the schoolgirls' mediocrity. The lessons are ruined by the teachers' 'lack of interest in teaching' and are aimed at successful examination results rather than intellectual achievement.¹⁴⁰ Despite her late introduction to formal education, Nancy is amazed by the girls' 'general ignorance', and poor knowledge of French and history while her efforts into an essay about the Elizabethan age remain unacknowledged.¹⁴¹ The school discourages the creativity and imagination that imbue Nancy's childhood. The protagonist laments the 'tragedy of the underpaid mistress grown old and cast aside for youth and a modern degree... of the sensitive child whose slightest slip from accepted custom met with a cruel derision... of the eager intellect denied expansion... of the brain forced and exhausted'.¹⁴² In Downwood, the concept of education is interpreted as endless routines punctuated by the girls' occasional quarrels rather than the vigorous concentration that Nancy expects.

Once she leaves Downwood, Nancy realises that she 'slipped back a whole age' and is 'bitterly homesick for childhood'.¹⁴³ The 'wonder' and 'imagination' of childhood have disappeared but have not been replaced by knowledge.¹⁴⁴ These conclusions illustrate the futility of the old-fashioned teaching methodologies that Downwood employs and the impossibility to apply them in real life. As young girls are still made to conform to century-old

¹³⁹ Ibid. 79.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 98-99.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 84, 88, 99.

¹⁴² Ibid. 115.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 123, 125.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 123.

stereotypes of domestic femininity, they are unprepared for the reality of life or the devastation of World War I. In Nancy's eyes, Downwood has 'taught them... bound their thoughts by rules... manufactured dreams for them... given them a language'.¹⁴⁵ Although the school's routine has moulded their behaviour and mind-set according to socially acceptable stereotypes, none of its ideas are applicable in real life.

The discourse on the futility of girls' education continues in *Two Selves*. If Downwood's lessons prove impractical in daily life, they amount to nothing in the time of war. During the war years, Nancy concludes 'Instead of teaching us to live all school did was to knock out of us any impulse toward freedom that we had'.¹⁴⁶ The schoolgirls are just taught to 'obey' and never question the established hierarchy.¹⁴⁷ A new definition of education emerges from the protagonist's inability to obtain employment that is condensed into the recurrent term 'development': a cumulative concept of both academic disciplines and life knowledge.¹⁴⁸ Women's development is still constrained not only by patriarchy but also by the older women who maintain pre-war stereotypes as Nancy's conversation with Eleanor demonstrates. The two young women criticise the matronly figure of their benefactor Lady Cockle as one of the 'old cats' who take the 'power' in their hands once the men go to war.¹⁴⁹ Although the novel refrains from further discussion of Lady Cockle's social status or role in the war effort, this minor character can be placed in the context of Patricia Fara's commentary on upper-class women's misinterpretation of suffrage in World War I.¹⁵⁰ In an expression of loyalty to the suffragettes' cause and misguided patriotism, ladies of leisure stopped buying luxury goods and economised on domestic help, thus forcing factory workers or maids into

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 118.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 249.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 249.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 246.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 244-245.

¹⁵⁰ Patricia Fara, *A Lab of One's Own: Science and Suffrage in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) 74.

unemployment.¹⁵¹ Their actions contributed to working-class women's impoverishment in a climate of scepticism towards the woman's ability as a worker and a citizen. Unknowingly, upper-class women, such as Lady Cockle, who had had power granted and preserved by their social standing, perpetuated social prejudice against working women and preserved old-fashioned stereotypes of femininity that also prevented any potential for these women's 'development'.

Bryher's discussion of education and women's status in society expands to her second and third novels, *Two Selves* and *West*, and their depictions of the stereotypes and social expectations encouraged by the system that *Development* rebukes. The two novels explore the protagonist's relationship with her own gender by presenting a gallery of clashing female stereotypes. Some of them, like Nancy's mother and her teachers, are bearers of Victorian femininity that translates into the war and the post-war years. While Nancy's mother is never mentioned in *Development*, her presence is implied through the parental force that sends Nancy to school. Nancy's mother gains more prominence in *Two Selves* as the protagonist's counterpart and an illustration of domestic femininity whose role is limited to criticising Nancy's appearance and running the family's household. Episodes of domesticity like the family conversation about the state of war or their leaving the house at night when the Zeppelins arrive include Nancy's mother but emphasise her lack of opinion and authority.¹⁵² Nancy's opinions about the war and the government, and her mother's limited perception of society and politics reveal the contrast between the two women. Nancy's father dismisses his daughter's choice to treat the war as a result of the government's irresponsibility and society's lack of education as he establishes his own opinion as the household's chief stance on the matter.¹⁵³ The mother's statement that 'People who make wars ought to go out first and be shot' remains

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 74.

¹⁵² Bryher, *Two Novels*, 222-227.

¹⁵³ Ibid. 222-225.

unacknowledged by the other participants in the conversation and is unrelated to the discussion.¹⁵⁴ Despite her constant presence in the family domain, the mother never makes a contribution to the ongoing discussions of education, the war, and women's limitations in wartime society. Though allowed to voice an opinion, the woman of the domestic space exposes her ignorance of politics as opposed to the young girl's ideas. The exchange implies that outdated perceptions of femininity are incompatible with the politics, attitudes, and problems of modernity. The female stereotypes of the past fade behind as Nancy leaves the comfort of her family's Victorian home and heads to the New World.

The novels' commentary on old-fashioned stereotypes of femininity continues with Downwood's mistresses. Described as 'overgrown schoolgirls', they have been living in the school for so long that 'they became school, their minds bounded by its restrictions'.¹⁵⁵ Although they fail to understand the school's dogma, they refuse to question it. In the context of the social constructs the novels criticise, the teachers are illustrations of the image of the school mistress that originated in the nineteenth century. De Bellaigue's analysis of nineteenth century schools negates the stereotype of the unmarried school mistress.¹⁵⁶ Her exploration offers the insights of a number of school teachers who were trained for the role from an early age or consciously chose it as their vocation.¹⁵⁷ According to De Bellaigue, the image of the 'reduced gentlewoman' who entered the teaching profession following the loss of her fortune or a failed engagement was partially fictional.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, this stereotype had to be maintained for the sake of preserving 'an ideal of femininity centring on marriage and motherhood'.¹⁵⁹ In practice, many families struggled to follow the middle-class stereotypes

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 223.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 114.

¹⁵⁶ De Bellaigue, *Educating Women*, 49-50.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 49-50.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 51.

¹⁵⁹ De Bellaigue, *Educating Women*, 51.

that dictated that a young girl should marry and run a household.¹⁶⁰ In their fear from the poverty of unmarried life, families sought other ways to secure the future of their young daughters in that period.¹⁶¹ Their attempts to prevent such fate resulted in them intentionally sending their daughters to be educated with the understanding they would become governesses or school teachers.¹⁶² Positions as governesses or school mistresses were desirable employment opportunities for some middle-class women with modest prospects. Although Bryher never elaborates on the backgrounds of Downwood's school mistresses, their matronly figures evoke the past social norms that clash with manifestations of modern femininity. Miss Sampson's relationship to her students demonstrates these social dynamics at work, when after a quarrel, she summons the Sixth Form to her drawing room and delivers a speech on the importance of the school's 'drill' that is well-known to all the girls.¹⁶³ Her behaviour and repetitive speech underscore the foolishness of the school's routine and the pointless activities that fill the girls' days.¹⁶⁴ The teachers' insistence on imposing the familiar stereotypes prompts Nancy's numerous quarrels with them during her two years in Downwood and even after she leaves the school.¹⁶⁵ After the publication of her book of poetry, an allusion to Bryher's own *Region of Lutany*, Nancy is invited to a 'schoolroom tea' where her stories about her trip to Wales scandalise the school teachers and their assumptions about travelling alone.¹⁶⁶ Nancy leaves frustrated and eager to escape not only their company but also the suffocating restraints of the stereotypes they support.

The novels' juxtaposition of stereotypes of femininity introduces a dimension of inter-generational conflict in the characters' relationships. In contrast to her mother and her school

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 51-52.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 51-52.

¹⁶² Ibid. 51-52.

¹⁶³ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 106-110.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 106-110.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 91-93.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 146-149.

mistresses, Nancy and her friends manifest the traits of the New Woman. After a series of legislative acts improved their legal status in the end of the nineteenth century, women gained a degree of independence they had never had before.¹⁶⁷ The social stereotype of the New Woman emerged as an embodiment of the social anxieties prompted by the changing gender dynamics and women's new-found freedom. In her exploration of *fin de siècle* society, Elaine Showalter defines the New Woman as a woman who sought opportunities for development outside marriage.¹⁶⁸ A rejection of Victorian ideas of femininity, the New Woman was educated, decadent, and sexually liberated. As such she epitomised the late-Victorian anxieties about modernity and women's liberation, which Sally Ledger discusses at length in her exploration of the social perceptions of the New Woman.¹⁶⁹ Ledger places the New Woman in the context of the tensions between gender and social politics as she was often compared to the dandy and the decadent despite they had little in common.¹⁷⁰ As a result, she was perceived as a 'sexual decadent' who posed a threat to women's roles as mothers.¹⁷¹

In Bryher's novels, the New Woman's ambiguous nature is realised in a group of women characters who reflect different qualities of the stereotype. The New Woman's strive for independence can be detected in Nancy's critique of *fin de siècle* society and its insistence on maintaining pre-war patriarchy. As she reflects on women's wartime difficulties, Bryher's protagonist concludes that education is women's only way to independence.¹⁷² However, young girls' education at the turn of the twentieth century is intertwined with the outdated traditions of 'an exhausted world' that refuses to accept modernisation.¹⁷³ Women are still

¹⁶⁷ Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siecle* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990) 7.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 38.

¹⁶⁹ Sally Ledger, 'The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism' in *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siecle*, ed. Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 22-44.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 24.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* 23.

¹⁷² Bryher, *Two Novels*, 249.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* 249.

forced to obey patriarchy and male authority. As Nancy and Eleanor reminisce their school days, she reminds her friend of Miss Sampson's life lessons: 'Obey your parents, obey the school, obey everything and everyone but your own self'.¹⁷⁴ Having followed this doctrine, Nancy realises that she is of 'no good' to herself or anyone else.¹⁷⁵ The protagonist's critique suggests that education should not encourage the surrender of one's individuality in order to be shaped according to society's expectations. Instead, it should help one formulate and voice their own opinions and ideas independently. Only then can one contribute meaningfully to the community.

As Bryher's own interpretation of the New Woman, Nancy challenges domestic stereotypes of femininity and the outdated institutions that educate them. Her provocation of authority, embodied in her teachers, parents, and the men characters whom she encounters, indicates her rebellion against patriarchy. Nancy's friends, Eleanor and Doreen, are similar illustrations of this stereotype in modernist literature. Contrary to the social expectations for middle- and upper-class girls of their age, they are both unmarried and struggling to find employment against the backdrop of World War I. Another example is Miss Cape, a dance teacher who is 'more interesting than the Downwood girls... because she had a job'.¹⁷⁶ However, despite the multiple positions she holds, Miss Cape's payment is still insufficient and she is forced to take a position with an English lady in Buenos Aires.¹⁷⁷ Although symptomatic of the New Woman's independence, Miss Cape's decision is also provoked by the perpetuation of lingering Victorian stereotypes of femininity and the social anxiety over women's independence. Similarly, Mrs Potter Brown, whom Nancy meets on her voyage to America in *West*, travels alone and is assigned an air of self-importance. Though aware of the social prejudice against independent women, she takes pride in her experience in travelling

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 249.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 249.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 198.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 198-199.

alone and informs Nancy that she was ‘quite a girl’ on her first trip to Europe and is better at travelling than most Americans.¹⁷⁸ Mrs Potter Brown’s pride over her experience sets her apart from other women of her generation as a prerequisite for the New Woman’s desires and freedoms. Her attitude changes from condescension to familiarity when Nancy mentions her acquaintance with Amy Lowell.¹⁷⁹ Her awareness of the Lowells’ reputation signals Mrs Potter Brown’s own social status.¹⁸⁰ The opportunities for travel, new experiences, and therefore education, in the sense of Nancy’s reflections, also become linked to a certain higher social standing, and financial security.

The narrative’s admission that higher social status grants some women better opportunities than other is implied in Nancy’s conversation with Eleanor as well. Although Nancy might be able to secure a passport and arrange a journey to America after the war, Eleanor is unable to do the same. Like many young women of the period, Eleanor is likely to remain unmarried and therefore work for a living, taking up the limited positions available to women.¹⁸¹ The character’s resignation highlights the economic truth that remains unspoken in the novel: just as men and women were not considered equal, women themselves were fractured into different communities defined by birth, social status, and financial viability, as Fara notices.¹⁸² Not all women could gain a prominent social status on their own and were thus rendered dependent on men or other, more economically-powerful women. Recorded in a chapter specifically titled ‘Eleanor’, the protagonist’s conversation and the text’s emphasis on Eleanor’s character reveals the paradox that Eleanor embodies as a young woman. Although she exhibits the traits and independence of the New Woman, the limitations she keeps in mind imply the restrictions that were still in place for women in this period. Therefore, Bryher’s

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 9.

¹⁷⁹ Bryher, *West*, 25.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. 25.

¹⁸¹ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 247-248.

¹⁸² Fara, *A Lab of One’s Own*, 19.

interpretation of the New Woman is an embodiment of a paradoxical femininity: though free to leave the domestic space and exercise certain freedoms such as travelling and education, or seek paid employment alongside men, the New Woman's independence is still hindered by social prejudice. As young women struggle to survive on their own, social restrictions and expectations stifle their desire for freedom and development until they surrender to a more familiar social order as is the case with Eleanor.

Women's distrust in their new freedom is also an issue in *West* where the outspoken Nancy is contrasted against the silent Helga and the demure Anne Trollope. The novel's record of new acquaintances and conversations for Nancy prioritises female conversations and characters, and minimises the influence of men characters in episodes across the narrative. While she is in New York, Nancy attends a party in Greenwich Village, accompanied by Helga and Anne Trollope. Although their presence is made clear in the narrative, the other two women take little part in the literary discussions at the party. When invited to join the conversation, Anne quickly refrains from voicing an opinion by retorting 'Please do not include me'.¹⁸³ She is reluctant to embrace the new freedoms other women desire. Despite Helga and Nancy's encouragement, she refuses to leave her job as a librarian in order to dedicate time to her talent for poetry.¹⁸⁴ Instead, Anne justifies her job by emphasising its service to society and her personal discoveries about a number of topics in the library books.¹⁸⁵ However, these are merely excuses for her lack of courage and fear of failure, which Nancy perceives as Anne's 'masochism' to her own imagination and talent.¹⁸⁶ Helga remains similarly silent throughout their stay in America. Although she is the object of Nancy's attraction, her 'friend' in Bryher's language, and her chaperone on their voyage, she upholds similar stereotypes to her friend Anne. When she does join Nancy's conversations with other characters, hers is the voice of

¹⁸³ Bryher, *West*, 156.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 148-149.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 148.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 150.

authority that restores balance to the narrative and serves as a mediator between Nancy's ideas about modernity and femininity, and old-fashioned or prejudiced characters. The character's authority over Nancy and other characters implies Bryher's perception of H.D., not only as a signifier of artistic freedom and shared sensitivity, but also reason and moderation. When Nancy and Anne launch their debate on women's freedom, Helga interrupts with: 'And if you want to fight, Nancy, fight when I'm not there.'¹⁸⁷ Unlike Nancy, she still believes in restraint in one's public behaviour, yet another reminder of the norms the protagonist criticises.

These characters expose Bryher's views on femininity by contrasting modern femininity to outdated stereotypes, and juxtaposing women of different generations. Although the author recognises the opportunities women have been granted as the result of a number of historical and legislative changes, her social commentary indicates the prejudice that still permeates society. The concept of education and its definitions become central to her critique and the resolutions she maps out for women's problematic status in early twentieth-century society. As Bryher extends the meaning of education beyond academic disciplines, innovative and accessible women's education becomes the driving force behind the establishment of their new social standing. Although in her novels Bryher voices her opinions through Nancy, her memoir states her ideas on women's free will directly. Freedom of will and control over one's body are more important than the vote, and also become part of the author's understanding of education.¹⁸⁸ While she never joined the suffrage movement or any other women's organisation, Bryher was an outspoken critic of society's mistreatment of independent women and wrote in favour of health education and the availability of birth control methods.¹⁸⁹ Her memoir's reference to the topic indicates the endurance of the questions of education and women's social status as dominant themes of her prose beyond the decade of the 1920s. These

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. 151.

¹⁸⁸ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 197.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 197.

reflections are further developed in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* alongside new roles for women both in the film industry and on the screen. Therefore, depictions of femininity, the female psyche and female stereotypes are interlinked with explorations of education in Bryher's fiction and non-fiction prose, a key difference between her treatment of femininity and that of H.D.'s autobiographical prose.

Hermione and Nancy: Modernist Femininity in Bryher's and H.D.'s Autobiographical Novels

Discussions of H.D.'s prose are usually dominated by her novels *Bid me to Live* (1960) and *HERmione* (1981). Previous academic explorations of H.D.'s novels dwell on the metaphors that characterise her prose and her interpretation of the female psyche. Rebecca Bowler traces the process of metaphorical gradation in *Bid me to Live*, where 'each metaphor ends by being partially erased and replaced by another and yet another'.¹⁹⁰ Her exploration aligns *Bid me to Live* with Richardson's *Pilgrimage* in its 'quest to find the perfect visual metaphor to represent the world and the self seen'.¹⁹¹ Despite the popularity of *Bid me to Live* in academic studies of H.D.'s experimentation with autobiographical prose, this chapter turns to an earlier attempt at prose, H.D.'s novel *Asphodel* (1992). H.D. started composing *Asphodel* in 1921-22, the same period when Bryher was working on *Two Selves* (1923). *Asphodel* encompasses the periods recorded in *HERmione* and *Bid me to Live*, including the poet's traumatic memories from World War I and the beginning of her companionship with Bryher. The novel's record of the poet's travels to Europe and Britain in the early 1910s establishes *Asphodel* as the novel that covers the longest period of H.D.'s life of all of her autobiographical novels. Like Bryher's *Two Selves*, *Asphodel* focuses on the war, its immediate aftermath and impact on human

¹⁹⁰ Rebecca Bowler, *Literary Impressionism: Vision and Memory in Dorothy Richardson, Ford Madox Ford, H.D. and May Sinclair* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2016) 94.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* 94.

relationships. Further parallels between the two novels can be found in their appropriation of important figures from the authors' circles as their characters: just as H.D. appears as the mysterious poet in the end of *Two Selves*, Bryher herself is incorporated in *Asphodel* as Beryl de Rothfeldt. Beryl is the young companion of H.D.'s protagonist and alter-ego Hermione, who helps her through her pregnancy and difficult marriage in the novel's final part. Other notable figures of the poet's past who appear in the narrative are H.D.'s husband, the English poet Richard Aldington, her former fiancé Ezra Pound, and her school friend Frances Gregg. Although this was the first novel the poet composed, she destroyed all drafts but one, kept at her archive at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, and published in 1992.¹⁹²

Apart from their focus on the war, a number of other parallels can be drawn between H.D.'s and Bryher's autobiographical novels, and their exploration of an exclusively female perspective of the pre-war and war years. Their focus on the female psyche offers divergent observations on femininity, female sexuality, and patriarchy's impact on female identity. The mechanism both authors apply relates to Paul de Man's 'tropological substitutions': just as Bryher and her protagonist Nancy share the same experiences, H.D.'s subjectivity and memories are interchangeable for those of her doppelgänger Hermione.¹⁹³ As they rename their protagonists and characters, the authors distance themselves from their fictional alter-egos and introduce a level of objectivity, and therefore authenticity, in their engagement with the novels' core themes. The parallels in the historical periods the two novels cover and the authors' construction of their autobiographical selves imply their mutual influence on each other's work. Hermione's experiences and relationships are fictionalised records of H.D.'s memories from the 1910s. The characters' relationships are complicated by Hermione's hesitation between her

¹⁹² Robert Spoo, 'Introduction' in *Asphodel* by H.D. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992) x.

¹⁹³ de Man, 'Autobiography as Defacement,' 922.

traditional heterosexual attraction to her former fiancé George and later her responsibilities to her husband Darrington, and the ‘female love’ she harbours for her friend Fayne Rabb. Hermione’s emotional dilemma recalls the discourse of female homosexuality in Nancy’s acknowledgement of her queer identity in *Development* and *Two Selves*. The common theme of queer femininity is treated differently in *Asphodel* and Bryher’s novels. Once she realises her homosexuality, Nancy embraces it and seeks out a companion who would understand her sensitivities. Her acceptance of her true self is part of her rebellion against patriarchy and the social prejudice that threatens her freedom as a young woman in a modern society. Unlike her, Hermione hesitates between her attraction to the men in her life and her love for her friend Fayne Rabb. *Asphodel* records Hermione’s confession of her attraction to Fayne in a stream of fragmented expressions:

I, Hermione, tell you I love you Fayne Rabb. Men and women will come and say I love you. I love you Hermione, you Fayne. Men will say I love you Hermione but will anyone ever say I love you Fayne as I say it?¹⁹⁴

As the names Hermione and Fayne become interchangeable in this passage, the protagonist’s admission of love for another woman is also an acknowledgement of love for herself and her true identity. In *Asphodel* female love evokes ‘self-love’, a concept Rachel Blau Duplessis recognises in H.D.’s prose.¹⁹⁵ The significance and resilience of female love translates into the novel’s perception of femininity.¹⁹⁶ In her admission of love, Hermione comes to terms with her own queerness just as Nancy realises it through her ‘two selves’. Disappointed by Fayne’s acceptance of patriarchy through her marriage to the ‘little Chemistry professor’, Hermione

¹⁹⁴ H.D., *Asphodel* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992) pp. 52-53

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 73; Rachel Blau Duplessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985)

¹⁹⁶ Duplessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending*, 71.

herself succumbs to the socially accepted stereotypes and marries Darrington.¹⁹⁷ Her adherence to the social norms suppresses her true identity and allows male authority to shape her femininity. The protagonist's mental and emotional transformation illustrates that men and women are uncomprehending of each other despite their mutual attraction. Women share a world, a realm of femininity, which differentiates them from men. Should a man enter this realm, he would disturb the equality women share. The imbalance in women's relationships, caused by the patriarchal norm, suppresses the true female feelings and alters Hermione's perception of herself and the surrounding world forever.

Once she retreats from the public spaces she inhabits as a young unmarried woman, Hermione enters the entrapment of domesticity. There the identity and femininity that have attracted Darrington are lost. Despite her best efforts, Hermione cannot emulate the femininity of her husband's lover, Merry Dalton. Her attempts at a more vulgar femininity are dismissed by Lowndes as he continues to meddle in the couple's life: 'You are more beautiful than Merry Dalton... but you haven't her charm.'¹⁹⁸ As Hermione surrenders to patriarchy, her body is subjected to male opinions of femininity. Her attempts to transform herself according to these male perceptions of female beauty with 'eau de cologne across black lidded eyes, make up, funny things' result in a 'dissipated' look.¹⁹⁹ Reflecting Pound's relationship to H.D. in real life, Lowndes calls Hermione 'Dryad' and imposes his own ideas of mythic femininity on the protagonist as she struggles to retain her individuality.²⁰⁰ His suggestions that her being too 'nun-ish' and 'shabby' are the reasons for Darrington's affair indicate the suppression of the protagonist's true identity by a warped idea of domestic femininity.²⁰¹ The loss of her identity and self-love are manifest in the text's articulation of a stunted female psyche in a series of

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 76.

¹⁹⁸ H.D., *Asphodel*, 120.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. 120.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 57.

²⁰¹ Ibid. 62.

fragmented sentences and expressions, similar to the prose of Nancy's school memories in *Development* and the episodes of war in *Two Selves*. The increasingly paratactic prose illustrates patriarchy's traumatic effect on the protagonist as its restrictions seep into her psyche. Stripped of her identity and her female companion, she is secluded to the domestic space that hinders her freedom of mind and creativity. Hermione's realisation of Darrington's affair is conveyed in a series of confused constructions that articulate her confused state of mind:

Hermione was odd. She wasn't in it, wasn't out of it. She didn't love Merry Dalton, didn't hate her. ... Darrington was pulling the other couch out from behind the screen that shut their enormous room into sections. The other big couch would do for two of them. Which two? What was this? What was her mind doing?... Don't think. You are so tired, take Merry into your bed. They can arrange it after you have gone to sleep.²⁰²

This record of Hermione's thought process reveals that she has given up on her attempts to regain her husband's attention. By leaving the realm of femininity, defined by her love for Fayne, Hermione has forsaken her true self. Unable to adopt neither the stereotype of domestic femininity nor the enticing beauty of Darrington's lover, she retreats into her own mind and abandons her daughter in Beryl's care. Hermione's daughter and her 'wicked eyes' remind the protagonist of her surrendered femininity and the only true object of her affections, her friend Fayne.²⁰³ The name of the protagonist's daughter, Phoebe Fayne, is also a relic of Hermione's memory of Fayne and the female companionship she has lost. Unable to come to terms with the sacrifice of her identity and her husband's adultery, Hermione turns away from Phoebe. Hermione is unlike Bryher's Nancy in her choice to give up her freedom and identity in order to fit into the accepted stereotype for women during the war period. By contrast, Nancy not

²⁰² Ibid. 130.

²⁰³ Ibid. 178.

only accepts her queer identity but applies it in her rebellion against patriarchal stereotypes and male authority as a tool of independence.

Despite their subsequent choices, Nancy and Hermione are both illustrations of modern femininity: Nancy is able to roam war-torn London freely and attend classes, fencing lessons, and dinners, while Hermione wanders across Paris and London with Fayne and her mother Clara Rabb. Nancy senses the social mechanism that controls her presence in the public space and criticises it for its authority over her life. H.D.'s protagonist, however, remains unaware of the social restrictions in place until they are pointed out to her by other characters. While they are sat at a lunch room in Paris, Hermione and her friend Fayne are reprimanded by Fayne's mother for their frivolous behaviour.²⁰⁴ As they attract the male gaze of a 'robust sophisticated creature', Clara faults them for their lack of 'proportion' in the public space.²⁰⁵ In a later episode, Hermione is also reproached for her late meeting with Walter, a friend she meets in Paris and the novel's reference to H.D.'s infatuation with the pianist Walter Rummel.²⁰⁶ These comments are provoked by the strict restrictions that still governed women's behaviour in *fin de siecle* society. Oblivious of others' opinions of her behaviour, Hermione remains ignorant of the ways society and the public space shape her behaviour, thoughts and by extension, her identity.

Feminist cultural theorists such as Griselda Pollock, Janet Wolff and Deborah Parsons recognise the unequal gender dynamics in early twentieth-century cities and the masculine authority that governed public spaces.²⁰⁷ The city streets were reserved for the flaneur, an

²⁰⁴ Ibid. 14.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. 14.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. 35; Vivienne Whelpton, *Richard Aldington: Poet, Soldier, Lover 1911-1929*. (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2014) 53-54.

²⁰⁷ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Arts*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1988) 98; Janet Wolff, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*. (Oxford and Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990) 34; Deborah Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 233.

exclusively male figure, who roamed the city ‘consuming the sights through a controlling but rarely acknowledged gaze, directed as much to other people as at goods for sale’.²⁰⁸ His ‘covetous and erotic’ gaze was a male privilege for ‘the man of means’.²⁰⁹ However, the rise of consumerism in modern society prompted the emergence of a different kind of spaces such as arcades and department stores where women could enjoy metropolitan culture without the fear of potential public disgrace.²¹⁰ Anne Friedberg’s discussion of women as consumers posits that such venues instilled a sense of safety in young women by replicating the external urban architecture indoors or sharing spaces with the open streets.²¹¹ Thus, such new venues served as a refuge from the open hostility of the city streets and the male authority that governed them while introducing a new gender dynamic based on women’s potential as consumers who would select and buy goods targeted at them.²¹² The social practices and behaviour described by Friedberg translate into Hermione’s experience of Paris. Although free to travel to France and enjoy the sights of the city, Hermione’s movements are reserved for safe feminine spaces like hat shops, cafes, and bookshops, where male presence is minimised.²¹³ Her movements through Paris are mapped out through the traces of her female gaze: Hermione notices the books and the people in the book shops, the draper’s assistant, Madame Dupont’s ‘magenta bignonias’, and the boys outside the cathedral, but never remarks on the people of the open streets or other public spaces.²¹⁴

As Hermione and her companions make their way towards the cathedral, the text creates the impression of the protagonist’s gaze as she moves across the space: ‘Climbing the street toward a door - a cathedral it was - the voice going on and on making long echoes like

²⁰⁸ Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 98.

²⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 98; Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, 233.

²¹⁰ Friedberg, *Window Shopping*, 36.

²¹¹ Ibid. 113-115.

²¹² Ibid. 37.

²¹³ H.D. *Asphodel*, 4-5.

²¹⁴ Ibid. 5-6.

some voice “off” in some obvious stage set.’²¹⁵ The exclusion of the space outside the cathedral implies the protagonist’s confinement into an enclosed space deemed safe, and her inability to enter the open public space. The public space’s hostility towards female presence is related through a series of auditory metaphors in Hermione’s dinner with George Lowndes.²¹⁶ The episode is a chaotic experience that attacks Hermione’s senses and distracts her from the conversation as her thoughts are drawn to unrelated poetry and music, and the crowd’s voices. Hermione’s scattered thoughts are related in a series of paratactic expressions similar to the fragmentation typical of Bryher’s descriptions of Nancy’s school days in *Development* and her fragmented psyche in *Two Selves*: ‘Voices. Notes... Tall candles and a mop of fleece. Veronese. The notes began what was presumably a prelude to the next stanza.’²¹⁷ The characters’ dialogue merges with the background noise and confuses her thoughts: ““Dryad?” “Yes-George?” “Dreaming, Dryad? Did you like the opus?” “Whose George?” “Mine, dearest Dryad. I thought myself quite fetching.””²¹⁸ The text’s choice to record Hermione’s thoughts but never George’s consciousness underscores the woman’s inability to concentrate and think in the public space. The sensory attack on the protagonist in this episode recalls Bryher’s description of the ‘incessant noise’ outside Downwood’s gates on Nancy’s first day of school.²¹⁹ In both *Asphodel* and *Development*, noise becomes an auditory expression of the hostility of the communities the protagonists are supposed to join. Despite Hermione’s freedom to enter this space, she is unable to adapt and exist there. She is vulnerable to its masculine aggression and therefore has no place there.

Unlike Hermione whose presence in public spaces is controlled by masculine authority and whose real identity is repressed by patriarchal norms, Nancy invades masculine

²¹⁵ Ibid. 5.

²¹⁶ Ibid. 55-59.

²¹⁷ Ibid. 56.

²¹⁸ Ibid. 57.

²¹⁹ Bryher, *Two Selves*, 83.

spaces and asserts her opinions. Having embraced her queer identity and found a female companion, Nancy gains independence from her family. With Helga as her chaperone on her trip to America, Nancy is allowed in public spaces because she is not alone. Her gaze maps out the dynamism of the city as she moves from one space to another. While H.D.'s protagonist is restricted to female spaces, Nancy's experience of the cities she visits is a series of open spaces, colours, and constant movement. Once in New York, Nancy faces the barbaric reality of the expanding metropolis.²²⁰ A series of metonymic descriptives denote the city's height and scope: 'Tiny lamps welled honey out of windows against the black depths of intersecting streets. Far away was the sea. Behind them cornfield and apple-farm, wasteland and mountain top, forests...'.²²¹ Despite the city's overwhelming scope, Bryher's protagonist never retreats in the safety of female spaces. Although the accounts of city life in *West* elicit a sense of rapidity and urgency, Nancy is liberated by the freedom the metropolis offers. Her drive from Pasadena to Los Angeles is recorded in an asyndetic list of sights of colour, movement and noise, such as 'unripe persimmons and faded-looking lemons', 'the tomato plantation', Pasadena's Million Dollar Homes, and the 'railway crossing'.²²² While Hermione moves from one enclosed space to another, unable to overcome the borders that hinder her and constantly made aware of the prejudice that govern her identity, Nancy experiences a colourful urban multitude that is accessible for few women despite their newly-acquired liberties at the turn of the century.

Thus, while Bryher's and H.D.'s prose focuses on the female psyche and the question of queer femininity, they propose two divergent interpretations of the modern woman. While the novels' time periods coincide and the author/protagonist relationships are governed by the same principles, they record different female experiences. The two differing feminine

²²⁰ Bryher, *West*, 23.

²²¹ *Ibid.* 24.

²²² *Ibid.* 123.

perspectives indicate the authors' contrasting interpretations of autobiographical prose's mission. Although Hermione's psyche can be substituted for H.D.'s memories and experiences in *Asphodel*, the novel's overall function is not a social commentary as is the case of Bryher's novels. In all three of Bryher's novels, biographical moments are described briefly and with few details. Characters are sketched out in concise description formulated by Nancy's subjective opinions that imply such details are of little importance to the narrative. Events and characters are only significant as starting points for the novels' social commentary. By contrast, the autobiographical elements of *Asphodel* are not intended as a critique of modern society and the novel's shared themes with Bryher's texts are not starting points for a discussion on outdated modes of femininity. H.D.'s novel is instead a quest for reconciliation with the trauma of the past through the act of writing the autobiographical text. Although her text recognises established stereotypes and their associated social behaviours, her prose reveals a focus on her own emotional world. The exploration of Hermione's psyche is an investigation of the poet's own mental state in this period as she identifies the emotional wounds her own choices or the acts of others have inflicted on her. Unlike Bryher who negates Victorian perceptions of heterosexual femininity, H.D.'s autobiographical texts exhibit a healing process where the poet retreats into herself and dwells on her own psyche. The poet's approach to prose is also evident in critical essays, published in *Close Up* between 1927-1929, which were limited to films and actors whom the poet admired, but never extended to the broader context of early film culture.

Therefore, Bryher's and H.D.'s autobiographical texts fulfil different functions in the context of their shared concerns for modern femininity, female homosexuality and women's social status. While other modernists, such as H.D., delved into abstractions of their own feelings and experiences, Bryher employed her memories as the basis of her social critique. Through its autobiographical roots and protagonist, her autobiographical prose defines Bryher's identity and the themes that dominate her work beyond the three novels. The

subjectivity and approach the two women authors developed in their novels form the core of their critical approach to film, evident in their *Close Up* publications. While H.D.'s essays are meditations on the film's effect on the poet's psyche, Bryher continues her reflections on the problems of education, femininity, and social prejudice against modern life. As observations shaped by the author's own experiences recorded in her novels, the enduring quality of these topics indicates the ways Bryher's experience of early twentieth-century society shaped her ideas about the new medium and its function in modern society. Structural parallels between the prose of her novels and her film texts further develop the role of the author's subjectivity in her work and its role in her critical approach to film.

CHAPTER 4

A Sponsor, Editor, and Critic: Bryher and *Close Up*

After the publication of her third novel *West*, Bryher published a series of critical texts on film as part of her involvement with the film journal *Close Up*. Her sponsorship of the journal and involvement in its establishment as an international periodical on avant-garde film and film culture marked the beginning of her engagement with the film medium, cinematic art, and culture. As the dominant themes of her prose translated into her film texts, they became the foundations of her understanding of the new medium, its applications and the concept of film spectatorship.

The journal *Close Up* was established in 1927 by POOL Reflections in Territet, Switzerland, with Bryher as the journal's sponsor and co-editor, and Kenneth Macpherson (1902-1971) as the chief editor. However, throughout the years of the journal's run Bryher assumed different administrative and editorial responsibilities that granted her almost full control over the journal. Her correspondence with Macpherson from the early 1930s reveals that despite his creative influence over the journal's content, Bryher was already responsible for all business on *Close Up*.¹ Unlike other women critics for *Close Up*, like H.D., whose essays appeared under the title 'Cinema and the Classics', and Dorothy Richardson, who wrote a column entitled 'Continuous Performance', Bryher never established a regular rubric. Her articles were published individually and rarely with clear internal connections. Apart from the main articles that reflect the journal's topics of interest alongside the author's own concerns, Bryher's initials can additionally be found in the end of numerous articles and smaller pieces in the journal's 'Comments and Review' section. The absence of a repetitive format or internal organisation to her contributions to *Close Up* to an extent hinders a clear definition of her role

¹ See Bryher Papers, Box 36, Folders 1282-1285.

as a critic. Hers is a presence that transcends the distinct boundaries of individual rubrics and guides the journal beyond its content, therefore granting her the creative freedom to join any discussions that dominate the journal. While all of Bryher's articles for *Close Up* are set in the context of film theory or film production, there is always an additional discourse that underlines the author's engagement with the new medium. The topics that foreground the author's *Close Up* articles are the problems of education and censorship, critics' perceptions of international film, the government restrictions on film distribution and exhibition in Britain and abroad, and the politics that control film production and film clubs.

Bryher's *Close Up* articles extend the author's observations on the problem of education that originates in her autobiographical novels and develop ideas on its improvement through the use of film. Her texts are also punctuated by discussions of social norms and habits, a trait of Nancy's observations of *fin de siècle* society. The social activism and thematic heterogeneity of Bryher's film texts sets her apart from other *Close Up* critics, like H.D. and Dorothy Richardson, who examined film in a framework of artistic abstraction or the flourishing British film industry. H.D.'s *Close Up* texts record the poet's personal experiences of film-viewing in a metaphorical language similar to the Hellenic imagery of her poetry. These parallels reveal the poet's understanding of the new medium to be a mechanical image projection that commands the viewer's psyche through its mythical power. Like H.D., Dorothy Richardson documented her impressions of the new medium in the context of her understanding of film's function and influence on audiences, and its significance for early twentieth-century culture. The novelist's articles establish film as a democratic medium, available to a variety of audiences irrelevant of their social status, age, and levels of literacy. In support of film's accessibility, she compares film's effect on viewers to the audience's relationship with the theatre. While she rarely reflected on individual films in the way H.D. approached her film reviews, Richardson provided an overview of the emergence of film

culture in Britain. Her articles sketch out different cinematic spaces across London, as well as audience stereotypes one might encounter in different parts of the city and the most popular film genres. Thus, she focuses on film's social analysis of the milieux likely to attend film screenings rather than its artistic properties. Her articles reveal the novelist's impression of film as a medium of entertainment and highlight the importance of its entertainment qualities for inter-war British society.

This chapter defines Bryher's critical opinions of the new medium within the framework of her *Close Up* texts. In doing so, it offers three strands of exploration: first, it clarifies Bryher's role in the journal's establishment and running throughout its publication period; then it compares Bryher's contributions to the journal and her approach to film criticism to those of other critics in *Close Up*, and in particular, H.D. and Dorothy Richardson, and finally, reflects on the core theme of education that became central for the majority of Bryher's film texts and the parallels between her *Close Up* articles and her novels.

Bryher's role in Close Up: Sponsor, Editor, and Contributor

Previous academic explorations of *Close Up*, like Michael O'Pray's account of POOL's activities, treat Macpherson as the dominant influence over 'the more or less fixed group united under the POOL banner' and dismiss Bryher as an 'impassioned pragmatist' whose role in the journal was limited only to her articles and sponsorship.² Barbara Guest also attributes the initiative of founding the journal to Macpherson as she recounts Bryher and Macpherson's walk by Lake Geneva, and his remark about the cinematic lights reflected by the lake's surface.³ Guest writes: 'She [Bryher] recognised then that his talents... were turning more to film.'⁴ This is an anecdote that Bryher herself describes in *The Heart to Artemis* where she

² Michael O'Pray, *The British Avant-Garde film: 1926 to 1995, An Anthology of Writings* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1996) 48-49.

³ Guest, *Herself Defined*, 189.

⁴ *Ibid.* 189.

repeatedly remarks on Macpherson's artistic talents and links them to his painter father.⁵ Maggie Humm recognises Bryher's financial and editorial responsibilities towards the journal in her overview of the author's publishing activities.⁶ Similarly to her financial support of the Contact Press and McAlmon's literary endeavours, Bryher sponsored POOL's film productions and publications, including *Close Up*. The journal was founded on a budget of £60 and contrary to the group's expectations, it ran for six years and gained five thousand subscribers.⁷

Besides her account of the journal's conception, in *The Heart to Artemis* the author insists on her disinterest in cinema and her detachment from any creative control over the journal's content. *The Heart to Artemis* reiterates Macpherson's interest in cinema and underscores Bryher's reluctance to identify as a film critic.⁸ Nevertheless, her memoir suggests that she controlled the journal's administration and business by drawing on her experience of running McAlmon's Contact Press. In a chapter dedicated to the POOL Group's activities and her travels in Europe, she writes that she remembered her 'Paris training... and said, "If you are so interested, why don't you start a magazine?"'.⁹ While Macpherson was charged with the creative control over the journal's content, she kept to the 'business side' because she considered the film screen to be restrictive of imagination.¹⁰ In her memoir she then claims that once *Close Up* ceased publication, she visited the cinema only once a year.¹¹ Despite her later claims, she recognised the importance of the new medium as a 'new' artform and a platform where critics and artists could 'state... convictions honourably in this twentieth century form of art'.¹² Her support for the modern medium of film was also a product of her critique of

⁵ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 247.

⁶ Humm, 'Women Modernists and Visual Culture' 150.

⁷ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 247.

⁸ Ibid. 247.

⁹ Ibid. 247.

¹⁰ Ibid. 247.

¹¹ Ibid. 248.

¹² Ibid. 248.

lingering Victorian values and social prejudice. Silent film was important for Bryher and other *Close Up* critics as it unified international communities across Europe regardless of their language.¹³ Like many of the *Close Up* critics, Bryher lamented the end of silent film and labelled it the ‘art that died’.¹⁴ She recognised what the introduction of sound meant for international films: an end to entertainment, which was accessible to a wide audience, because of sound film’s language barrier. Sound film’s effects also extended to the possible fragmentation of the unified international community of which the author was part and often supported financially. Thus, despite the author’s reluctance to admit to her involvement with the journal’s content and the film medium, the opinions she harboured indicate her enduring interest in film and its development.

Although the journal’s content pages list Bryher as an assistant editor, her correspondence with Macpherson from the early 1930s reveals that she became increasingly involved with the editorial process.¹⁵ In the period of 1930-1931, he still had some editorial responsibilities towards *Close Up* and the two discussed the journal’s format, printing costs, articles by different contributors, and film stills.¹⁶ In three letters from January 1931 Macpherson requests Bryher’s outline for that number’s content, discusses their decision to delay the contributions on sound film they have received so far to a later issue, and asks about the journal’s new size and format.¹⁷ Similar discussions on received contributions and film stills dominate their letters throughout 1931.¹⁸ However, their correspondence from 1932 until the end of the journal’s run suggests Macpherson’s declining interest in the journal. His letters to Bryher from this year contain few discussions of the journal, apart from his procurement and

¹³ Ibid. 248.

¹⁴ Ibid. 247.

¹⁵ See Bryher Papers, Box 35 Folder 1281; Box 36 Folders 1282-12885.

¹⁶ Kenneth Macpherson to Bryher, 1931, Bryher Papers, Box 36 Folder 1282.

¹⁷ Kenneth Macpherson to Bryher, January 1931, Bryher Papers, Box 36 Folder 1282.

¹⁸ See Kenneth Macpherson to Bryher, June-July 1931, Bryher Papers, Box 36 Folder 1283.

editing of film stills from Pabst's films and photographs of Marlene Dietrich.¹⁹ Letters from August 1933 confirm that he did little work on *Close Up*'s September 1933 number as he writes: 'Close Up. Under way. Hellish job!'; 'NO Close Up work has been touched yet. I'll try to do some tomorrow.'²⁰ As he started travelling and eventually settled in Capri, he rarely referred to *Close Up* in his letters. Previous discussions on content are replaced by reflections on ceasing the journal's publication and their divorce. In a letter from August 1933, Macpherson writes:

I think we don't have to go very deeply into psychology to see that *Close Up* became painful to me on account of reasons which brought an aspect of publicity and ridicule to that which I would have preferred the whole of London not to know of.²¹

Although Macpherson never clearly identifies this 'aspect', the text of the letter implies disappointment with his attempts at filmmaking and the controversial reception of his last film *Borderline*, or his marriage arrangement to Bryher. He claims that his 'few trimmings of personality' as well as his 'underlying genuineness' are 'of no use'.²² In his letter Macpherson refers to Bryher's comments about a 'change' in him and dismisses her suggestion that psychoanalysis might help.²³ Finally he concludes that divorce is 'a horrible idea' and writes of his need to live a life of his own, away from Bryher who is 'set in... [a] particular mould'.²⁴ Regardless of the source of his anxieties, this letter signals the decline of *Close Up* as well as Bryher's personal and creative partnership with Macpherson. There were only two more issues of *Close Up* following this letter: one in September 1933 and one in December

¹⁹ Kenneth Macpherson to Bryher, 1932, Bryher Papers, Box 36, Folder 1284.

²⁰ Kenneth Macpherson to Bryher, 1933; Kenneth Macpherson to Bryher, August 8th, 1933, Bryher Papers, Box 36, Folder 1285.

²¹ Kenneth Macpherson to Bryher, August 30th 1933, Bryher Papers, Box 36, Folder 1286.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

1933.

Based on their correspondence, it appears that Macpherson had the final say on the journal's content, but Bryher planned the outline for each issue of *Close Up*, corresponded with other critics, managed the finances, wrote her own articles, and solicited new contributors.²⁵ In the early years of the journal's publication she sought out new contributors among her closest friends. The first issue of *Close Up* includes articles by its founders, Macpherson and Bryher, as well as by H.D., Bryher's brother John under his *nom de plume* E.L. Black, and Dorothy Richardson. Despite the novelist's initial scepticism, Bryher convinced her to start a regular rubric for *Close Up*. Entitled 'Continuous Performance', Richardson's column was first conceived after Bryher and the novelist exchanged a series of letters in June 1927. Although 'thrilled by the prospect of the film paper', Richardson was initially reluctant to become a contributor to *Close Up*. Anxious that she had little to say about film with her affinity for 'wild west dramas and simple sentiment', the novelist was aware that she possessed neither the technical knowledge nor the language to comment on art film or its aesthetics.²⁶ Her initial resistance quickly dissolved when in the same letter she admitted that she had 'some notes somewhere and... will look them up'.²⁷ She quickly produced ideas and plans for 'Continuous Performance' in subsequent letters.²⁸ Richardson proved to be an influence on *Close Up* from the moment Bryher shared her plans about it and became one of the journal's most fervent and devoted supporters. In a letter from June 1927 Richardson advises that the journal's title should be 'Close-up or Close-Up to avoid ambiguity' and formatted in 'Big black block letters & flat thick hyphen'.²⁹ In subsequent letters from June and July 1927 she recommends potential contributors like Barbara Low, and provides Bryher with her current address.³⁰ Upon the

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Dorothy Richardson to Bryher, 1927, Bryher Papers, Box 52, Folder 1915.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Dorothy Richardson to Bryher, 3 June, 1927, Bryher Papers, Box 52, Folder 1915.

³⁰ Dorothy Richardson to Bryher, July 1927, Bryher Papers, Box 52, Folder 1915.

publication of the journal's first issue, Richardson and her husband Alan Odle even ensured that local stores stocked *Close Up*: 'I think we were the first that ever burst into Bumpus's for *Close Up* that lay in a pile very visible just inside the door'.³¹ Through Richardson's connections Bryher secured a contribution by Low who wrote on film, education and children, topics that also interested both Richardson and Bryher.³² By soliciting Richardson, Bryher not only acquired a regular contributor for *Close Up* but also ensured that the novelist's enthusiasm and connections expanded the journal's scope.

Besides Richardson and Low, Bryher attracted a wide circle of contributors from her personal network of acquaintances. She was acquainted with Gertrude Stein from her frequent visits to Paris in the early 1920s while McAlmon still ran the Contact Press.³³ Stein went on to submit three short stories unrelated to film criticism in three consecutive issues, from August to October 1927.³⁴ Another contributor who is listed in Bryher's financial notes from the period is Arnold Bennett (1867-1931), who submitted only one essay, published in the journal's issue of December 1927.³⁵ However, Stein and Bennett contributed only to the journal's first volume: an indication that despite its overall aim to reflect on film theory, the journal's first volume attempted a broader scope of topics, similar to the little magazines of the 1910s. As it built its international network of critics, reviewers and correspondents, *Close Up* detached itself from its literary roots and delved into film theory, becoming purely a film theory journal.

The journal's establishment as an authority on film theory and international cinema was aided by another prominent contributor whom Bryher solicited: Robert Herring, an established film critic for the *Manchester Guardian* and the *London Mercury*, who regularly submitted articles to *Close Up* until it folded in 1933. In a letter to Bryher from October 21

³¹ Dorothy Richardson to Bryher, 1 July, 1927, Bryher Papers, Box 62, Folder 1915.

³² Low, 'Mind-Growth or Mind-Mechanisation?' 44-52.

³³ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis* 154.

³⁴ Stein, 'Mrs Emerson' 23-29; 'Three Sitting Here' 17-28; 'Three Sitting Here' 17-25.

³⁵ See Bryher's notes in Bryher Papers, Box 169, Folder 5652; Arnold Bennett, 'The Film "Story"' *Close Up* I - 6 (December 1927) 27-32.

1927, Herring claims that he ‘should be most grateful’ if he ‘could try’ and contribute to the journal.³⁶ He continues: ‘Close-Up atmosphere suits me: it’s like a roomful of people in sympathy! In my other papers (ssh) I feel a little in the dark - ’.³⁷ Herring and Bryher’s correspondence of 1927-1928 records the quick shift in their relationship as the two became close collaborators on *Close Up*. Herring’s letters recount the films he viewed in London and on his travels in Paris and Berlin, as well as the acquaintances he made as he was slowly inducted into the European avant-garde and Bryher’s private circle. His letters from 1928 describe his encounters with Sylvia Beach and Gertrude Stein, as well as his efforts to further *Close Up*’s popularity in Europe.³⁸ Although Kenneth Macpherson was in charge of the procurement and editing of the film stills featured in *Close Up*, Herring obtained the stills of films such as *Battleship Potemkin*, *Mother* or *Blackmail*.³⁹ His contribution to *Close Up*, however, extended beyond the journal’s content. In a letter from May 1928, Herring advises Bryher on regional newspapers that should be sent copies of *Close Up* in order to expand its subscription lists and POOL’s network of contacts.⁴⁰ He writes:

Don’t, then, send any copies to The Yorkshire Weekly Post, or any of the Liverpool or Bristol papers till I come out; as I shall send to some of these; it’s half past ten now. I will send them off tomorrow. Also, would you like The Sunday Worker? They wrote interestedly and patronisingly of me.⁴¹

His advice can be linked to a surge in the copies of *Close Up*’s issues in 1928.⁴² According to Bryher’s own records, POOL printed 500 copies of each *Close Up* number of

³⁶ Robert Herring to Bryher, October 21st, 1927, Bryher Papers, Box 18, Folder 703.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Robert Herring to Bryher, April 1928, Bryher Papers, Box 17, Folder 703.

³⁹ Robert Herring to Bryher from December 19th, 1928, Bryher Papers, Box 18, Folder 703; Robert Herring to Bryher, Summer 1929, Bryher Papers, Box 19 Folder 706.

⁴⁰ Robert Herring to Bryher from May 2nd, 1928, Bryher Papers, Box 18, Folder 703.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Bryher, ‘Notes’, 1928, Bryher Papers, Box 169, Folder 5652.

1927.⁴³ However, in February 1928 printed copies increased to 750 and then 1,500 in the months between March and June, 1928.⁴⁴ In October 1928, a *Daily Mail* correspondent subscribed privately to *Close Up*.⁴⁵ Similarly, other British and French dealers, and institutions also requested copies of the journal throughout its run.⁴⁶ These included the British Institute of Adult Education, and libraries in Boston, New York and Los Angeles.⁴⁷ *Close Up*'s numbers were additionally boosted by private subscribers from Britain, France, America and Japan, as well as other film publications including *Educational Screen Documents*, *Film Spectator Hollywood*, and *Hackenschmied Prague*.⁴⁸ The increase in print numbers and other publications' interest in the journal demonstrate its growing importance as an authority on film theory and culture, as well as the success of Bryher and Herring's mission to expand its popularity and pool of subscribers.

Bryher maintained her close relationship with Herring after *Close Up* ceased publication and later appointed him and her school friend Dorothy Petrie Townshend as editors of another journal she sponsored, *Life and Letters To-Day*, published by her Brendin company. Her choice to allocate the editorial duties on *Life and Letters To-Day* to someone else has been previously interpreted as the author's attempt to keep her name away from any publications in the 1930s and 1940s, as a result of her involvement with refugees of the fascist regime in Germany.⁴⁹ Her second memoir, *The Days of Mars*, confirms that she helped refugees from the Nazi regime and even funded part of Walter Benjamin's passage through Europe.⁵⁰ Despite her claims in *The Heart to Artemis* that she rarely went to the cinema after *Close Up* ceased

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Friedman, *Analysing Freud* 82-83.

⁵⁰ Bryher, *The Days of Mars: A Memoir 1940-1946* (New York: Harcourt Bruce Jovanovich, 1972) 22-23.

publication, her enduring sponsorship of film writing suggests otherwise: she recognised the potential for the film medium and its impact on education and culture beyond avant-garde filmmaking.⁵¹ *Close Up*'s content reflects the same trajectory. The journal's content is initially dedicated solely to silent avant-garde cinema and discourses on cinematic practices but this doctrine becomes less pronounced in the 1930s as its pool of contributors expands, rendering *Close Up* a journal of conceptual discussions of filmmaking and film culture rather than individual films and cinematic practices. Despite the popularity of H.D.'s articles in critical studies of the journal's contents, it is Bryher's contributions that reflect most strongly *Close Up*'s doctrine of introducing readers to the properties of the film medium, filmmaking movements, and their cultural significance. Nevertheless, these have remained overlooked by previous explorations of *Close Up* where Bryher is presented as a benefactor rather than an active critic.

Bryher's frequent trips to Berlin in the late 1920s led to numerous acquaintances and partnerships with prominent figures in film and psychoanalysis.⁵² During their first stay in Berlin in 1927, Bryher and Macpherson were acquainted with the organisation of the German film industry by the filmmakers G.W. Pabst, and Fritz Lang. Pabst admired *Close Up* and identified it as 'the paper that expresses our inmost psychological thoughts'.⁵³ He facilitated Bryher and Macpherson's attendance to multiple screenings in Berlin and access to Ufa studios, and introduced them to other intellectuals and filmmakers, like the psychoanalyst Hanns Sachs, whom Bryher met at a dinner at Pabst's home, and the Soviet filmmaker and theorist Sergei Eisenstein.⁵⁴ Sachs and Bryher became close friends and he submitted several articles on the relationship between film and psychology to *Close Up* in 1928 and 1929.⁵⁵ Like Sachs,

⁵¹ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis* 247.

⁵² Ibid. 249-250; 252-253.

⁵³ Bryher to H.D., 1927, H.D. Papers YCAL MSS 24 Series I Correspondence Box 3 Folder 83, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁵⁴ Bryher to H.D., 1928, H.D. Papers, Box 3, Folder 83.

⁵⁵ Hanns Sachs, 'Film Psychology' *Close Up*, III - 5 (November 1928); 'Modern Witch

Eisenstein shared a close friendship with Bryher, confirmed by references in her correspondence with Macpherson in the late 1930s. The Soviet filmmaker often obtained obscure film equipment for Macpherson and joined Bryher on her travels to Norway in 1939 and 1940.⁵⁶ Along with his partner Pera Attasheva, Eisenstein became a prominent contributor for *Close Up*. His articles discussed his film theories about montage and the new medium's properties, while Attasheva reported news and film reviews from Moscow. *Close Up* also developed a network of such international correspondents, who were tasked with unearthing trade news and upcoming releases abroad. The Hungarian photographer Andor Kraszna-Krausz was *Close Up*'s correspondent in Berlin, while Harry Potamkin and Clifford Howard were responsible for bringing news from New York and Hollywood respectively. Freddy Chevalley, who offered his services early on in 1927, became the journal's Geneva correspondent and the German-American writer Trude Weiss provided news from Vienna.⁵⁷ These contacts contributed to the variety of the journal's materials and topics, and informed entire issues dedicated to individual movements such as Soviet film, 'black' films, and Japanese cinema that expanded the journal's scope and influence beyond Western Europe and Britain.

During these years Bryher accumulated information on international film and individual filmmakers, and issues of foreign film magazines⁵⁸. Her personal archives contain a vast collection of film reviews and biographical texts on filmmakers and actors that she amassed over the years.⁵⁹ During the journal's run, these proved valuable source materials for Bryher's articles and her subsequent volume *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, as well as the journal's 'Comment and Review' sections. Through her correspondence with international

Trials,' *Close Up*, IV - 5 (May 1929)

⁵⁶ See letters from Macpherson to Bryher in Bryher Papers, Box 67, Folders 2578, 2580.

⁵⁷ See Bryher's note in Bryher Papers, Box 169, Folder 5652.

⁵⁸ See Bryher Papers, Box 170 Folders 5676, 5681, Folders 5684-5685 and Box 171, Folder 5704.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

publications, film institutions and critics, Bryher also attracted foreign subscriptions for *Close Up*.⁶⁰ In 1929 Bryher secured a partnership with VOKS, the USSR's Society of Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries/ Vsesoiuznoe Obshchestvo Kul'turnoi Sviazi s zagranitsej/ Всесоюзное общество культурной связи с заграницей).⁶¹ Founded in 1925 in Moscow, VOKS was responsible for the establishment and development of relations with foreign cultural and artistic entities. As such, it also monitored the contacts between Soviet intellectuals and artists, and their foreign counterparts. Bryher's correspondence with her contact at VOKS's cinema section, V. Milman, reveals that VOKS subscribed to *Close Up* and in turn provided Bryher with a list of Soviet film journals, such as 'Soviet Screen' and 'Cinema and Culture'.⁶² A later letter from March 28th, 1929, confirms that Bryher bought subscriptions to the journal 'Soviet Screen' and informs Bryher of VOKS's 'Cinema journalist bureau' that provides the foreign press with information on Soviet films.⁶³ These periodicals and contacts are referenced in Bryher's later publication, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, which mentions VOKS's handbooks in its explorations of Soviet films and their role in education.⁶⁴ Although she rarely names her sources, the author's collections of other film journals like the German periodical *Illustrierte Filmkurier* (1919-1945) and her connections to organisations like USSR's VOKS underpin the author's influence over *Close Up*'s contents and international outlook.⁶⁵

Bryher's international connections also secured other platforms for her own film writing. In January and April 1931, Bryher published two essays in the Czech daily newspaper

⁶⁰ See Bryher Papers, Box 170, Folders 5676, 5681, Folders 5684-5685 and Box 171 Folder 5704.

⁶¹ V. Milman to Bryher, March 5th, 1929 and March 28th, 1929, Bryher Papers, Box 169 Folder 5662.

⁶² V. Milman to Bryher, March 5th, 1929, Bryher Papers, Box 169, Folder 5662.

⁶³ V. Milman to Bryher, March 28th, 1929, Bryher Papers, Box 169, Folder 5662.

⁶⁴ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* 119, 122.

⁶⁵ See Bryher's collection of copies of *Illustrierte Filmkurier* in Bryher Papers, Box 170, Folders 5684-5685.

Lidove Noviny (People's News).⁶⁶ While her articles for *Close Up* examine international film practices, the articles she authors for the Czech publication reflect on British perceptions of film and film literature.⁶⁷ These can be considered as extensions to some of her articles on British film audiences and film spectatorship published in *Close Up*. Thus, besides exposing *Close Up's* subscribers to international film culture, Bryher took it upon herself to promote British film culture abroad as well as boost the popularity of art film in Britain. Therefore, Bryher's contribution to *Close Up* and its mission to introduce its readers to international film culture extends far beyond her sponsorship of the journal. Besides a regular contributor, the author was also a prominent editor whose efforts sustained *Close Up* throughout its run.

Film in Education: Teaching Methodologies in Bryher's Close Up articles

Besides its co-founder, editor, chief sponsor and administrator, Bryher was also one of the main contributors of *Close Up*. She regularly published full articles or shorter pieces that treated film as a resolution to the problems of education, and personal 'development', which shaped the main themes of her three autobiographical novels. Reinterpreting these concepts, Bryher's film articles posit that cinema's representational properties and entertainment value can be employed in a new teaching methodology that is accessible to both children in schools and the general population according to an understanding of education that is beyond traditional academic disciplines. As a new teaching tool, film would encourage freedom of thought and imagination, otherwise restricted by institutional rigidity, social and genders stereotypes, and censorship policies on international film and film literature.

Although she encouraged film's implementation in teaching methodologies, Bryher's early film texts acknowledged the public's objections against cinema. Her articles on

⁶⁶ Bryher, 'Literatura o filmu v Anglii' ('Film Literature in England'), 30 Jan, 1931; 'Podminky avantgardního filmu v Anglii' ('The conditions of avant-garde film in England'), 10 April, 1931, Bryher Papers, Box 171, Folder 5704.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

film in education engage with the prevalent arguments against film equipment, film's mechanism and its effect on audiences. Published in the second issue of *Close Up*, the article listed as 'Education and Cinema' on the contents page is entitled 'Films in Education: the Complex of the Machine' in the journal's main text.⁶⁸ The article's subtitle points to the author's engagement with the problems of the medium's mechanical origin, society's scepticism against it, and film's impact on education. Like her novels, 'Films in Education' is a critique of the old-fashioned education system in 1920s' Britain. Since 'few of the great Englishmen of the past half century have emerged from conventional channels', Bryher insists that an 'independent childhood' encourages one's own opinions.⁶⁹ Her demands for individuality and independence of mind in this article are reminiscent of Nancy's own rebellion against Downwood's regulations and her struggle to maintain her imagination under what she qualifies as a form of institutional censorship in *Development*. Innovative teaching methodologies should be introduced in schools with film as a central part of education despite the prejudice against its mechanism as an aid to the formation of children's independent thoughts and behaviour.⁷⁰

The social anxiety surrounding film that Bryher recognises can be traced to the rapid industrialisation of urban life in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, and the rise of what Ben Singer calls 'commercial sensationalism'.⁷¹ The expanding working class, predisposed to a 'startling and violent spectacle', and the 'post-Victorian middle class' supplied the early film industry with audiences.⁷² Early spectators' fascination with the moving image can be traced to the shared qualities Benjamin recognises in photography and film: a camera's single movement could trigger a series of complicated processes, exemplified in the work of

⁶⁸ Bryher, 'Films in Education' 50.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 50.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 50.

⁷¹ Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity* 96.

⁷² Ibid. 96.

the photographer who could ‘fix an event for an unlimited period of time’.⁷³ As he aligns film with new technological inventions that could trigger a surge of new stimuli through the human brain, Benjamin claims that film’s ‘formal principle’ is ‘conditioned by shock’⁷⁴. The modern man became accustomed to this sense of shock as the same perception was triggered by the dynamism of urban life and the mobility of the metropolis.⁷⁵ Film embodied the sense of urgency and mobility that urban life stimulated. Bryher’s film articles on education summarise the mechanical medium’s controversial effects and relate them to people’s perception of film art as part of the industrialisation of life and labour.⁷⁶ She connects a whole generation’s hostility to film’s popularity to their scepticism towards the increasing mechanisation of labour and the machines that robbed them of ‘a sense of power’ over their place in society.⁷⁷ The restrictions imposed on film give this older generation the consolation that by limiting film’s accessibility, they place young people ‘in a state equal with themselves’.⁷⁸ This statement once again recalls *Development*’s critique of Downwood where the schoolmistresses have embraced the institution’s order and attempt to enforce it on the young girls, thus forcing them to become just like themselves. A further parallel can be established between the mistresses and the invisible public that imposes its mind-set and understanding of life on a younger generation through modes of censorship. The school mistresses enforce century-old stereotypes on the Downwood girls with the belief that these norms should shape the life of future generations. They never recognise the need for innovation and are sceptical of young girls’ limited freedoms in the 1910s. Their encouragement of the girls’ surrender of their individuality could be aligned with the ideological censorship that is imposed on the young film viewers. As children grow their minds are shaped by old-fashioned perceptions of life and society until they accept their

⁷³ Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life* 190-191.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 191.

⁷⁵ Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity* 102.

⁷⁶ Bryher, ‘Films in Education’ 51.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 51.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 51.

identities within this society. The outdated education system controls their development and censors their engagement with modern concepts or inventions, as the public's critique lists a number of objections against the new medium: 'Films teach crime, are bad for the eyesight, cinemas breed germs, movies are responsible for all the evils and the restlessness of the modern age'.⁷⁹ However, these are refuted by the author's subsequent articles as they develop her critique of society's prejudice against the new medium.

The constant institutional control over people's perceptions leads to their inability to understand the information communicated through various artistic and media outlets. As British audiences 'take theatres, games, papers, cinemas even as dope', Bryher claims that their perception of any art form or media is based on associations to previous similar experiences.⁸⁰ Unlike German audiences, British audiences go to the cinema to be hypnotised and 'to forget' the outside world.⁸¹ Unable to cast a critical eye on cinematic art, spectators' expectations are shaped by the popularity of the film's 'star', 'theatre' or 'idea'.⁸² Bryher's film articles dismiss such expectations and instead suggest that as a mechanical art, born of the industrial age, film should be used for the future development of modern society. Besides providing spectacle for the crowds of tired workers, it could nurture intellect.⁸³ As contemporaries to film's birth and flourishing popularity, children are aware of its properties and familiar with their effects.⁸⁴ There is no need to shield them from modernity and film's visualisation of it since cinematic imagery could grant them freedom that is otherwise disallowed in old-fashioned education. Cinema's entertainment factor and realistic representation of the world can be employed in an innovative teaching methodology that introduces children to letters of the alphabet,

⁷⁹ Ibid. 52.

⁸⁰ Bryher, 'Dope or Stimulus,' *Close Up*, III - 3 (September 1928) 59.

⁸¹ Ibid. 61.

⁸² Ibid. 59, 61.

⁸³ Ibid. 50.

⁸⁴ Bryher, 'Education and Cinema'/'Films in Education: the Complex of the Machine' (August 1927) p. 51

geographical landscapes and scientific concepts.⁸⁵ The efficiency of this method lies in its employment of children's interest in 'any kind of illustration or picture' and their ability to learn visually.⁸⁶ In the end of this article the author outlines a simple teaching method that involves a lesson followed by a film screening and practical work that could replace traditional approaches.⁸⁷ The author maintains her position on film's educational properties and develops her plans of its incorporation in teaching methodologies in her film writing after *Close Up*. Following its launch of *Life and Letters To-Day*, the Brendin Publishing Company issues *The SURVEY Pamphlets* as companion booklets to the main magazine. Its first issue, *The Cinema Survey* includes Bryher's article 'Film in Education', which articulates a similar but more detailed method.⁸⁸ Apart from her ideas about the perception and basic necessity of education in post-war society, this version of 'Film in Education' outlines a detailed plan of film's integration into new teaching methodologies. Once again film's entertainment aspect is linked to the child's visual memory because the mind retains 'pleasurable impressions' like moving images more easily.⁸⁹ The medium's accessibility and mobility renders educational films available to children across the entire country.⁹⁰ Therefore, film's quality of an accessible mass medium emerges as Bryher's main argument for film's integration in new teaching methodologies.

In further parallels between Bryher's writing on film and education, and her first autobiographical novel, the language of her *Close Up* article recalls the prose and themes of *Development*'s last chapter entitled 'Visual Imagination'.⁹¹ Serving as a summary of the ideas articulated throughout the novel by the child Nancy, the novel's final chapter reflects on the

⁸⁵ Bryher, 'Films in Education: the Complex of the Machine' 53-54.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 53-54.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 54.

⁸⁸ Bryher, 'Film in Education' in *The Cinema Survey* (London: Brendin Publishing, 1937) 15-22.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 19.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 19-20.

⁹¹ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 171-177.

child's imagination and its connections to the artist's ability to portray the world. The text's description of the act of dreaming as the process of drawing 'pictures across the black curtain of the mind. A thought occurs, a wish, and is immediately translated into a picture. Wish joins wish - picture fits into picture' and its insistence on 'visual imagination' as exclusively the 'gift of the child' reminds us of the author's arguments on children's ability to relate and understanding the film image.⁹² As she endows children's imagination with a cinematic visuality, Bryher explains their ability to understand pictures is rooted in their inherent creativity that otherwise is destroyed by institutional restrictions.⁹³ Detached from the novel's central narrative about Nancy's childhood and school years, Bryher's reflections on child psychology organises children's imagination in 'conscious', 'unconscious', and 'visual' pictures and connects them to the effects of photography.⁹⁴ An 'unconscious' picture passes through the mind and there is no effort to try and retain it; the 'conscious' picture is retained and made clear by the mind; the 'visual' images are connected in the mind's imagination, 'vivid with light and movement'.⁹⁵ These ideas about the dreamlike qualities of pictures and their engagement with children's imagination form the basis for Bryher's later insistence on children's ability to understand film imagery. The familiarity with the film image assigned to young children may be traced to the author's distinction between pictures, a fluid visual stream in a child's mind, and the photograph, a mere 'impression formed on the mind of the actual world'.⁹⁶ The differentiation between pictures' dream-like quality and the photographic stillness not only explains the continuous visual streams of Nancy's childhood, but also provides an early definition of her understanding of film's effect on the psyche: film is similar to the connected 'visual' images that move through one's mind.

⁹² Ibid. 172.

⁹³ Ibid. 172-173.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 173-175.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 173.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 173.

Bryher's advocacy of film as a medium of education draws on its superiority over illustrations or pictures. Its advantage over other means of visual representation lies in its record of movement and ability to capture reality's development in real time. In his discourses on the semiotics of cinema, Christian Metz argues that film is more realistic than photography because of its representation of motion.⁹⁷ André Bazin's discourse on the mechanical arts notes that while photography is only the trace of a spectacle, film is a recording of it in real time: 'objectivity in time'.⁹⁸ Although it is a truthful documentation of an object, the event of the photograph's production remains in the past. Meanwhile, film's recording of reality can be experienced numerous times. The film's projection in the present moment further reinforces the connection between the recorded world and the real world of the 'now'. The simultaneity of the recorded event's projection and viewing is complicated by the possibility to edit film and therefore manipulate the cinematic reality. These arguments provide a background for Bryher's own support of the beneficial effects cinema can have on school children.

The article 'Films for Children', published a year later, in August 1928, develops Bryher's ideas about film and education provides a list of films children should see as opposed to films they are recommended as suitable for their age.⁹⁹ Apart from documentaries and newsreels like *Tiergang in Abyssinian* (1910), *Voyage au Congo* (1924) and *Under Arctic Skies*, the article also includes a short musical *Kraft und Schoenheit* (also known as *Seff auf dem Wege zur Kraft und Schönheit*, 1926) and the Russian films *Son of the Mountains* and *Mother* (*Mat'/Mamь*, 1926).¹⁰⁰ In addition to the main list, Bryher mentions *Joyless Street* (1925) and *Bed and Sofa* (also known as *Tretya Meshchanskaya* or *Bett und Sofa*, 1927), two films that appear later in her own articles and *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, and which are

⁹⁷ Metz, *Film Language*, 8.

⁹⁸ André Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Leo Baudy and Marshall Cohen (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 168-170.

⁹⁹ Bryher, 'Films for Children,' 16-18.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 17-20.

popular examples of German and Soviet filmmaking with *Close Up* critics.¹⁰¹ However, these films are subject to the public's prejudice, provoked by censorship and the critics' inability to form an opinion independent from the censor's recommendation. Children, as well as mass audiences, should be taught to discern a film's importance by its artistic applications of avant-garde practices or its narrative. Otherwise, they are susceptible to the influence of government censorship regulations in their perception of the film medium and international films.

As an extension of the persisting theme of education and social prejudice of her early novels, film's potential as a teaching tool became one of the definitive functions Bryher recognised for the medium and intertwined it with her later reflections on Soviet film. Film's mechanical nature and universal appeal could ensure a minimal level of education for any society, expanding society's mind-set beyond the social stereotypes that had remained in the post-war period. While Bryher acknowledged the artistic merits of film art, she interpreted artistic film practices through the visual medium's ability to build associations and disseminate ideas to a maximum number of audiences. Her exploration of the mechanical medium's effect on audiences, and specifically children, further relates her ideas about film with her understanding of child psychology. Her perception of the film medium is of an endless stream of images, very much like the asyndetic lists of events and views, typical of Nancy's thought process in her novels. The parallels between the stream of consciousness and the human psyche, and the moving image not only endows her early prose with a sense of cinematic urgency but also illuminates her own perception of the purely psychological affect of the film image, besides its educational and socio-political functions.

Bryher, H.D., and Dorothy Richardson

The core circle of *Close Up* critics was attracted through networks of friendship, shared ideas,

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 18.

and existing commitments. Three of the original contributors alongside Macpherson were women: Bryher, H.D. and Dorothy Richardson, whose contributions to the journal connects it to the tradition of little magazines, run by women.¹⁰² Although neither Richardson nor H.D. were professional critics, the two regularly submitted film articles during their involvement with *Close Up*. H.D. became involved in *Close Up* through her personal connections to Bryher and Macpherson, while Bryher attracted Richardson by calling on her curiosity about the new medium and its audiences. Although their *Close Up* essays articulate three different understandings of the film medium, Bryher, H.D. and Dorothy Richardson often explore similar concepts in their analysis of the new medium. All three critics reflect on the medium's potential to address social issues, such as social or gender inequality, establish inclusive spaces for all audiences, and the experience of film spectatorship. Their articles reveal what attracted each of them to the new medium and their divergent approaches to film analysis.

While Richardson and Bryher published in the journal until it folded in 1933, H.D.'s final article in *Close Up* was published in December 1929. A year later the poet published a pamphlet on Macpherson's film *Borderline* that adopted the same ideas and language she developed in her film reviews and articles. The poet's articles record her impressions of the film viewing experience and her opinions about the films, directors, and actresses whom she admired. H.D. connected film to concepts of psychology and Imagism, and suggested an abstract interpretation of film's influence on audiences that evokes the spiritualism and symbolism of her poetry, as previously noted by Laura Marcus.¹⁰³ The abstraction of the poet's understanding of the new medium and the connections this perception establishes with her Imagist poetry can be linked to her articles' popularity with academic studies of *Close Up*. Caroline Maclean reflects on the poet's interest in the performance of the Russian actress

¹⁰² Georgina Tylor, *HD and the Public Sphere of Modernist Women Writers, 1913-1946: Talking Women* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001) 6-7.

¹⁰³ Donald, Friedberg and Marcus *Close Up 1927-1933* 96.

Aleksandra Khokhlova in Lev Kuleshov's *By the Law* and relates it to H.D.'s focus on gestures and facial expressions in her performance as Astrid in *Borderline*.¹⁰⁴ Jonathan Foltz's close analysis of the poet's review of Kuleshov's film links her interest in the new medium with the proximity of literary and cinematic forms in her film writing.¹⁰⁵ Rachel Connor places the poet's film texts in correlation with theories on spectatorship and female subjectivity.¹⁰⁶ In her reflections on H.D.'s understanding of film, Connor draws on the poet's documentation of the viewing experience as inclusive of the film, the trip to the cinema, and the audience that populates it.¹⁰⁷

Indeed, the viewing experience is integral to the poet's understanding of film. Her review of *By the Law* and the article on Pabst's *Joyless Street* both include references to the circumstances in which the poet viewed the films. Only after going through her memories of running through Lausanne and reaching the cinema late does the poet move on to discuss the narrative and actors' performances in Kuleshov's *By the Law*. H.D. insists that the 'built-up and somewhat over-done little shops with windows and wares' she sees on her way to the little cinema are an essential component of the overall cinema experience of that evening.¹⁰⁸ The poet misses the film's start but this is unimportant because her review overlooks the plot. Instead, the article's main focus is the landscapes of the narrative's setting and the performance of the Russian actress Khokhlova as an example of the psychological consequences of guilt and murder. Khokhlova is an 'inhuman gargoyle of a woman' and a 'wildcat' with her 'angular, bird-like, claw-like' features'.¹⁰⁹ H.D.'s analysis of Carl Theodore Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) follows a similar pattern. The text's main focus is the performance's impact

¹⁰⁴ Maclean, 'The Magic that is Montage,' 44-60.

¹⁰⁵ Jonathan Foltz, 'The Laws of Comparison: H.D. and Cinematic Formalism,' *Modernism/Modernity*, 18 - 1 (January 2011) 1-25.

¹⁰⁶ Rachel Connor, *H.D. and the Image* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004) 19-31.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 29-30.

¹⁰⁸ H.D., 'Expiation,' 38.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 42, 46.

on the audience and its contribution to the film's mediation of the protagonist's psyche.¹¹⁰ The review claims that Maria Falconetti's performance as Joan portrays her burden and pain 'superbly, almost mediumistically'.¹¹¹ The effect of Falconetti's performance renders film viewing a sensual and psychological experience for the poet. Overwhelmed by 'spiritual antagonism', H.D. writes that her hands are 'numb and raw and bleeding', as she sympathises with Joan's pain, and is 'cut into slices by the inevitable pan-movement of the camera' by the film's 'remorseless rhythm'.¹¹² The poet's articles are subjective to her personal impressions of these films rather than objective critical observations and theories. H.D.'s deeply personalised accounts with the new medium record its effect on her psyche and reveal that the real focus of her film writing is the reason why specific films affect her psyche while others never do. She is more interested in an analysis of her own psychological reactions to film than a discussion of the director's use of cinematic techniques and the film narrative. Therefore, film is yet another tool for psychological self-analysis, just as autobiographical prose becomes a site for the explorations of her personal trauma.

Unlike H.D., whose articles relate a personalised perception of the viewing experience, the films the poet viewed and their effect on her psyche exclusively, Bryher's articles adapt the author's experiences as a spectator differently. As the author's film articles reflect on the medium's appropriation for the purpose of social and educational reform, they refer back to ideas on education and teaching methodologies that originate in her novels. The autobiographical novels *Development* and *Two Selves* recognise the need for educational and social reforms, as well as society's scepticism against anyone that pioneers innovative teaching approaches or merely dares to voice criticism against the established status quo. These problems translate to her film articles through film's appeal as a teaching tool and society's

¹¹⁰ H.D., 'Joan of Arc,' 15-23.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 15-16.

¹¹² *Ibid.* 15, 17.

scepticism of the new mechanical medium and its effect on young children. Personal experience informs H.D.'s articles insofar as some of her film reviews relate her memories of viewing these films. Bryher, by contrast, relies on ideas informed by personal experience that render her film writing an extension of her autobiographical prose. *Close Up* serves as a platform for her ideas about society and education, which she articulates free of the fictional disguise of Nancy's voice. The extension of the social analysis beyond her novels informs the author's experimentation with other genres of prose after World War II, such as her historical fiction published throughout the 1950s.

H.D.'s approach to film analysis is defined by her choice to seek out the medium's aesthetic categories, and draw parallels between psychic conditions and states of film viewing. In her record of her sessions with Freud, *Tribute to Freud* (1956), the poet refers to memories and visions that Freud later analysed. The text elaborates on the visions H.D. experiences in her hotel room during her stay on the island of Corfu with Bryher in 1919-1920 and recounts Freud's opinions of their meaning.¹¹³ The poet describes her visions as 'pictures on the wall' or 'picture-writing on the wall' that are 'projected' on the walls of her room¹¹⁴. Her experience of the lights and shapes on the wall in her room at Corfu, actually projected from her spirit lamp, evoke the poet's perception of film's effect on the psyche. The terminology that she employs in *Tribute to Freud's* accounts of these experiences resembles the expressions she uses in her film essays as she describes the hallucinations' presence in the physical world as projections. Her interpretation of the cinematic image also as a kind of projection underscores the spirituality of the film viewing experience and the realism of the expressions of one's psyche in the same time. The faces of the images she sees on the walls of her room in Corfu are 'head and shoulders, three-quarter face' and 'a silhouette cut of light'.¹¹⁵ The poet's visions

¹¹³ H.D., *Tribute to Freud* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1970) 44-50.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 44.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 45.

are accompanied by ‘buzzing’ emitted by a group of ‘small creatures, that are black’, gathered around ‘the base of the tripod’ in her room.¹¹⁶ The poet’s references to film terminology suggests a connection between her perception of the human psyche and her understanding of film imagery. The interconnections between the psyche and the cinematic image can be traced to H.D.’s poem of two parts published in two consecutive editions of the journal.

Published in the journal’s first issue of July 1927 and its fourth of October 1927, H.D.’s two-part poem ‘Projector’ evokes a metaphor for film’s mechanism and essence similar to the visual descriptions in *Tribute to Freud*.¹¹⁷ Film and projection are related to light and its symbolic effect on one’s mind as the poet writes ‘Light takes new attribute/ and yet his old glory/ enchants.’¹¹⁸ The projector is a ‘serpent creeping... his shaft of light’ that materialises the cinematic image in the real world.¹¹⁹ The conceptual motif of light carries through to the second part of the poem with the opening verses: ‘This is his gift;/ light/ light that sears and breaks/ us’.¹²⁰ The light that ‘sears’ and ‘breaks’ metaphorically alludes to the effects of film projection on the audience’s psyche, but also ‘fascinates’.¹²¹ Its uncanniness overwhelms the mind. The image’s proximity to reality depicts ‘... souls upon the screens/ live lives that might have been,/ live lives that ever are’.¹²² The combination of the poetic language and film terminology ascribes cinematic imagery to the abstractions of a spiritual realm that one reaches only through the transformative experience of film projection. The cinematic reality and its numerous diegetic worlds present infinite possibilities. When watching a film, one can transport oneself to an alternate reality and imagine life there as film’s alternative world retains the realism of the physical world. The oxymoron ‘we sleep and are awake’ underscores the

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 48.

¹¹⁷ H.D., ‘Projector I (a poem),’ *Close Up*, I - 1 (July 1927); ‘Projector II (a poem),’ *Close Up*, I - 4 (October 1927).

¹¹⁸ H.D., ‘Projector I (a poem),’ 46

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 50.

¹²⁰ H.D., ‘Projector II (a poem),’ 35.

¹²¹ Ibid. 35.

¹²² Ibid. 43.

alignment of cinematic realism with the projected image's hallucinatory quality.¹²³ This tricks the psyche into believing the diegetic world might be real as the boundaries between reality and film's diegesis are blurred. Therefore, in H.D.'s ideas, film's projection of the recorded image overwhelms the unconscious and influences one's perception of reality. This is further complicated by the realism of the projected image itself as the audience is no longer aware of the surrounding environment but only of the diegetic world that is presented on the screen.

The external authority over the projected image recognised in both parts of 'Projector' evokes the notion of external control exerted over the female psyche in H.D.'s autobiographical prose. The viewer is placed in a position similar to that of H.D.'s Hermione in *Asphodel* where she is made a passive observer of her marriage with Darrington and his adultery. The patriarchal authority that governs the domestic space never allows her to intervene or object to the established situation. The metaphors of H.D.'s film poems posit that the film viewer is in a similarly passive position as the recipient of the conceptual mediation of the film projection. The poet's acknowledgement of an external influence over one's perception of film echoes Bryher's discussion of censorship's control of films that are suitable for children and British audiences. However, as the two interpret the concept differently, Bryher discusses the government's facilitation of censorship and the banning of films from film clubs' programmes, while H.D.'s poems allude to this authority's encouragement of the viewer's complete immersion into cinema's mimetic reality. These 'lives that might have been' are similar to the hallucinations one's psyche might trick one into believing.¹²⁴ Such metaphors further reinforce the psychedelic quality that the poet sees in film's mechanical projections of realistic images.

The external authority that governs the projected image becomes intertwined with the poet's perception of film directors as exclusively male. The director wields the mechanical

¹²³ Ibid. 36.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 36

medium's properties to create a diegetic world that satisfies the viewer's need to escape the mundane reality that he inhabits. He manipulates the viewer's mind into believing a fantasy through film's realism. This manipulation of the mind is endowed with an almost fantastical quality in H.D.'s film texts that sets the poet's *Close Up* essays apart from the pragmatic reflections that dominate Bryher's articles or Dorothy Richardson's social analysis. The discussion of gender that emerges from H.D.'s film poems permeates her subsequent film reviews as she juxtaposes the director's masculinity with the femininity of the actresses she admired in the articles dedicated to individual aesthetic categories in film.

Entitled 'Beauty', H.D.'s first *Close Up* article explores the depiction and transformation of female beauty in the increasingly commercialised film industry. Different aesthetic categories are projected on the female body as an illustration of film's abilities to manipulate the viewer's perceptions. The text's record of Greta Garbo's transformations in German Expressionist films and Hollywood cinema suggests the actresses' significance to H.D.'s ideas of femininity in film. Her comparison of Garbo's screen reincarnations argues that the actress's transition into Hollywood cinema has 'deflowered, deracinated, devitalised' her.¹²⁵ The implied masculinity of the 'Censor' has taken the Nordic beauty of Pabst's *Joyless Street* and offered her to the viewer as a 'serpent for an egg, stone for bread'.¹²⁶ By placing the woman in the commercialised context of popular entertainment, film's male authority vulgarises the actress's beauty: 'He learns that there is a new European importation for instance of a 'star'; this importation being thudded into his senses for some months beforehand; his mind is made up for him; she is beautiful'.¹²⁷ The actress's name and her beauty are summarised by the metonymies of economy ('importation') and fame ('star'), as she is stripped from her individuality and craft. Displaced from the art of filmmaking, she becomes a product,

¹²⁵ H.D., 'Cinema and the Classics: Beauty,' 26.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 27.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 25.

caught in the mechanisms of Hollywood, and prey to the masculinity that dominates commercial film production and censorship. The actress, in this case Greta Garbo, and the artistry of the avant-garde film are further assigned a mythic quality, as H.D. saturates her reflections with the Hellenic imagery, typical of her poetry.

Garbo's body, beauty, and gestures are rendered part of this mythic world projected into the physical space of the real world, and are combined with poet's observations on film's depiction of the human psyche. The city of post-war Vienna in *Joyless Street* is described as a 'modernised epic of Troy town... some mournful and pitiful Babylon' while the censor's authority over film is personified by the figures of Saint George and the Totem dragon, or the Ogre, who guards the entrance to the cinematic world and allows only a glimpse of film's beauty.¹²⁸ Meanwhile, Greta Garbo is the embodiment of the beauty that 'existed in pre-Periclean Athens, in the islands of the Cyclades, the temple of Karnak'.¹²⁹ The Hellenic metaphors and allusions persist in later articles: film's command over one's imagination is compared to the Greek gods' impact on the Athenians' worldview in the article 'The Mask and the Movietone'.¹³⁰ The poet writes: 'We are like pre-fifth Athenians waiting for our Aeschylus, our Sophocles, our Euripides'.¹³¹ The audience relies on the realistic depiction of the on-screen reality and its symbols but silent film's imagery is 'crude'.¹³² The introduction of sound film, or the movietone, superimposes more complicated emotions and characters on screen. Sound film's introduction terminates the influence of silent film and its control over the imagination. Unlike silent cinema, sound cinema cannot be manipulated by the censor. As it is not purely visual, sound film presents 'bottled' versions of international communities.¹³³ International

¹²⁸ Ibid. 28.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 29.

¹³⁰ H.D., 'Cinema and the Classics: The Mask and the Movietone,' *Close Up*, I - 5 (November 1927) 18-31.

¹³¹ Ibid. 24.

¹³² Ibid. 23.

¹³³ Ibid. 26.

films become concentrated versions of the psychology of different nations. Contrary to the opinions on sound cinema and censorship that Bryher articulates in her articles, H.D.'s text suggests that sound films are a new form of communication that allows for 'international understanding' that cannot be controlled by the censors.¹³⁴ As such, it may bridge the differences between nations and individuals and unite communities through its universal effect on spectators. Its constant technological evolution cannot be controlled by any censorship regulations despite attempts to do so. Therefore, the new medium not only has the power to duplicate reality and project it into the physical space but also to erase national differences by introducing a new superior tool of communication.

H.D.'s discussion of film and its effect on the imagination endows the new medium with a mythical power. Its diegetic world is an environment where mythological and poetic metaphors can actually come to life. They are projected into the physical space of the film theatre and, for a short period of time, the audience experiences the projected image as a catharsis born of the modern technological age. The poet's impression of film's ability to influence the mind can be traced to the imagery evoked in her novels. In her analysis of H.D.'s film essays, Rebecca Bowler argues that H.D.'s interest in film is partially motivated by the fact that cinema provides 'an aesthetic model in which the signifying power of the still, posed body, the deliberate framing of a room and its people as tableau, and the superimposition of multiple angles of vision come into their own'.¹³⁵ The poet sees no need for film to show movement or a complicated narrative. The presence of the projected image in the physical space it shares with the audience is enough to confirm its powerful effect on the psyche. The poet's notice of such details justifies her dismissal of films' plots and her privileging of performance. Bowler continues her argument by claiming that H.D.'s defence of the 'simplicity

¹³⁴ Ibid. 25.

¹³⁵ Bowler, *Literary Impressionism*, 129.

of form and movement' in her article 'Restraint' is later refracted in the poet's experimentation with autobiographical prose and the depiction of her protagonist Julia in *Bid me to Live* (1960).¹³⁶ Unlike *Asphodel*, *Bid me to Live* is written in the late 1930s and early 1940s but the poet refuses to publish it. It is not until 1956 that Bryher and Richard Aldington convince her to pass the manuscript to a publisher.¹³⁷ The novel is published posthumously in 1960. Bowler's comments underscore the influence of film language and visuals on H.D.'s subsequent prose, like *Bid me to Live*. The use of such phrases attributes a psychological depth to the characters of H.D.'s later novels and the visual narrative world they inhabit. Similar to the focus on the protagonist's thoughts in Bryher's novels, H.D.'s *Bid me to Live* is filtered through the consciousness of the poet's alter-ego Julia. As Cyril Vane and Julia walk out in the London streets, the protagonist's passive submission to masculine authority is implied as he is 'propelling her toward a door, through a crowd of tables'.¹³⁸ Narrated through her point of view, the text breaks down the sequence of events into individual static images. The sentence constructions emphasise images like the evening's 'hectic aftermath, the streets crowded and a group shouting'.¹³⁹ Actions are fragmented into individual sentences that function as separate photographic frames that document nuances of characters' behaviour:

He [Cyril] would get a taxi. Vane was the sort of person who would somehow always manage to get a taxi. It was the manner. It was his detachment, his air of indifference, the feudal remarks. Perfectly, he was there to help her.¹⁴⁰

The tableau-like images created by the asyndetic listing of Vane's qualities reveal

¹³⁶ Ibid. 129-130.

¹³⁷ Richard Aldington to Bryher, February 12th, 1953; March 21st, 1953; April 8th, 1953; April 24th, 1953; April 27th, 1953, Bryher Papers Box 1, Folder 24.

¹³⁸ H.D., *Bid me to Live* (London: Virago Press, 1984 [1960]) 120. Citations refer to the 1984 edition.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 120.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 120.

Julia's opinion of his behaviour toward her. The cinematic sensation of the moment is further reinforced by his suggestion that they visit 'the pictures' and Julia's thoughts of 'the actual black and white of screen-projection' and 'other things to look at'.¹⁴¹ The cinematic quality of Julia's experience of urbanity and Vane's presence detaches the protagonist from her experience of the physical event. The visual stillness created by her remarks renders her a spectator of these events, as she distances herself from what she sees, very much in the same way an audience might be affected by film projection. Although they do not participate in the events that are filmed, the spectators experience their subsequent impact, much in the same way Julia allows Vane to take care of her, but her detachment allows her to observe him and comment. The photographic quality of the novel's imagery implies film's impact on the poet's prose and its interpretation of the human psyche, and introduces a level of dissociation between the protagonist and her experience of the world.

Unlike H.D., who relied on abstract language and Hellenic metaphors to define her perception of the film medium and record her experience of film projection, Dorothy Richardson reflected on film in relation to different communities across London and the cinema theatre's function as a social space. The novelist's initial reluctance at Bryher's invitation to become a contributor to *Close Up* can be justified by her lack of technical knowledge of film. Nevertheless, her subsequent dedication to the journal resulted in twenty-two articles and the novelist's involvement in the journal's censorship petition launched in 1929-1930.¹⁴² Unable to comment on the technicalities of cinematic practices, she instead chose to concentrate on films' non-diegetic elements. She separated films from their narratives and dedicated articles on the musical accompaniment and captions, exploring the ways these elements shaped the audience's perception of film's narrative and diegetic reality.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 120.

¹⁴² Dorothy Richardson, 'The Censorship Petition,' *Close Up*, VI - 1 (January 1930) 7-11.

Richardson's third *Close Up* article demonstrates the novelist's analysis of the peripheral elements of film projection through a series of reflections on captions. The novelist writes that the film starts, a series of captions announce the filmmakers' names, the actors and the main characters just like 'placards' that the audience is accustomed to dismiss.¹⁴³ The captions' function is to introduce 'bright and new, truths that in our keeping had grown a little dim, or telling us strange news of which within reason we can never have too much.'¹⁴⁴ Although they are a reminder of film's relationship to literature, they make no contribution to the narrative and the information they carry is not to be interpreted literally but as 'a hint' to the shots' intended meaning.¹⁴⁵ The novelist considers film's visual properties and its mimetic reality to be enough for audiences to understand the narrative events. Therefore, captions are unnecessary as they regurgitate the main narrative themes since the film, under the control of the 'artist' filmmaker, conveys all the narrative's messages.¹⁴⁶ Film not only entertains, it challenges the imagination to decipher the truths about life it holds. Its simulation of reality aids this process as it renders the diegetic world believable. Film projects new ideas on this imitation of reality and through its influence on the audiences, these ideas translate into the real world beyond the cinema theatre.

Although unqualified to comment on film technology, Richardson contributed to the journal's discussion of sound film by reflecting on its impact as a spectator, rather than an experienced film critic. In a series of articles she reflects on the development of sound technology from musical accompaniment to sound film, and defends film's 'essential character', which she defines as 'pantomime'.¹⁴⁷ Her reflections align the binary of sound and

¹⁴³ Dorothy Richardson, 'Continuous Performance III: Captions,' *Close Up*, I - 3 (September 1927) 52-53.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 54.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 55.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 55.

¹⁴⁷ Dorothy Richardson, 'Continuous Performance IV: A Thousand Pities,' *Close Up*, I - 4 (October 1927) 62.

silent film with the human senses of sight and sound in support of silent film's superior influence over audiences.¹⁴⁸ The 'continuous and flexible' musical accompaniment aids film's visual mediation of meaning and ensures the 'stillness and concentration' necessary to understand the narrative.¹⁴⁹ Any change in the music may disrupt this process and render the film's visuals less accessible to the audience. As it varies across film genres and follows the narrative action, music 'helps... create the film and gives the film both colour and sound'.¹⁵⁰ However, realistic sound effects such as a 'pistol-shot' or a 'puff of smoke' are unwelcome because their realism disturbs the specificity of cinematic reality.¹⁵¹ The novelist's recollection of *The Heart of Dixie* (1929) illustrates the change in the viewing experience when the musical accompaniment the novelist favours is replaced by sound film.¹⁵² As music and 'dead' silence alternate throughout the 'film opera', the faults of the new technological feature disturb the uniformity of the film viewing process and result in a comical experience.¹⁵³ The seamless impression of film's diegetic world is further destroyed by 'the hold-up, the funeral march of words' and 'the necessity for concentrating upon hearing the spoken word'.¹⁵⁴ In his reflections on Richardson's engagement with sound film, Tim Armstrong notes the novelist's scepticism of 'the need to "dictate" words to the apparatus'.¹⁵⁵ This voiceover not only disturbs the seamless viewing experience but also exposes how 'sound congeals in particular bodies' and renders the actors into no more than 'ventriloquist's dummies'¹⁵⁶. Sound is an unnecessary

¹⁴⁸ Dorothy Richardson, 'Continuous Performance: A Tear for Lycidas,' *Close Up*, VII - 3 (September 1930) 196-202.

¹⁴⁹ Dorothy Richardson, 'Continuous Performance II: Musical Accompaniment,' *Close Up*, I - 2 (August 1927) 61.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 61.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* 61.

¹⁵² Dorothy Richardson, 'Continuous Performance: Dialogue in Dixie,' *Close Up*, V - 3 (September 1929) 211-217.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* 213-214.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 215.

¹⁵⁵ Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, technology and the body: a cultural study* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 232.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 232.

attachment to the film image and hinders one's complete immersion into the staged world recorded by the camera. Therefore, throughout her reflections on sound and film, the novelist maintains that any sound element in film should be consistent with the viewing experience and the narrative world projected in the film theatre. She sees sound film's technological imperfections as a hindrance to the audience's assimilation of the diegetic world and insists on film's artificial reality. Despite its ability to record moving image realistically, film creates a diegetic world that should not be mistaken for reality. Instead, it is a continuous narrative world that one experiences in the privacy of the cinema and this should be preserved.

Richardson's articles on musical accompaniment and sound were part of an ongoing discussion of sound film in *Close Up*. In October 1928 *Close Up* published a joint statement by the Soviet filmmakers Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Grigori Alexandrov.¹⁵⁷ A critique of the 'talking film' and its appropriation by the industry, the text claims that 'a misconception of the possibilities of this new technical discovery may... hamper the work of developing and perfecting cinematography as an art' and 'ruin its present and actual achievements'.¹⁵⁸ The Soviet directors argue for the preservation and development of film's status as a visual art dominated by montage techniques and defend 'mounting', or montage, as film's chief tool of expression.¹⁵⁹ Despite their apprehension that 'sound will destroy the meaning of mounting' unless it is treated as a new element of montage, they admitted that sound is the technological solution to 'blind alleys' like film texts and other 'explanatory items' and could still further the development of avant-garde film.¹⁶⁰ The contrapuntal method, proposed by the three Soviet filmmakers, incorporated sound as an enhancement on film's cultural influence and international character rather than a limitation to specific national

¹⁵⁷ Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov, 'The Sound Film: A Joint Statement from the USSR,' 10-13.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 10.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 10-11.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 10-12.

markets.¹⁶¹ As he acknowledged the opinions of the three Russian filmmakers, the actor and director Jean Lenauer (1904-1983) argued that sound film would create a new form of acting where gestures would be more subdued in his article 'The Sound Film: The Salvation of Cinema'.¹⁶² In the same edition, the screen writer Ernest Betts (1896-1975) claimed that speech would harm film's chief function, which was to namely 'imitate life in flowing forms of light and shade to a rhythmic pattern'.¹⁶³ While Richardson joined their ongoing discourse, she steered clear of film's technical aspects and instead, similar to H.D., defended film's ability to influence audiences through the abstract diegetic world it could create.

Richardson also joined the poet in gendering her analysis of film but her concerns about twentieth-century gender dynamics are refracted through her engagement with silent and sound film.¹⁶⁴ In contrast to H.D.'s allusions to male authority's control over film, Richardson claims that film is 'essentially feminine' and as such it first develops as a silent medium.¹⁶⁵ Women 'who excel in memory' are regarded as 'humanity's silent half'.¹⁶⁶ By remaining a silent and visual medium film is female, and as such can remind, memorise, depict and communicate anything anywhere. This is the film's period of 'innocence'.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, sound film's popularity is aligned with men's affection for women who 'chatter', like 'village women... villa women, to unemployed service-flat women, to chatelâines' and who have adopted the conversation not as a means of communication but rather as an activity that aids their assimilation in a patriarchal society.¹⁶⁸ Their speech is a 'facade' they use 'to banish embarrassment' and cover their 'spiritual nakedness'.¹⁶⁹ Those women who never question

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 13.

¹⁶² Jean Lenauer, 'The Sound Film: The Salvation of Cinema,' *Close Up*, IV - 4 (April 1929)

¹⁶³ Ernest Betts, 'Why Talkies are Unsound,' *Close Up*, IV - 4 (April 1929)

¹⁶⁴ Dorothy Richardson, 'Continuous Performance: The Film Gone Male,' *Close Up*, IX - 1 (March 1932) 36-38.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 37.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 36.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 37.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 36.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 37.

‘clear speech’ have been ‘maltreated’ in their education and are therefore more in ‘the men’s than within the women’s camp’.¹⁷⁰ Even the ‘partisan women’ who articulate ‘not their own convictions’ are part of the male realm as their choice of communication is speech.¹⁷¹ Therefore, by embracing sound, film submits to the male agenda of becoming a ‘medium of propaganda’.¹⁷² While silent film encourages quiet contemplation of the diegetic world and its narratives, sound film may become a victim to rival ideologies and even ‘government monopoly’.¹⁷³ The novelist’s recognition of film’s potential to be the Establishment’s means of spreading ideas and ideologies, and the potential danger this might pose to society, relates Richardson’s interest in censorship to Bryher’s own ideas on the topic. Both Richardson’s and Bryher’s writing on the topic suggested that once individuals have surrendered their imagination to the cinematic reality of the continuous performance, the Establishment may take advantage of film’s universal appeal and modes of communication, and turn it into a tool that disseminates a social agenda of complacency.

As she wrote from the perspective of a spectator of the film theatres’ continuous performances rather than a film professional, Richardson reflected on the collective viewing experience and the audience demographic that cinemas attracted. Her articles record film’s transition from a mode of popular entertainment to a medium that provides an escape from the monotony of everyday life. The article ‘The Increasing Congregation’ stereotypes the viewers in the cinema theatre and documents a series of observations on film’s effect on them.¹⁷⁴ Spectators from all classes, genders, and ages frequent the cinema: ‘Happy youth... weary women of all classes... Sensitives...elders’.¹⁷⁵ The space of the cinema establishes a unified community that is a ‘Refuge, trysting-place’ and ‘shelter’ for audiences of all ages, genders,

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 36.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 36.

¹⁷² Ibid. 38.

¹⁷³ Ibid. 38.

¹⁷⁴ Richardson, ‘Continuous Performance VI The Increasing Congregation,’ 61-65.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 64.

and social status.¹⁷⁶ A democratic realm of acceptance and tranquillity, the film theatre is devoid of the woes of everyday life. The articles ‘Cinema in the Arcady’ and ‘Cinema in the Slums’ suggest that a cohesive community can develop through their mutual enjoyment of cinema anywhere and in any social milieu.¹⁷⁷ The two consecutive articles draw on film’s expanding popularity as entertainment and popular pastime with all classes, as the number of cinemas across London grew and audiences diversified. The cinemas of London’s poorer regions are ‘repulsive’ with ‘plaster frontages and garish placards’ but the moving picture’s impact is more beneficial for the education and well-being of audiences than other misguided attempts at ‘betterment’.¹⁷⁸ Film’s illustrations are encountered ‘innocently, unguardedly, in silence and alone’ in the cinema, which magnifies their impact.¹⁷⁹ Meanwhile, the elevation of film’s cultural status is manifested in the larger cinema theatres in central locations that become urban centres of social life.¹⁸⁰ A demand for ‘perpetual cinema’ is justified by the ‘melodrama and farcical comedy’, which are ‘favourites’, and the ‘lovely’ musical accompaniment.¹⁸¹ As film replaces all kinds of ‘large scale public entertainment’ it presents pictures from various parts of the world, its universal appeal unites international communities by erasing differences and alters their worldview.¹⁸² Despite their initial scepticism, the inhabitants of a small town can become ‘world citizens’ once a cinema is erected in their neighbourhood.¹⁸³ They are able to see worlds and events beyond the town their community inhabits and share international experiences. The film medium is thus praised for its entertainment value and ability to provide distraction for a range of social groups, as well as its potential to include all communities into

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 64.

¹⁷⁷ Richardson, ‘Cinema in the Slums,’ 58-62; Richardson, ‘Cinema in Arcady,’ 52-57.

¹⁷⁸ Dorothy Richardson, ‘Continuous Performance,’ *Close Up*, I - 1 (July 1927) 35; Richardson, ‘Cinema in the Slums,’ 60.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 61.

¹⁸⁰ Richardson, ‘Cinema in the Arcady,’ 55.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. 56.

¹⁸² Ibid. 56.

¹⁸³ Ibid. 57.

an international audience.

However, cinema's appeal also poses dangers: as a result of their constant exposure to film the younger generation loses its local quality and is instead 'amplified' and preoccupied with the outside world.¹⁸⁴ These effects are explored in the novelist's articles 'The Front Rows' and 'Film for Children', which counter the benefits of film's visual properties with the disadvantages of its mechanism. The article 'The Front Rows' focuses on three boys sitting in the front row of the cinema, who choose to stay in the 'coolness' of the film theatre instead of the city streets.¹⁸⁵ Film's 'black villainy' has drawn the children into the stuffy cinema, subjecting them to the 'spiritual degradation' of popular entertainment.¹⁸⁶ However, film's negative potential is once again balanced with its promise as an educational medium. The children's familiarity and patience in the cinema are proof for film's educational qualities.¹⁸⁷ Their constant presence in the cinema theatre has granted them the chance to see films that are not necessarily deemed fit for children's viewing. Richardson concludes that the boys are 'learning either less than nothing or more than was good'.¹⁸⁸ The images of bears and cliffs, which Richardson describes, suggest that the film in question is a documentary or a newsreel. Nevertheless, they are not 'puzzled', 'dizzy' or 'breathless' with confusion.¹⁸⁹ Instead they watch films that are 'above their heads' alongside the adults and formulate opinions on film technique, performances and narrative, as well as the world's realities on their own.¹⁹⁰ The film medium's visuality provides them with an insight into the real world beyond the ideas that they are taught at school or the life they encounter in the streets, encouraging them to think for themselves rather than rely on someone else's judgement.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 56.

¹⁸⁵ Dorothy Richardson, 'Continuous Performance VII Front Rows,' *Close Up*, II-1 (January 1928) 60.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 60-61.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. 62-63.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. 60.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 63.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 63.

Despite her initial praise for film's educational potential, the novelist was more sceptical in her discussion of film and education than Bryher whose film texts often functioned as extensions of her observations on education in the early decades of the twentieth century. Published alongside Bryher's article of the same name, Richardson's 'Films for Children' claims that theatre has failed to provide children with intellectual stimulation by offering them only 'Christmas pantomime, or Blue Bird, or Peter Pan'.¹⁹¹ Although film has the potential to entertain and educate children, their needs 'are ignored as they are in no other branch of contemporary art'.¹⁹² Parents and authorities are blamed for their prejudice and failure to recognise film as a major educational and entertainment tool for children. However, the medium itself is also at fault because its mechanical nature alters the realistic representation of specific subject matters. 'Nature' films that represent 'natural processes' with 'unnatural smooth swiftness and reality' are particularly problematic.¹⁹³ Despite its realistic depiction of the real world, the nature documentary never traces natural processes in their full length and eliminates the events between the beginning and the end result. Creating a false sense of reality, it only presents the egg and the chicken to its audience as the depiction of a natural process becomes 'a conjuring trick'.¹⁹⁴ This false idea of the natural world is created by film's manipulation of footage through montage. Montage techniques interrupt the recorded event and select the shots that are most appealing and educational, thus altering events' duration and omitting elements from natural processes. Although she recognises that film is equipped with other elements that complement its visual nature, like captions and other non-visual details that can explain scientific and natural processes, Richardson's concerns over the effects of its mechanism serve as a counterpoint to Bryher's relentless insistence on its superiority over

¹⁹¹ Richardson, 'Films for Children,' 21.

¹⁹² Ibid. 23.

¹⁹³ Ibid. 25.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. 25.

obsolete teaching methodologies.¹⁹⁵

Although a series of parallels can be drawn between the *Close Up* articles published by Bryher, H.D. and Dorothy Richardson, their texts present three different approaches to film analysis, defined by each critic's position on the film medium's nature and its potential as an art and a socio-political tool. These parallels arise from the journal's broader support of art film aesthetics, discussions of gender dynamics, and international film, as well as the importance of film's status as a social and educational medium. Each of the three women critics endowed film with critical dimensions informed by their own experience of film culture: Bryher emphasised film's potential for social reform, H.D.'s saw it as a manifestation of the psyche in the physical world, and Richardson documented the flourishing film culture of the early twentieth century from the position of a spectator. While H.D.'s abstract approach ascribed mythical qualities to the exclusively male film director, Richardson presented film as a democratic medium that united communities through its entertainment appeal. Finally, Bryher made her own unique contribution to the diversity of ideas articulated by the journal's women critics. Her observations about the new medium are entangled with the themes of innovative education, teaching methodologies, and social reform that originate in her three autobiographical novels, as well as a more reflective relationship to the movement of the cinematic image and its potential to affect the psyche. However, these articles formed only part of her contribution to the journal. Unlike Richardson and H.D., Bryher undertook the responsibilities of editor and administrator, who ensured the diversity and international outlook of the journal's content. As Armstrong remarks in his study of her activities, her involvement with the journal sets her into the context of other women benefactors whose patronage supports culture producers outside male-dominated institutions¹⁹⁶. By soliciting other women critics'

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. 25.

¹⁹⁶ Tim Armstrong, *Modernism: A Cultural History* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005) 56.

contributions to the journal, Bryher expanded *Close Up*'s expertise on international film, critical perspectives and filmmaking practices, and its influence as an authority on film. As her film texts draw on her novels, the new medium is presented as an invaluable tool that can transport ideas, images, experiences and records of worlds to communities internationally. Therefore, its potential to be the cure for society's complacency and acceptance of an obsolete perception of the world becomes central for Bryher's approach to film analysis and engagement with international film.

CHAPTER 5

International Films: Bryher on German Film, Hollywood, and British cinema

Drawing on the themes of education, social reform and censorship of her autobiographical novels and her early film articles, Bryher's reflections on film's future expand in her articles on international film practices such as German cinema, the Hollywood code, or classical Hollywood genre conventions, and the early British film industry. Although the author often referred to Soviet films in her articles, she explored Soviet cinema and the films of individual Soviet filmmakers at length in her critical volume *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* (1929), examined in another chapter of this thesis. The specificity of her film examples across her *Close Up* articles not only reveals her preferences for these European film industries, but also indicates the films that informed her high standards of the medium's purpose and properties, which she later applied to British cinema.

German cinema was at the core of *Close Up*'s, and also Bryher's, initial impressions of European art cinema, influenced by the connections Bryher and Macpherson established with German filmmakers on their frequent journeys to Germany. Their trips from 1928 and the network of acquaintances they established are documented both in Bryher's personal diaries and her correspondence to H.D. of that period. Bryher's new connections in the film industry and the field of psychoanalysis shaped her understanding of the technical processes of film production as well as different artistic applications of film's properties. Bryher's exposure to German film and its filmmakers' working processes reaffirmed her belief in film art over film entertainment. Her articles of 1928 and 1929 connect German film's abstractions to psychoanalytic theories and emphasise the director's artistic contribution to film production, unlike H.D., who perceived the director's authority as a metaphor for masculinity in society. Bryher's texts on German cinema explore the incorporation of the director's

background and the actors' psychological conditions into the diegetic world, an approach that translates into *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* where individual chapters describe Soviet directors' backgrounds and their characters' moral and psychological motivation.

Bryher's admiration for German cinema served as a counterpoint for her critique of Hollywood conventions. The author's opinion of American films is marked by an abrupt change between her articles from the late 1920s and the essays she publishes in the first three years of the 1930s. Her first articles suggest an admiration for Hollywood films' depiction of the common American mentality. However, as her focus moves on from film reviews to essays on film's social application, education, and censorship, Bryher's opinions change, and Hollywood cinema becomes to exemplify the consequences of a system's consistent restrictions on the filmmakers' imagination. Artistically inferior to European art cinema, Hollywood dictates a series of genre conventions that determine films' narrative and style, and prohibits deviations from established production patterns. These structures aid the production of simplified but well-known narratives that would later become genre conventions. Popular with passive viewers, these repetitive films appeal to mass audiences' desire for entertainment and their disinclination to engage intellectually with film art, a problem Bryher also identifies with British society. Hollywood's insistence on popular conventions and increasing use of sound film are treated as a threat to the development of European film production. Despite her early praise for American film narratives, in later issues of *Close Up* the author claims that Hollywood epitomises an increasing reliance on the medium's entertainment quality, inability to employ film's artistic properties, and a failure to educate audiences about film's social applications.

Bryher's praise for European avant-garde films and her critique of Hollywood conventions both translate into her observations on the standards of British filmmaking. Hollywood films' popularity with audiences grants its studios exclusive control over British

cinemas and film distributors. However, Hollywood films also influence British filmmakers' understanding of filmmaking and film narrative, and therefore render British films inferior to European productions. Bryher's critique of British films is accompanied by indications of how British filmmakers could develop their approaches to film production and change the course of British cinema's development. Therefore, besides her opinions of three separate film industries, Bryher's *Close Up* articles also demonstrate the author's research and detailed knowledge of each national film industry she discusses, different approaches to film production, and film legislation. In its engagement with Bryher's reflections on three separate national film industries, this chapter outlines the ways the core themes of her early prose continue to inform her relationship to film art and diversify the author's understanding of concepts like education and censorship. The following chapter organises these ideas according to the two film movements that helped form the author's critical approach to film art and draws on the author's personal accounts of her relationships with individual filmmakers and her correspondence. Finally, it examines her opinion of the British film industry, the influence of censorship and British film criticism, and her recommendations on the improvement of British filmmaking.

German Film: The Foundation of Bryher's film criticism

In *The Heart to Artemis* Bryher wrote that G.W. Pabst's film *Joyless Street* 'expressed our entire generation' because it was 'the first picture to use contemporary material with a sense of intelligence and art'.¹ In early issues of the journal other *Close Up* critics also voiced similar admiration for Pabst's films and German filmmaking. For example, H.D. dedicated her first *Close Up* article to Greta Garbo's performances and proposed her performance in Pabst's film as the definition of cinematic beauty.² Kenneth Macpherson's editorial in the same issue of

¹ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 252.

² H.D., 'Cinema and the Classics I Beauty'

Close Up refers to German cinema as a ‘thing’ of ‘curious details, watchfulness, harking on claustrophobia’.³ The examination of German film’s aesthetic categories and psychological traits became an ongoing discussion across *Close Up* articles throughout the journal’s run, as individual films featured as examples in the critics’ analysis on different topics. The journal’s inclination towards German films has been already noted by Susan McCabe, who relates H.D.’s interpretations of femininity in Pabst’s films *Joyless Street* and *Secrets of the Soul* (*Geheimnisse einer Seele*, 1926) to her performance in POOL’s film *Borderline* (1930).⁴ McCabe suggests that H.D.’s depiction of Astrid’s broken femininity emulates Pabst’s ‘versatile representation of female embodiment’ and his ‘feminine’ and ‘decadent’ film style.⁵ Meanwhile, Laura Marcus posits a connection between H.D.’s interest in German film to the Hellenic imagery of her poems, which this thesis has already discussed.⁶ While the poet ascribes films and film projection to an abstract realm and eschews more detailed reflections on technique, Bryher’s observations on German films underscore their treatment of moral and social concerns, based on the themes that originate in her novels, and their appropriation of the medium’s technical properties.

Bryher became familiar with the German film industry and its notable figures when she and Macpherson met G. W. Pabst in 1928. According to *The Heart to Artemis*, their first meeting took place during their first stay in Berlin.⁷ Although it is difficult to trace Bryher and Macpherson’s journeys through Germany, a timeline of events is recorded in *The Heart to Artemis* that marks the start of the couple’s various trips in November 1928.⁸ Bryher’s letters to H.D. from the same period are labelled as her correspondence from October 1927 but

³ Kenneth Macpherson, ‘As Is,’ *Close Up*, I-1 (July 1927)

⁴ Susan McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 162.

⁵ *Ibid.* 162.

⁶ *Ibid.* 96-97.

⁷ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 249-250; 252-253.

⁸ *Ibid.* 249.

correspond to her schedule from July 1928, preserved at her archive at the Beinecke.⁹ In spite of these records' contrary chronology, Bryher's memoir and her correspondence offer detailed accounts of her acquaintances during her stays in Berlin, as well as her close relationship with Pabst and her impressions of the German film industry. Pabst admired *Close Up* and identified it as 'the paper that expresses our inmost psychological thoughts'.¹⁰ He facilitated Bryher and Macpherson's attendance at multiple screenings in Berlin and access to Ufa studios, and introduced them to other figures of the German film industry. In a letter to H.D. Bryher mentions seeing Abel Gance's *Napoleon* (1927) and Cecil B. DeMille's *King of Kings* (1927).¹¹ Her schedule for the month of July reveals that she attended screenings of *Anna Karenina* (1926), Olga Preobrazhenskaya's *The Peasant Women of Ryazan* under the German title *Dorf der Sünde* (1927), and Eisenstein's *Ten Days that Shook the World* (*October 1917/ Октябрь*, 1928).¹² She and Macpherson also showed POOL Productions' film *Foothills* (1928) to Pabst and in return, he organised a screening of his first film, *The Treasure* (1923).¹³ During their stay in Germany, Bryher and Macpherson toured the two major film studios in Germany at the time.¹⁴ Unimpressed by the studio at Neubabelsberg in Potsdam, the two later met the filmmaker Fritz Lang (1890-1976) at Ufa Studios.¹⁵ At a dinner party at Pabst's home, they were also introduced to Hanns Sachs and 'Meizner', or Ernő Metzner, an Austro-Hungarian film director and production designer who worked on several of Pabst's films, including *Westfront 1918* (1930).¹⁶ Through the acquaintances she made on her journeys to Germany Bryher managed to develop an elaborate network of connections that not only enabled her research into the German film industry for her own articles, but also secured other contributors

⁹ Bryher, 'Berlin. 1928', Bryher Papers, Box 72, Folder 2857.

¹⁰ Bryher to H.D., October 28th, 1927, H.D. Papers, Box 3 Folder 83.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Bryher, 'Berlin. 1928', Bryher Papers, Box 72, Folder 2857.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Bryher to H.D., October 26th, 1927, H.D. Papers, Box 3, Folder 83.

¹⁵ Bryher to H.D., October 23rd, 1927, H.D. Papers, Box 3, Folder 83.

¹⁶ Bryher to H.D., October 30th, 1927, H.D. Papers, Box 3, Folder 83.

for the journal. These included the psychoanalyst Hanns Sachs, whose article contributions include 'Film Psychology' (1928), 'Modern Witch-Trials' (1929), and 'Kitsch' (1932), and Ernö Metzner, who contributed the articles 'German Censor's Incomprehensible Ban' (1929), 'A Mining Film' (1932), 'On the Sets of the Film *Atlantis*' (1932), and 'The Travelling Circus' (1933).¹⁷

Although she wrote to H.D. of her intentions to interview Pabst and Lang, Bryher never completed these interviews.¹⁸ Instead, she published an overview of Pabst's work in *Close Up*'s issue of December 1927: 'G.W. Pabst: A Survey'.¹⁹ The article confirms her reflections on Pabst's *Joyless Street* in *The Heart to Artemis*, and includes it in a group of films like *Secrets of the Soul* and *Jeanne Ney*, as examples of the director's ability to depict 'intense realism' as the 'truth, poetry'.²⁰ The connection between the realism of Pabst's films and the poetic truth of their imagery relates to the truth Bryher later recognises in Soviet films. The introductory chapter of her volume *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* (1928) separates Soviet film from government politics and the state's control over the film industry in Russia.²¹ Instead, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* insists that Soviet films are reflexive of the social environment and moral dilemmas of Soviet Russia's society in the 1920s. The author's insistence on film's capacity to depict real life, alongside her admiration for Pabst's films, indicates how his work shaped the author's subsequent interpretations of screen depictions of the human psyche and social issues.

Her article on Pabst disparages mass audiences who choose films according to actors'

¹⁷ Hanns Sachs, 'Film Psychology,' *Close Up*, III - 5 (November 1928); 'Modern Witch-Trials,' *Close Up*, IV - 5 (May 1929); 'Kitsch,' *Close Up*, IX - 3 (September 1932); Ernö Metzner, 'German Censor's Incomprehensible Ban,' *Close Up* IV, No. 5 (May 1929); 'A Mining Film,' *Close Up*, IX - 1 (March 1932); 'On the Sets of the Film *Atlantis*,' *Close Up* IX - 3 (September 1932); 'The Travelling Circus,' *Close Up* X - 2 (June 1933)

¹⁸ Bryher to H.D. from October 23rd, 1927, H.D. Papers, Box 3, Folder 83.

¹⁹ Bryher, 'G.W. Pabst: A Survey,' *Close Up*, I - 6 (December 1927) 56-61.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 58, 60.

²¹ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 11.

popularity and the accessibility of their narrative, an issue she later identifies with English film audiences in her article 'Dope or Stimulus'.²² Although she praises Greta Garbo's talent, Bryher indicates the importance of the director's vision of the narrative world: Pabst 'sees psychologically... he knows the sub-conscious impulse or hunger that prompted an actual trivial action'.²³ Such truthful depiction of human psychology separates films for entertainment from film art. Although entertainment films attract audiences with popular actors and adventure storylines, their mass appeal is meaningless because they never incorporate the medium's properties to their full extent. Unlike popular films, Pabst's films present characters that exceed stereotypes championed in mass entertainment films. Apart from Garbo's character in *Joyless Street*, the text lists the butcher and the young man, who has lost 'restraint because the battle had wiped away the reward of thrift or decency', the housekeeper's 'amoral "toughness"', and the 'girl who murdered for her lover'.²⁴ His characters' complexity and his courage to dwell on human suffering on screen distinguishes Pabst's work from mass entertainment. The films' engagement with distorted human psyche is the result of the realistic representation of the world that Bryher assigns to film's mechanism. There is no need for further abstractions when the camera is able to record a single gesture and endow it with the problem of 'modern Europe', hinting at the problems of social inequality of post-war European society through film's visuality.²⁵ Due to their focus on social injustice, Pabst's films appear as examples of Bryher's reflections on film's properties and application in later *Close Up* issues. His films *Joyless Street* and *Jeanne Ney* are included on the author's list of films for children, and films that should be screened freely, unaffected by censorship regulations.²⁶

As German cinema also serves as a point of contrast in her commentary on the

²² Bryher, 'G.W. Pabst: A Survey,' 57; 'Dope or Stimulus,' 59.

²³ Ibid. 60.

²⁴ Bryher, 'G.W. Pabst: A Survey,' 58-59.

²⁵ Ibid. 60.

²⁶ Bryher, 'Films for Children,' 16-20.

superficiality of Hollywood filmmaking, Bryher's first article on Hollywood films compares American talkies to the concept of 'kitsch' that invaded the German film industry.²⁷ While Hollywood's talkies flooded English cinemas, other countries like Germany and France saw the advent of sound film and the artistic negation of Hollywood conventions as an opportunity to re-establish their native film industries.²⁸ Although the majority of Bryher's articles reflect on different social and artistic aspects of film production rather than on individual films, like Richardson, she entered *Close Up*'s ongoing discussion on sound film technology by noting sound films' importance for the European film industries. Her review of Pabst's first sound film *Westfront* (1930) marks a change in her view on the new technology and celebrates the film as an 'exceptional, creative experiment with a new medium'.²⁹ The film's significance to the introduction of sound film is compared to the contribution of *Battleship Potemkin* to the experimentation with montage.³⁰ Although it lacks the 'subtleties' of Pabst's silent films, *Westfront* is a combination of sound and movement.³¹ Unlike other sound films that seem constructed of static movement of pauses, *Westfront* moves 'more swiftly than any film... except for some sequences in the work of Eisenstein'.³² The film's engagement with a balance of the senses, denoted by the 'ear, eye and brain', produces new effects on the audience's psyche through its sparing use of dialogue and incidental sounds.³³ The film's properties present the need for new training of the senses in order to appreciate the sound technology.³⁴ The amalgamation of image and sounds proves that 'it is possible to deepen consciousness through film... through a process of concentration'.³⁵ Although sound in film poses the danger

²⁷ Bryher, 'The Hollywood Code,' *Close Up*, VIII - 3 (September 1931) 234.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 234.

²⁹ Bryher, 'Westfront 1918,' *Close Up*, VII - 2 (August 1931) 105.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 104.

³¹ *Ibid.* 105- 107.

³² *Ibid.* 106.

³³ *Ibid.* 105-106.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 105-106.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 105.

of letting the mind rest and even becoming lazy, the ‘blending of language’ in *Westfront* contributes to film’s stimulation of the mind.³⁶ The film’s French dialogue encourages a deeper engagement with its imagery and plot.³⁷ In the context of Bryher’s previous opinions of Pabst’s films and their ability of truthful representation of reality, sound becomes yet another tool for the director’s depiction of the human psyche. Although it incorporates several languages, the film is not divisive. Instead it unites different communities in its depiction of World War I.

This abrupt change in Bryher’s stance reflects the journal’s general change of tone in its discussion of sound in film. *Close Up* critics’ original scepticism towards popular uses of sound film can be traced to the article by the Soviet directors Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin, and the cinematographer Grigori Alexandrov, published in the journal’s issue of October 1928.³⁸ The Soviet filmmakers’ article warns against the use of sound film for the creation of ‘high cultural dramas’ of ‘theatrical nature’.³⁹ A combination of existing montage principles and the new sound technology, their ‘contrapuntal method’ celebrated film’s international quality as an art form that could avoid the hindrances other film industries introduced by producing films in their national languages. A significant discussion in film circles at the time, the adoption of sound film and its effect on the film industry and film art expanded beyond the boundaries of individual articles and became a running motif in *Close Up*. In his reflection on the journal’s treatment of sound film, James Donald notes the POOL critics’ debate on aesthetic, cultural and economic consequences of sound film’s emergence.⁴⁰ However, Donald claims that the issue was not sound as much as ‘synchronised speech’.⁴¹ As film projections in this period were often accompanied by a non-diegetic musical

³⁶ Ibid.106.

³⁷ Ibid. 106.

³⁸ Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov, ‘The Sound Film: A Statement from the USSR,’ 10-13.

³⁹ Ibid. 12.

⁴⁰ James Donald, ‘From Silence to Sound,’ in *Close Up, 1927-1933*, 81, ed. Donald, Freidberg, and Marcus, 81.

⁴¹ Ibid. 80.

accompaniment, a lecturer's narration or simply the noise of the audience's conversation, synchronised sound and its increasing reliance on spoken word threatened to replace the appreciation of silent film's coherence⁴². Donald further argues that the journal's women critics, like Bryher and Dorothy Richardson, were particularly 'resistant' towards sound film's infiltration of the film industry.⁴³ Bryher described silent film as 'the art that died' while Richardson dedicated three separate articles on sound film.⁴⁴ In the article 'Almost Persuaded', published in June 1929, the novelist admits that she has yet to see a 'Talkie'.⁴⁵ Her impatience to see the talkies later transformed into doubt in the new sound technology, articulated in her article 'Dialogue in *Dixie*'⁴⁶. Despite the excellence of the film's cinematography, the novelist's viewing of Paul Sloane's *Hearts in Dixie* (1929) is affected by its distorted dialogue and silent pauses between scenes.⁴⁷ However, Bryher's article on *Westfront* signals a departure from the scepticism against sound film she initially shared with Richardson. Instead Bryher posits that sound film may have a part in more realistic treatments narrative events and contribute to film's artistry and expand its audiences.

The journal's controversial position on sound film was further compromised by the fact that the journal's first issues came out in a period when sound film was just emerging in popular cinema.⁴⁸ A number of *Close Up* film critics voiced doubts over film's future at the advent of sound technology. As early as November 1927, H.D. blamed the sound 'welded' to the moving image for underscoring the artificiality of cinema in her article 'The Mask and the Movietone'.⁴⁹ Although the projection of voice and image worked in perfect unison, they

⁴² Ibid. 80.

⁴³ Ibid. 81.

⁴⁴ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 247.

⁴⁵ Dorothy Richardson, 'Continuous Performance: Almost Persuaded,' *Close Up*, IV - 6 (June 1929) 31-37.

⁴⁶ Richardson 'Continuous Performance: Dialogue in *Dixie*,' 211-218.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 215-216.

⁴⁸ Donald, Friedberg, and Marcus, *Close Up, 1927-1933*, 79.

⁴⁹ H.D., 'The Cinema and the Classics: The Mask and the Movietone,' 20.

remained separate entities that fulfil ‘different mechanical requirements’.⁵⁰ In his editorial to the journal’s issue of September 1929, Kenneth Macpherson reflected on the ‘sound film war’ and the economic implications of sound technology for film production.⁵¹ Initially considered to be the way to cheaper and faster film production, sound film’s production started to increase⁵². In the following issue of October 1929, Macpherson notes the possible outcomes of the sound-sight combinations in cinema and uses Alfred Hitchcock’s *Blackmail* (1929) as an illustration of sound film’s controversial relationship to film art.⁵³ According to Macpherson, Hitchcock has adopted the contrapuntal method because he has realised the talkies’ ‘crassly naive and retrospective manner’ in the way ‘spoken dialogue ... illustrates the picture-text instead of pictures illustrating written text’.⁵⁴ These are both instances when one element of sound film overpowers the other and therefore renders any artistic attempt to use the new technology meaningless. Macpherson concludes that sound should never be considered alone but instead it should complement the recorded image without distorting the narrative reality or disturbing its effect on the audience.⁵⁵ He encourages the establishment of sound-vision or sound-sight, and the development of an aesthetic that incorporates the new technology.⁵⁶ Just as silent film, sound film poses the possibility for an infinite field of experimentation and study into the medium’s effects on narrative, its artistic potential, and its reception by the public but only as long as filmmakers, viewers, and critics understand the nature of the new properties of its technology. Otherwise, sound film, just like silent film, might be rendered only mindless entertainment that borrows conventions from previous art forms but is not an art form in itself.

This is an opinion upheld by Robert Herring, whose article ‘Twenty-Three Talkies’

⁵⁰ Ibid. 21.

⁵¹ Kenneth Macpherson, ‘As Is,’ *Close Up*, V - 3 (September 1929) 168.

⁵² Ibid. 168-170.

⁵³ Kenneth Macpherson, ‘As Is,’ *Close Up*, V - 4 (October 1929) 257-263.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 258.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 262.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 262.

of February 1930, suggests that the use of sound film may depend on the film's narrative.⁵⁷ In a review of *Interference* (1928), Herring describes the protagonist's phone conversation accompanied by the sounds of his cooking as an example of sound film's potential to create a 'smoother' narrative in a logically unified diegetic world where the main narrative theme is maintained without the need to cut away to small elements, otherwise inessential for the narrative development.⁵⁸ A similar example is Irving Cummings's *In Old Arizona* (1928) where sound helps build the suspense of the narrative as it complicates the diegetic world through the use of sounds effects.⁵⁹ Herring writes of his impressions as 'sound gave... one visual thing, and added to it by sound.'⁶⁰ As Bryher does in her review of *Westfront*, he praises the film's use of the Spanish and Chinese languages as 'dramatic noise, not as dialogue, which is a point'.⁶¹ Herring similarly admits to the possibilities posed by sound film technology in his writing beyond *Close Up*. In an article for the *London Mercury*, he finds sound in film to be necessary for diegetic purposes such singing or speech.⁶² Therefore, while he acknowledges the main criticism against sound film technology, his view on sound film is not as sceptical as that of other *Close Up* critics. Herring recognises the new technology's value for the creation of a unified narrative that invites the viewer's immersion into the diegetic world and its contribution to a richer viewing experience.

Bryher's observations on German film extend beyond Pabst's work and his incorporation of sound technology when in September 1932 *Close Up* published her 'Notes on Some Films'.⁶³ An overview of German cinema beyond the avant-garde practices of German Expressionism, the article remarks on the rise of national socialism in early 1930s Germany:

⁵⁷ Robert Herring, 'Twenty-Three Talkies,' *Close Up*, VI - 2 (February 1930) 113-128.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 115.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 116.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 116.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 116-117.

⁶² Robert Herring, 'The Movies,' *The London Mercury* (May 1928) 202.

⁶³ Bryher, 'Notes on Some Films,' *Close Up*, IX - 3 (September 1932), 196-199.

‘The atmosphere in the streets is only to be compared with that of any large city in 1914-1918’.⁶⁴ Similar to the author’s reflections on Pabst’s work, this article focuses on films’ depictions of realistic human suffering. The article analyses *Wither Germany (Kuhle Wampe/To Whom Does the World Belong?, 1932)*, a film directed by Slatan Dudaw, scripted by Bertolt Brecht and, according to Bryher’s account, produced under controversial conditions⁶⁵. The result of Dudaw’s own left-wing convictions, *Wither Germany* promoted a clearly communist perspective⁶⁶. Halfway into the production process, the company, which owned the sound equipment, objected to the film’s overt depiction of political and social issues⁶⁷. The film was banned twice by German censors, re-edited, and finally premiered in Berlin on 30 May, 1932, after a series of protests by film critics.⁶⁸

Bryher’s analysis of *Wither Germany* highlights the depiction of social class and moral dilemma, an approach the author later develops in her analysis of *Mother* in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*.⁶⁹ The article sketches out the main family’s social status in a single sentence: ‘There is the father, the average German workman, the mother busy with her kitchen and few pieces of furniture, the son and the daughter’.⁷⁰ This sentence is reflexive of the author’s critical approach in its structural and critical similarities to the sentence that marks the beginning of the author’s analysis of *Mother* in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*: ‘A drunk father, a son, a mother cleaning up the kitchen’.⁷¹ Both sentences list the characters and their main characteristics as if following the visual organisation of a sequence of frames. Each character’s features are linked to the specific social stereotype they depict and the issues they

⁶⁴ Ibid. 196.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 198.

⁶⁶ Michael Bock, Tim Bergfelder and Kevin Brownlow, ‘Slatan Dudaw’ in (eds) Hans-Michael Bock, Tim Bergfelder and Kevin Brownlow, *The Concise Cinegraph: Encyclopaedia of German Cinema* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009) 100.

⁶⁷ Bryher, ‘Notes on Some Films,’ 198.

⁶⁸ Bock, Bergfelder and Brownlow, ‘Slatan Dudaw,’ 100.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 196.

⁷⁰ Bryher, ‘Notes on Some Films,’ 196.

⁷¹ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 50.

reveal about German society, such as unemployment, homelessness and education⁷². Once again similar to her attitude to *Mother*, Bryher praises *Wither Germany* for its presentation of the disillusionment with a social order that has failed its citizens, the individual's struggle against social stereotypes, and the female psyche in the character of the daughter.⁷³ In line with the author's overarching concerns, the article remarks that 'if the education and viewpoint of the masses could be changed, there would be a different world⁷⁴'. Sound further aids the film's inclusion of social stereotypes through the repetition of the word 'coffee' in the dialogue, prompting a series of close-ups of characters from different backgrounds.⁷⁵ The film's experimental use of sound complicates its exploration of German society and also illustrates *Close Up*'s ideas about the potential of sound technology. *Wither Germany* not only embeds sound for its literal function of relating dialogue quickly but also employs its potential for artistic experimentation and renders it into a soundtrack of its montage sequences that enhances the rhythm of the editing.

The author's reflections on film's depiction of class and social stereotypes indicates a common concern for her *Close Up* articles and her novels. Both *Two Selves* and Bryher's articles on German film of the 1930s share the author's ongoing discussions of unemployment and social injustice, and the effects of oppression on the human psyche. While *Two Selves* relates these topics to the author's experiences as a young woman during the war, her analysis of *Wither Germany* develops a discourse of social injustice in the context of working class communities and new political upheaval. In *Two Selves* Nancy reflects on the difficulties women face in finding permanent employment, their limited opportunities for education, and society's choice to preserve obsolete stereotypes.⁷⁶ Eleanor mentions the 'old cats' whose

⁷² Bryher, 'Notes on Some Films,' 197-198.

⁷³ Ibid. 197.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 197.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 197.

⁷⁶ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 244.

intentions are to preserve the pre-war social and gender dynamics regardless of their irrelevance during and after the war.⁷⁷ The narrative of *Wither Germany* delves even further into social injustice with its depiction of a family of unemployed characters who have put up ‘tents or makeshift huts’ outside Berlin.⁷⁸ Although the social stereotypes and historical context described in *Two Selves* and the author’s article on German film may be different, both texts engage with dimensions of social injustice. The film article’s focus on unemployment and working class communities indicates a shift in the author’s discussion of social groups as her reflections depart from events informed by personal experience or research in the film industry. Instead, her observations centre on communities unknown to the author but whose suffering becomes familiar through the film medium. This social commentary adds another dimension to Bryher’s insistence on film as an educational tool that can reveal new sights, social groups and their problems to its audience. Films like Pudovkin’s *Mother* and *Wither Germany* can introduce audiences to unfamiliar social groups and communities whose suffering is unrecognised. Understanding their hardships has the potential to prompt the adoption of different social dynamics that eliminate communities’ difficulties.

Bryher’s interest in another German film, Max Mack’s silent film *Fight of the Teria* (*Kampf der Teria*, 1929), prompts a comparison between the school systems in England and Germany, thus further expanding the author’s reflections on education and film. Her review of the film discusses the representation of school life on film.⁷⁹ The film is based on a novel by Wilhelm Speyer, also adapted into a sound film in 1952. The article’s commentary on German and English schools is additionally influenced by the author’s own memories from Queenwood and the English school system. Bryher finds that the film’s main fault is its treatment of school life from a ‘romantic point of view, all sweetness and happy ending, and NOT as the bitter

⁷⁷ Ibid. 244.

⁷⁸ Bryher, ‘Notes on Some Films,’ 196.

⁷⁹ Bryher, ‘A German School of Film,’ *Close Up*, VI - 2 (February 1930) 128-133.

reality that is apparent to the child'.⁸⁰ While it is a commentary on the film's narrative, this sentence channels Bryher's own disappointment with school life and the language used to narrate Nancy's experiences in Downwood in *Development*. Nancy's queerness and rejection of Downwood's oppressive regime excludes her from the girls' internal structures. Despite the fact that she laments the time she has lost, she fails to assimilate the stereotypes that have been imposed on her. Compared to her miserable experience at a girls' boarding school Bryher's brother John Ellerman records his own impression of English public schools in his *Why Do They Like It?* where despite the initial difficulties of the school hierarchy, his protagonist James Freeman forges a strong friendship with the rest of the boys. The same juxtaposition between the male and female experience of the school environment informs Bryher's dismay at the male dominance in the mixed school in *Fight of the Teria*.⁸¹ Despite her marginal role, the girl in the film, Daniela, reinforces her femininity because she 'can run faster and climb better than the boys'.⁸² In its conclusion the text reveals yet another of film's didactic functions: it is a 'demonstration of German school mentality as opposed to English'.⁸³ The film enables a sociological comparison between the mentality of English and German schools, while it raises questions about the gender dynamics in educational institutions across Europe. Bryher underscores the film's educational quality not as part of a teaching methodology but this time as a document, a study of how schools could be run.

Bryher's reflections on the German film industry's development mark the beginning and the end of her contributions to the journal. The author begins her discussions of German film in the first issue of *Close Up* and publishes her last article 'What shall you do in the war?' in the journal's issue of June 1933.⁸⁴ Bryher's final article in *Close Up* is an overview of the

⁸⁰ Ibid. 129.

⁸¹ Ibid. 130.

⁸² Ibid. 130.

⁸³ Ibid. 133.

⁸⁴ Bryher, 'What Shall You Do in the War?' *Close Up*, X - 2 (June 1933) 188-192.

film industry's faith under the prospects of the National Socialist party's rise in Germany. It reports the rise of populism, the suppression of ethnic minorities in German society, censorship on foreign publications such as the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Nation*, and the burning of books.⁸⁵ Less a film review rather than a socio-political commentary, the article functions as a warning to the English society, who remains oblivious of the rising threat on the continent. The author laments Pabst's exile as all of his films are banned from Germany.⁸⁶ Social cleansing is suggested in the article's observations on the dwindling number of studio workers and the forced exile of anyone who has worked with Pabst.⁸⁷ As part of Bryher's social commentary, film and film production become metaphors for intellectual freedom that is threatened by the new political regime. Parallels are drawn between the development of experimental film and small film societies, and the resistance to populist ideas and the effort to 'raise respect for intellectual liberty'.⁸⁸ Film culture's diversity in terms of national cinemas, techniques, filmmakers' nationalities and narrative content is an antidote to social and political conformity. German film becomes the first cinematic movement that allows Bryher to intertwine her social concerns with her understanding of the film medium and its functions. She relates her opinions of society and politics of early 1930s Europe to German films' narrative topics and depiction of human psyche. Her three autobiographical novels and her articles on German cinema articulate the same concerns about school systems and women's place in society. Nancy comments on war-torn London in *Two Selves* in the same way Bryher's reviews of Pabst's films focus on the depiction of post-war society. As her final article focuses on the rise of populist ideas in Germany, the text serves as a foreboding of the upcoming political events that led to World War II. Therefore, the development of German film and its most notable figures help shape the author's approach to film analysis early on in her engagement with the new art

⁸⁵ Ibid. 188-189.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 189.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 189.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 192.

form. This approach translates into her writing on other film movements.

Hollywood: An Industry of Conventions

A journal on film theory, film criticism, and film production, *Close Up* turned its critical eye to Hollywood filmmaking as well. Its comparisons of Hollywood films to European cinema deemed Hollywood inferior to the artistic and technical accomplishments of German and Soviet filmmakers. *Close Up*'s juxtaposition of European filmmaking and Hollywood conventions found its way into Bryher's articles and their reflections on education and film spectatorship. Despite her main focus was European art cinema, Bryher dedicated three articles to Hollywood films and commented on individual films in her other *Close Up* texts on education and depictions of war on film. These reflections, combined with the author's observations on American society and sound film, outline the change in Bryher's outlook on American filmmaking and the Hollywood genre conventions that govern it across her contributions to *Close Up*.

Bryher's commentary on filmmaking in America begins with the article 'The War from Three Angles'.⁸⁹ A comparison of cinematic depictions of World War I, the text draws on examples of American, British, and German filmmaking. The article is a critique of national and international perceptions of the war and its consequences, its representation in national and international media, and people's overall reception of the war effort. Bryher writes that it is 'inevitable... that the first authentic comment on the War should come from America' because American society was not involved in the war as 'personally' as European nations.⁹⁰ America's distance from the events that led to the war therefore enable American filmmakers to objectively criticise it.⁹¹ King Vidor's *The Big Parade* (1925) exemplifies the American

⁸⁹ Bryher, 'The War from Three Angles,' *Close Up*, I - 1 (July 1927) 16-22.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 16.

⁹¹ Ibid. 16.

objective perception of World War I. Although in this first article the author's technical knowledge of filmmaking is not as detailed as in her later texts, she praises the film for the 'greatness' of its understanding of war.⁹² The fear and chaos of the war period are related through the film's depiction of movement and its 'clear photography', which accurately mediates the 'sheer mass hypnotism' of the enlistment and the 'cruelty' of women who consider 'war as romance instead of reality'.⁹³ The lack of understanding of the war, the circumstances that led to it, and its consequences indicates the need for 'real education for people' to replace the process of the 'standard fitting of a few facts and no real thought to hundreds of schoolchildren'.⁹⁴ The critique of war is a familiar theme that emerges in Bryher's second novel *Two Selves* where the protagonist Nancy claims that war could have been avoided through innovative teaching methodologies and compulsory education.⁹⁵ Nancy's opinion feeds into Bryher's own reflections about post-war reality and informs her perception of cinematic interpretations of the war. As a theme that extends across the author's fiction and non-fiction texts, it indicates the author's wider scepticism against the circumstances that led to World War I and the government's decisions, as well as society's general misunderstanding of the war effort.

The discourse on cinematic depictions of war begins with Bryher's discussion of the 'disappointing' British film *Mons* (1926) and the German film *Emden* (*Unsere Emden*, 1926).⁹⁶ Dismissive of Walter Summer's *Mons* with its 'blurred and out of focus' cinematography, the author claims that this is a film based on 'sentimentality' that one would not encounter even in a Hollywood film.⁹⁷ Despite its attempts to depict British soldiers' courage, the narrative and viewing experience are spoiled by the film's photography and sentimental treatment of

⁹² Ibid. 17.

⁹³ Ibid. 17.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 17.

⁹⁵ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 222-225.

⁹⁶ Bryher, 'The War from Three Angles,' 18, 20-21.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 18-19.

characters.⁹⁸ By contrast, the narrative of *Emden* captures the author's attention with the 'suspense' of its first scenes before the declaration of war.⁹⁹ However, its treatment of the war is also disparaged: though realistic, *Emden*'s numerous battle sequences never contribute to the film's artistic effects or educational mission.¹⁰⁰ The author's first article considers Vidor's *The Big Parade* to be the most successful in reflecting her ideas about war, society, and the need for education.¹⁰¹ Having seen the film seven times, Bryher concludes that the overall impression is one of 'courage' and 'greatness', especially in the opening scenes.¹⁰² Described as the 'most authentic comment on the War', the film discourages romantic interpretations of war and is the 'best lesson to those with eyes to read of the necessity of real education'.¹⁰³ If the statements about the war in her novels hint at her scepticism towards the Establishment's decisions and the intergenerational difference of opinions between Nancy and her father, this passage of her first film article develops the author's critique of the 'sheer mass hypnotism' of the enlistment process and society's incomprehension of the events and decision that led to the war.¹⁰⁴ Bryher's praise for Vidor's film continues in her sequel to her article on war films, 'The War from More Angles', published in October 1927.¹⁰⁵ This text once again uses the depiction of war in *The Big Parade* as a counterpoint to English interpretations of the war years on screen. Films like *The Somme* (1927) and Walter Summers's *Battle of the Falklands (The Battle of Coronel and Falkland Islands, 1927)* present a view of the war for the 'unimaginative classes': 'Heroic and nicely tidied up. Pleasant to watch but completely unreal'.¹⁰⁶ Since both *Two Selves* and the article are published following the events of World War I, the texts signal the

⁹⁸ Ibid. 20.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 21.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 21.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 17.

¹⁰² Ibid. 17.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 17.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 17.

¹⁰⁵ Bryher, 'The War from More Angles,' *Close Up*, I - 4 (October 1927) 44-48.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 47.

author's concern that valuable lessons have been ignored. Society's perception of the war years and films' glamorisation of these events have prevented a more serious analysis of the circumstances that have led to the war in the first place. The hardships of war have been overlooked in favour of a fictionalised representation of the war period that nevertheless appeals to audiences. Therefore, the article serves as Bryher's warning against similar future events and decisions, and further reinforces the importance of her insistence on educational reform and the adoption of new social and gender stereotypes.

Praise for Hollywood films also appears in Bryher's recommendations for suitable film titles for children where she disapproves of the 'American educational papers' and their recommendations that children be taken to see only appropriate films like Lewis Milestone's *Two Arabian Knights* (1927).¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the list includes several American films like Cecil B. DeMille's *The King of Kings* (1927) and two documentaries by Robert Flaherty, *Nanook of the North* (1922) and *Moana* (1926).¹⁰⁸ Although they were produced in America and by American filmmakers, these films are not representative of the genre conventions that Bryher criticises in her later articles on Hollywood. Flaherty's documentaries suit her agenda for film's educational mission and its ability to introduce audiences to cultures and societies they have never encountered. Bryher's early articles in *Close Up* signal an admiration of American films and their choice of narratives that fit into the journal's wider critical engagement with American filmmaking. Kenneth Macpherson's editorial from September 1927 praises *The Big Parade* and *Emdem* for their 'historic... geographic and dramatic feeling'.¹⁰⁹ His editorial of October 1927 continues to defend American filmmaking by claiming that 'American comedies are better than French comedies, and infinitely better than German ones'.¹¹⁰ Although he concedes that some American films are 'incredibly bad',

¹⁰⁷ Bryher, 'Films for Children,' 17.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 19-20.

¹⁰⁹ Kenneth Macpherson, 'As Is,' *Close Up*, I - 3 (September 1927) 13-14.

¹¹⁰ Kenneth Macpherson, 'As Is,' *Close Up*, I - 4 (October 1927) 9.

comedies are America's strength in film production.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, these films are marked by a certain sense of sentimentality that remains incomprehensible for the European mind.¹¹² This 'damp and treacly rehash of 1880-ish yellow-black novelish eyewash' is not enough for Western European audiences who need 'richer fare'.¹¹³ Macpherson's delineation between the expectations of American and European viewers can be aligned to Bryher's own analysis of American and British audiences' perception of Hollywood films in a wider context of the journal's opinions of American filmmaking.

In February 1928, *Close Up* published 'Defence of Hollywood', Bryher's first article that focused explicitly on Hollywood films.¹¹⁴ Although it remarks on individual filmmakers' and actors' talents, the article is a comparison between the mind-sets of British and American audiences. Bryher's reflections on the social differences between the East and the West coasts, and their preferences to film genres, reveal the influence of the author's experiences in America on her understanding of Hollywood filmmaking. In its opening, the text concedes to the levels of 'falseness and sham psychology' that many British critics recognise in American films of the 1920s, a result of British society's insufficient understanding of the American mind-set.¹¹⁵ The social stereotypes from the East and the West described in the article are similar to the rigid social structures and habits recorded in Bryher's *West* where she writes: 'Here, it seemed, one had to do things correctly or not at all'.¹¹⁶ Although Nancy hopes to encounter an open-minded society that is free from stereotypes and conventions, she realises that American society simply adheres to different conventions. The same idea is carried through to her journal article on American film that claims it is impossible to understand American films unless one is aware

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 9.

¹¹² *Ibid.* 10.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 10.

¹¹⁴ Bryher, 'Defence of Hollywood,' *Close Up*, II - 2 (February 1928) 44-51.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 44.

¹¹⁶ Bryher, *West*, 47.

of the organisation of American society and its psychology.¹¹⁷ The Easterner's social habits and mind-set are different from those of the Westerner.¹¹⁸ The Easterner 'approximates to Europe, talks a far better English than can usually be heard in London, and suffers to the point of sterility from over-education'.¹¹⁹ By contrast, the Westerner is 'child-like, impressionable, superficial'.¹²⁰ The multitude of American films are produced by the 'Westerner', who assigns 'triumph' to the West and punishes the 'Eastern girl' for her 'individuality'.¹²¹ The Eastern girl and her individuality are synonymous to Nancy and her freedom of imagination. As Nancy is forced into a stereotype that she considers dated and inappropriate, the typical Eastern girl from American films needs to accept the social order of the West.

The depiction of such predictable character stereotypes is underscored by a technical mediocrity that characterises American filmmaking in comparison to European art films.¹²² English critics' inability to recognise the social stereotypes and the films' limited artistic merits stems from their tendency to 'see only with the eyes of their own conventions', unable to understand the origin of American films' repetitive narratives.¹²³ Any fictional event depicted on film that does not fit their ideas about the world is false and thus, an example of inept filmmaking. Although Bryher recognises the limitations of entertainment films and the emerging repetitive formats, at this stage she considers American films to be the grounds for more complicated experimentation with the new medium. Unlike other British critics, she is not dismissive of these films: they are entertainment films that appeal to mass audiences but not to experienced connoisseurs of film art, like the filmmakers and critics of *Close Up*'s network. Her initial article on American film also marks her doubt of British film criticism,

¹¹⁷ Bryher, 'Defence of Hollywood,' 45.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 48.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 48.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 48.

¹²¹ Ibid. 48-49.

¹²² Ibid. 45-47.

¹²³ Ibid. 50.

which she deems ignorant of the narratives American society would easily understand. While these early remarks on British film criticism's superficiality are sparse, they are indicative of Bryher's views of critics' misapprehension of film's properties and purpose, and their misconception of what audiences would understand and enjoy as viewers.

However, as her favouritism of European art films with social purpose increases, her views on American films, and particularly Hollywood conventions, evolve. The author's critique of Hollywood's production techniques and wasteful approach to filmmaking begins with an interview of the actress and screenwriter Anita Loos (1888-1981) from April 1928.¹²⁴ The studios' inability to plan film productions means that 'fifty thousand feet of film' are taken as 'a sort of rehearsal'.¹²⁵ Filming starts only when they have taken footage 'enough to make three full length pictures'.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, Loos claims that there is some 'hope' in the 'quickies' produced by independent companies, which are more likely to follow strict plans because of their limited time schedules, recourses, and production budgets.¹²⁷ Despite independent films' promise of 'hope' for artistic development of different national industries and cinematic practices, Hollywood studios disregard production values and insist on films' conformity to narrative and stylistic conventions, not for audiences' entertainment but for the sake of the rapid production of economically successful films in America and abroad.¹²⁸

Bryher's article of two parts, 'The Hollywood Code I' and 'The Hollywood Code II', fully develops the author's opinions of the consequences of Hollywood film's popularity for both English films and film art. Published in September 1931, the first part of the article comments on Hollywood's use of sound film technology and outlines the reception of Hollywood sound films in Britain and on the continent, particularly in France and Germany¹²⁹.

¹²⁴ Bryher, 'An Interview: Anita Loos,' *Close Up*, II - 4 (April 1928) 12-15.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* 13.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 13.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 14.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* 13-14.

¹²⁹ Bryher, 'The Hollywood Code (I),' 234-238.

The popularity of Hollywood films is connected to their use of sound technology and silent art film's decline.¹³⁰ Since no sound film of the early 1930s develops 'lighting', 'photography', and 'story' equally, Hollywood films have reverted to the 'code of the pre-war era'.¹³¹ The author claims that serious topics like the 'avalanche, the famine... the present economic crisis' have been replaced with 'bigness... illicit eroticism... sex appeal'.¹³² The European demand for Hollywood films that Bryher identifies can be linked to the costliness of sound technology that led to a dip in national film production, especially in pre-war France¹³³. Upon the onset of World War I, the French film industry collapsed and American films poured into the domestic market.¹³⁴ Hollywood films' popularity in France in the war period encouraged a number of Hollywood studios to establish branches in France, and French filmmakers were sent to Los Angeles to study the filmmaking practices and industry organisation there.¹³⁵ Bryher summarises this complicated dynamic between the French film industry and Hollywood in her remark that French film critics seem to 'worship' Hollywood films.¹³⁶ Bryher's account confirms that on the continent Hollywood films were desirable not so much for their artistic value but for their popularity with audiences, and their simplistic and repetitive narratives¹³⁷. Although German society's war-time hardships could provide an interesting subject for Hollywood films and a deviation from familiar plots, political instabilities in the late 1930s made it difficult to portray German life on American screens.¹³⁸ However, even prior to political changes that led to World War II, a surge of German filmmakers and stars emigrated to Hollywood. Ernst Lubitsch moved to Los Angeles in 1922 and William Wyler arrived in

¹³⁰ Ibid. 234.

¹³¹ Ibid. 236-237.

¹³² Ibid. 236-237.

¹³³ Ibid. 234.

¹³⁴ Andrew Kelly, *Cinema and the Great War* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) 101-102.

¹³⁵ Ibid. 102.

¹³⁶ Bryher, 'The Hollywood Code (I),' 234.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 234-235.

¹³⁸ Kelly, *Cinema and the Great War*, 128.

1923, followed by the Austro-Hungarians Josef von Sternberg, Fritz Lang, and Billy Wilder, who all went on to contribute to German Expressionism's impact on Hollywood filmmaking later in the 1940s.

As European countries attempted to resist the domination of the Hollywood film industry, Hollywood's insistence on mindless entertainment blurred the intelligence of British audiences and aspiring filmmakers until they stopped questioning its conventions.¹³⁹ According to Bryher's article, the shared language and sound technology enabled Hollywood distributors to import their films in Britain irrespective of the import costs or the films' quality¹⁴⁰. Bryher's opinions on Hollywood's effects on the British film industry may be examined in the context of the early years following the passing of the Cinematograph Act of 1927, which forced British distributors to show a certain percentage of British films regardless of their quality.¹⁴¹ As the Act came in effect on April 1st, 1928, the years immediately following its announcement were formative for the establishment, organisation and formalisation of the British film industry. The first five years of the Act foregrounded the founding of over two hundred new production companies and growth in film studio facilities, and film production in the country rose from 14 per cent in 1928 to 22 in 1932.¹⁴² The Act also coincided with the rise of sound film technology, as Bryher rightly points out in her Hollywood articles. While November 1928 saw the production of nineteen silent films, a year later the number of production had halved but all films were talkies.¹⁴³ Therefore, the Act was not only a protectionist measure that aimed to revive the limited film production in Britain, but also consolidated the establishment of fully-equipped production studios near Islington, Shepperton, and Twickenham, and created employment opportunities in a flourishing and

¹³⁹ Bryher, 'The Hollywood Code (I),' 236.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 234.

¹⁴¹ Steve Chibnail, *Quota Quickies: The Birth of the British 'B' Film* (London: BFi, 2007) 1.

¹⁴² Ibid. 4, 18.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 3.

organised film industry.¹⁴⁴ As the Act's main aim was to encourage British film production and promote British cultural values against the waywardness of American movies, the films produced in this period, known as the 'quota quickies', were less concerned with artistic experimentation than with meeting the exhibitors' and the audiences' demands.

Early British films' lack of artistic flair comes under fire in the second part of Bryher's article on Hollywood. Published in December 1931, 'The Hollywood Code (II)', connects Bryher's opinions of Hollywood to her critique of British films' conformity to Hollywood narrative and style conventions.¹⁴⁵ Bryher recognises that unlike Europeans, American society still perceives film as entertainment and not as an art form, and this translates into British society along with Hollywood's popularity.¹⁴⁶ Rarely discussed among the middle classes, film is still regarded as mass entertainment, an attitude that threatens the proliferation and indeed existence of Hollywood filmmaking.¹⁴⁷ Aware of audience's attitudes, Hollywood studios rely on familiar conventions that allow no 'room for the experimental mind' to ensure economic success and spectators' attention¹⁴⁸. This approach produces enough films to meet popular demand but keeps the existing conventions of narrative and cinematic techniques intact. As Hollywood filmmaking becomes the epitome of commercial filmmaking, the author pins it against the European art films produced in Germany, France, and Soviet Russia, and praises their superior understanding of the medium and their experimentation with avant-garde cinematic practices.

Intertwined with *Close Up* critics' thoughts on sound film, other opinions of Hollywood films in the journal range from praise of its technical accomplishments to comparisons between its tendency for mass entertainment and the artistic properties of

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 1, 19-21.

¹⁴⁵ Bryher, 'The Hollywood Code (II),' *Close Up*, VIII-4, (December 1931) 281.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 280-282.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 281.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 281.

European avant-garde films. These opinions are reflected in *Close Up* articles published as early as 1928. The opposition between the artistic film and entertainment film is captured by Dorothy Richardson's article 'The Thoroughly Popular Film'.¹⁴⁹ Although the article never mentions specific Hollywood film titles, it juxtaposes the 'territory of the Films' and the 'territory of the Movies' as metaphors for film art and film entertainment.¹⁵⁰ Richardson questions the future of the 'Movies' should their funding be withdrawn and suggests that the 'Films' would be just as popular, should they be exhibited for free.¹⁵¹ A few months later, in June 1928, Wilbur Needham's article 'The Future of the American Film' laments American films' simplified narratives.¹⁵² Topics such as 'Frank discussion of sex, the infrequent beauty of the human body... and all hints at the radical government or sociology' have disappeared from American films.¹⁵³ As the most original films are produced in Germany, Russia and France, American films become 'driveling' and 'less honest' in their depictions of reality.¹⁵⁴ Needham echoes Bryher's suggestions of films for children in his evocation of the films of Fritz Lang and F.W. Murnau, as well as Robert Flaherty's documentaries.¹⁵⁵ The opposition between film art versus film entertainment is captured even by the journal's Hollywood correspondent, the screen writers Clifford Howard (1868-1942), whose article 'Sapient Hollywood' states that Hollywood is 'short on Art - art with a capital A - but is undeniably long on the most essential of all cinema arts - showmanship'.¹⁵⁶ Similar to Bryher's comments on studios' desire to appease audiences in favour of economic success, Howard suggests that Hollywood's showmanship depends on its ability to make the audience believe anything with a level of seriousness that releases it from any responsibility over the realism of the film's

¹⁴⁹ Dorothy Richardson, 'The Thoroughly Popular Film,' *Close Up*, II - 4 (April 1928) 40-50.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 47.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* 47.

¹⁵² Wilbur Needham, 'The Future of the American Film,' *Close Up*, II - 6 (June 1928) 45-54.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* 45.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 46.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 47.

¹⁵⁶ Clifford Howard, 'Sapient Hollywood,' *Close Up*, VII - 6 (December 1930) 426.

narrative.¹⁵⁷ Howard further demonstrates Hollywood's popularity in his 'Hollywood in Fact'.¹⁵⁸ Just as he juxtaposed the art film versus the entertainment film in his earlier article, Howard indicates the decline of the film journal in favour of the 'fan magazine' in America.¹⁵⁹ The popularity of fan magazines is linked to the prominence of Hollywood news, gossip, and film reviews in weeklies and monthlies, unrelated to film.¹⁶⁰ Hollywood's extravagance fades, its daily workings cease to attract readers and become part of the mundane reality of life.¹⁶¹ Fan magazines trivialise the film industry. As its simplicity is assimilated in daily life, Hollywood poses a threat to society's intelligence with its insistence on conventions and entertainment over critical engagement and topical content.

As Bryher's articles mirror the journal's opinion of Hollywood cinema, they provide insight into the reasons for the abrupt change in the author's opinions of American films. Her approach to American filmmaking combines the scepticism of some *Close Up* critics' ideas about Hollywood and an indication that generic filmmaking may be replaced by artistic experimentation should studios allow for it. Although she recognises that genre conventions and light entertainment are at the core of Hollywood films' success, she admires their early treatment of historical narratives. Her position is informed not only by her preference for narratives of social hardship and historical events but also by her insistence on art film's superiority. As she realises the threats posed by the complacency of American and particularly Hollywood film genres, and their repetitive formats and plots, the author fears their impact on British films, British critics and audiences' understanding of film, and the film industry in Britain.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 427.

¹⁵⁸ Clifford Howard, 'Hollywood in Fact,' *Close Up*, IX - 2 (June 1932) 87-91.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 88.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 88.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 88.

British cinema: A Discussion on Censorship, Film Production, and Spectatorship

Although as a publication *Close Up* was based in Switzerland and never limited its content to British films, international film critics and filmmakers considered it to be an Anglophone journal throughout its entire run. The journal's core founders and initial contributors were British, including Bryher, Macpherson and Richardson, aided by the expatriate American H.D., still married to Richard Aldington at this moment, and with regular contributions by Blakeston and Herring. When Virginia Woolf approached *Close Up* to re-publish her article 'The Cinema' in 1927, she was under the impression that the journal was foreign.¹⁶² Once she realised that *Close Up* was not a foreign publication, she retracted her request under the claim that *Nation and the Athenaeum* would not allow the article to be published in another British journal.¹⁶³ However later on, the journal attracted the attention of a number of international critics and contributors such as the journal's correspondent for Germany, the Hungarian-born photographer and editor Andor Kraszna-Krausz (1904-1989), its Russian correspondent Pera Attasheva (1900-1965), and the correspondent for Austria, the German writer and scholar Trude Weiss (1908-1989).

Like other *Close Up* critics, Bryher celebrated European filmmakers and their work. Her admiration of European cinema, however, was intertwined with a critique of the British film industry, its development and government censorship's influence on British cinema-goers' perception of film art. Unlike her attitude towards American films and Hollywood, Bryher's opinion of British cinema never changed throughout the course of her involvement with *Close Up*. Her articles not only indicate the faults of British films but also make recommendations for their improvement and the development of amateur film production in Britain. Alongside her discussion of the faults of the British film industry, Bryher reflected on the effects of

¹⁶² Virginia Woolf to Kenneth Macpherson, July 10, 1927, Bryher Papers, Box 170, Folder 5672.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

ensorship and film production legislation in Britain, audience preferences, and the education of future British filmmakers. Therefore, even her critique of British film production and film criticism was dominated by her major concerns about inter-war society, methods of education, and her conviction that film could prompt resolutions to such problems.

Bryher's scepticism towards British films is echoed by comments by other *Close Up* critics in the journal's early years. In his first editorial in July 1927, Macpherson articulates his concerns over the 'English revival' in film: he claims that despite the film industry's attempts, there is little hope for its detachment from the conventions it follows and British society's 'nonchalant' and 'clownish' understanding of art additionally hinders innovative and avant-garde filmmaking.¹⁶⁴ His defence of small-budget productions, which would result in a 'film as noble as anything you wish to see' only on a 'hundred pounds' recognises that conventions and 'mediocrity' spoil any chances for artistic film production in Britain at the time.¹⁶⁵ Macpherson's commentary on conventions' influence over British filmmaking pre-empts Bryher's reflections on Hollywood's impact on British cinema in later issues of *Close Up*. Like Macpherson, Bryher connects the poor use of film's properties in British filmmaking to the influence of conventions and censorship by launching a critique on British films' depiction of World War I.¹⁶⁶ Despite their attempts to document the war-time experience, films like *Mons* (1926) and *The Battle of the Falklands* (also known as *The Battle of Coronel and Falkland Islands*, 1927) enforce the idea that the war is an 'elaborate and permissible adventure'.¹⁶⁷

Both *Mons* and *The Battle of the Falklands* were part of a tradition of war reconstructions produced by British Instructional Films after the war and released at the moment of the introduction of the Cinematograph Act of 1927, when films about the war were

¹⁶⁴ Macpherson, 'As Is,' 8.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 10.

¹⁶⁶ Bryher, 'The War from Three Angles,' 16-22; 'The War from More Angles,' 44-48.

¹⁶⁷ Bryher, 'The War from More Angles,' 45.

rarely produced.¹⁶⁸ The Act encouraged the increase in production of films with more popular themes at the expense of quality narratives or artistic experimentation.¹⁶⁹ Despite the fact that *The Battle of the Coronel and Falkland Islands* incorporates real settings, as Bryher herself points out in her article, Andrew Kelly's account of the films of the period admits the 'poor technical work, unrealistic uniforms and melodramatic acting' in the film.¹⁷⁰ Although Bryher never dismisses *The Battle of the Coronel and Falkland Islands* completely, she remarks on the film's lack of realism in the depiction of 'men and women whose lives were broken and whose homes were destroyed'.¹⁷¹ Therefore, cinematic reconstructions of the war period never apply the medium's mechanism in order to depict the reality of everyday life, people's suffering or the war effort. Such negation of realistic depictions of historical events positions British films in stark contrast to Bryher's own ideas about the purpose of the film medium and its ability to record reality. While Macpherson focuses his arguments on individual examples of British filmmaking's mediocrity, Bryher identifies faults with the entire British film industry. As a result, her essays on the depictions of the war effort on British screens overlook films that respond to the Act's requirement that British films are 'adequately patriotic' but also draw on individual filmmakers' anti-war sentiments and include limited recreations of war-time hardships, such as Adrian Brunel's *Blighty* (1927).¹⁷²

A Gainsborough production scripted by Eliot Stannard (1888-1944) and Ivor Montagu (1904-1984), *Blighty* follows the Villiers' family experience of the war. The Villiers' son Robin and their chauffeur David are both sent to war. Although Robin is killed at the front, David is promoted through the ranks and eventually returns to Britain to marry the Villiers' daughter

¹⁶⁸ Kelly, *Cinema and the Great War*, 61.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 61.

¹⁷⁰ Bryher, 'The War from More Angles,' 45; Kelly, *Cinema and the Great War*, 61.

¹⁷¹ Bryher, 'The War from More Angles,' 46.

¹⁷² Josephine Botting, "'A war film with a difference': Adrian Brunel's *Blighty* and Negotiation within the British Studio System of the Late Silent Period,' *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 12 - 2 (2015) 157-158.

Ann. Christine Gledhill's analysis of the film remarks on its depiction of the 'reorganisation of social boundaries' prompted by the changing social dynamics following the Armistice: David and Ann's 'heterosexual romance to refigure class relations' brings together the aristocratic Villiers family and workers from a nearby building site in an Armistice-Day montage.¹⁷³ A reference to the people's suffering caused by the war, *Blighty* demonstrates the British film industry's attempt to engage with the realities of the war period beyond the depiction of the battlefield. Besides the protagonists' experience, the film also focuses on the war's effect on domestic life as Lady Villiers has to deal with a stack of ration cards while a map on the library wall chronicles the war's development¹⁷⁴. However, in the context of Bryher's opinions of British war films, even a film like *Blighty* with its inclusion of anti-war sentiments, the realities of war-time life, and the post-war renegotiation of social dynamics, would be an unfit account of the period because of its emphasis on the idealised patriotism she dismisses in her very first *Close Up* article.¹⁷⁵ After he informs the Villiers family that he has joined the army, the chauffeur Marshall treats his conscription as a great adventure. Similarly, following the outbreak of war, the family's son Robin abandons his studies in Germany and also signs up for the army. The characters' readiness and sense of duty and adventure as they sign up for the army place *Blighty* in the context of other films that treat the war as a romantic adventure and not a traumatic experience that results from the Establishment's mistakes and society's complacency.¹⁷⁶

Although her essays comment little on the technology of British film production, they point out its weaknesses in photography and narrative. Despite their attempts, British filmmakers fail to implement film's recording properties for educational or scientific purposes.

¹⁷³ Christine Gledhill, *Reframing British Cinema: Between Restraint and Passion, 1918-1928* (London: BFi, 2003) 28-29.

¹⁷⁴ Botting, "'A film with a difference': Adrian Brunel's *Blighty* and Negotiation within the British Studio System of the Late Silent Period,' 163/

¹⁷⁵ Bryher, 'The War from Three Angles,' 16-17.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 16-17.

Their lack of artistic merit is linked to censorship and the critics' control over British audience's detached attitude to the arts. *Close Up*'s discussions on censorship's effect on film production and distribution of imported films provide context for the scepticism of Bryher's articles. Macpherson's editorial from February 1929 describes British censorship regulations as 'England's Prohibition Law'.¹⁷⁷ After its establishment in 1912, the British Board of Film Censors imposes a trade censorship that forbids films from addressing a number of topics like health, personal and general physiology, psychology, hygiene, and sex.¹⁷⁸ The same editorial includes six extracts from the Board's restrictions on demoralising film content.¹⁷⁹ The Board restricted film content with the belief that it ensured the protection of British viewers' purity and moral character from the potential vices that might invade their minds through film.¹⁸⁰

Robert Herring also discusses censorship on the pages of *Close Up* in his article 'The English Censorship', which documents a discussion of film censorship at an 'informal non-party meeting' in the House of Commons after three prominent films were banned from British screens.¹⁸¹ In an unprecedented case where the government took a stance on a particular film shown by a private film society and not a public cinema theatre, the Lord Chamberlain banned Vsevolod Pudovkin's *Mother*.¹⁸² A popular film in the journal's discussion of Soviet film and censorship, *Mother* also appears in Bryher's articles on films for children where she laments its limited distribution in Britain.¹⁸³ Herring also remarks that 'someone... also stirred up a little fuss' about Pudovkin's subsequent film *Storm over Asia* (1928) and Noel M. Smith's *The Night Patrol* (1926) through the London Film Society.¹⁸⁴ Herring's article reports the formation of a new committee for film reviews after a number of prominent figures in the British film

¹⁷⁷ Kenneth Macpherson, 'As Is,' *Close Up*, IV - 2 (February 1929) 5.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 6-7.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 9.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 5, 10-13.

¹⁸¹ Robert Herring, 'The English Censorship,' *Close Up*, VI - 4 (April 1930) 269-272.

¹⁸² *Ibid.* 269.

¹⁸³ Bryher, 'Films for Children' 16-20.

¹⁸⁴ Herring, 'The English Censorship,' 270.

industry voiced concerns over censorship's damaging influence on film's development.¹⁸⁵ As the journal's critics document film censorship's development in the 1920s and early 1930s, their texts also highlight censorship anomalies such as the House of Commons' interference with the private screenings of a film society. Although the British film industry was governed by self-imposed censorship regulations, individual films like Pudovkin's works attracted the government's attention. This not only prevented the film industry's progress but also thwarted audiences' perceptions of international film. As a result, viewers often saw sanitised versions of what the censors considered films should be rather than the original copies.¹⁸⁶

Although published earlier than Herring's article, Bryher's article 'Films for Children' lists a number of film titles that were edited according to censorship regulations or entirely removed from British screens.¹⁸⁷ While the author's critique of film censorship is not as explicit in her earlier articles as it is in her later texts, the article highlights films that sparked controversial discussions of the effects of film censorship in Britain. Film's status as a popular pastime for the working classes in the early 1900s prompted anxieties over the propriety of film content and the social environment and dangers that cinemas encouraged.¹⁸⁸ Similarly, Hollywood's prominence on British screens introduced debates over the 'unadulterated... decadence' of Hollywood films and their influence over British youth, particularly young women.¹⁸⁹ The urge to exert control over the films exhibited in Britain led to the establishment of the Cinematograph Act of 1909 with the initial purpose to grant local authorities the right to qualify buildings as cinemas and enforce safety regulations.¹⁹⁰ However, its wording was interpreted as a confirmation of local authorities' right to issue verdicts on films' suitability for

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. 270-271.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 271.

¹⁸⁷ Bryher, 'Films for Children,' 16-20.

¹⁸⁸ Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema*, 1.

¹⁸⁹ Chibnail, *Quota Quickies*, 1.

¹⁹⁰ Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema*, 1; Anthony Aldgate, *Best of British: Cinema and Society from 1930 to the present* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999) 13.

audiences.¹⁹¹ As local authorities' influence over film content increased, the film industry itself obtained the government's approval to establish a self-regulatory institution: the British Board of Film Censors, founded in 1913.¹⁹² Although its involvement with the film industry was still liberal in the 1910s, its engagement with international cinema and sound film throughout the 1920s and 1930s became increasingly inflammatory.¹⁹³ A film listed in Bryher's article on films for children, *The King of Kings* was a 1927 Pathé production, imported in Britain after a successful run in the United States.¹⁹⁴ The film's distribution in Britain became problematic because of its representation of religion, and depictions of Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene.¹⁹⁵ As cited in Macpherson's editorial of 1929, in its very first annual report the BBFC explicitly rejected films that in any way materialised religious figures or events¹⁹⁶. Aware of the potential censorship restrictions, Pathé decided not to submit the film for the BBFC's consideration first but instead arranged a number of private screenings for every denomination of the British clergy and polled them on the film's suitability for general audiences.¹⁹⁷ After the film was successfully shown in London in December 1927, other local authorities passed it and *The King of Kings* was shown in 153 local authority areas out of 160 by 1931.¹⁹⁸ This incident highlights the anomalies that resulted from the BBFC's meticulous restrictions on film exhibition and the inconveniences they caused for the industry as exhibitors and producers struggled to import and show films that were popular with audiences elsewhere. Therefore, the BBFC not only controlled the film industry but actually hindered its artistic development and economic success.

Although *Close Up* criticises the BBFC's agenda in general, the journal pays

¹⁹¹ Aldgate, *Best of British*, 13.

¹⁹² Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema*, 1.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* 1.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 32.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 32.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 32; Macpherson, 'As Is,' 5.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 32.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 32.

particular attention to the campaign against Soviet films. The Board's actions against the import and distribution of Soviet films in Britain can be traced to British anxieties over Bolshevism and the censor's sensitivity over any depictions of the October revolution on screen.¹⁹⁹ As Rebecca Beasley and Philip Bullock remark in their study of the British perception of the Russian, the British interest in Russian culture was provoked by the political and diplomatic tensions that surrounded the two countries' relations in the end of the nineteenth and beginning of twentieth centuries.²⁰⁰ This interest was further justified by the need to know the 'enemy' recently defeated in the Crimean War but which still posed a threat to the British colonies in Asia and the Far East.²⁰¹ Following the British involvement on the side of the White forces in the Russian Civil War, tensions in the countries' relationship continued despite Britain's recognition of the Soviet Union in 1926.²⁰² Despite the political context, Russophiles and Russian expats imported a number of cultural trends that exerted considerable influence over British perceptions of Russian culture and also the formation of British modernism. These included the Chekhovian drama, the psychological 'Dostoyevskyan' novel, and the montage film.²⁰³

Starting from 1919 and well into the 1920s, the BBFC censored a number of Soviet films, which were either banned from British screens or edited according to the Board's regulations. The list of Soviet films censored by the BBFC includes *Red Russia*, an anti-Soviet film of unknown origin with added footage of the post-revolutionary conditions in Russia.²⁰⁴ Earlier screenings of the film in Amsterdam in November 1921 caused Communist disturbances.²⁰⁵ The film's run in London in the end of 1925 led to similar events and the film

¹⁹⁹ Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema*, 29.

²⁰⁰ Beasley and Bullock, *Russia in Britain, 1880-1940*, 6.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.* 6.

²⁰² *Ibid.* 6-7.

²⁰³ *Ibid.* 8.

²⁰⁴ Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema*, 29.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 29.

was linked to the nine-day British general strike of May 1926.²⁰⁶ By the time these events occurred, *Battleship Potemkin* was submitted for the Board's verdict. Accounts of the film's screening in Germany in the British press suggested that German cinema audiences took sides on the film's propagandistic mission.²⁰⁷ As the memories from the general strike were still fresh, *Battleship Potemkin*'s release was delayed until 1928 when Ivor Montagu over-turned the BBFC's verdict and the London Film Society screened the film. However, in the same year, Pudovkin's *Mother* arrived in Britain. At this point, Pudovkin's film had already been suppressed in France, Italy and America.²⁰⁸ The film was shown successfully in Germany where it was seen by members of the British press.²⁰⁹ Nevertheless, despite the BBFC's attempts, *Mother* was shown by the London Film Society in October 1928.²¹⁰ At the time of the screening, the BBFC had yet to make a decision on the amended print of the film submitted by the company of Brunel and Montagu.²¹¹ The amended print omitted a number of violent scenes, as well as the final scene, which included an appearance of the workers' flag.²¹² As a result, screenings of Pudovkin's later films like *Storm over Asia* and *The End of St. Petersburg* attracted the attention of Conservative MPs who mounted campaigns against the damaging effects of these films and involved themselves in the policies of the BBFC.²¹³ These are perhaps the events described in Herring's article 'The English Censorship'.²¹⁴

While Bryher never addresses censorship legislation with as much detail as Macpherson or Herring, her articles intertwine the question of film censorship with the problem of education, the audience's ignorance of art film, and the quality of British films. Her

²⁰⁶ Ibid. 29.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. 29.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. 34.

²⁰⁹ Ibid. 34.

²¹⁰ Ibid. 34-35.

²¹¹ Ibid. 35.

²¹² Ibid. 35.

²¹³ James C. Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors: Film Censorship in Britain, 1896-1950* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016) 51.

²¹⁴ Herring, 'The English Censorship,' 269-272.

comments on the connections between film art and education fit into Peter Stead's description of British perceptions of film culture in the 1920s and 1930s.²¹⁵ Stead posits that the close links between educationalists and those interested in film resulted in a strong preference for 'educational' continental films like those produced by German, French and Soviet filmmakers, whose work *Close Up* also favoured.²¹⁶ This trend towards 'educational' films promoted by film societies was at odds with the public's preference for romantic melodramas, character-driven comedies, and historic and imperialist adventure dramas.²¹⁷ While Bryher articulates similar opinions in her articles on European art films and their purpose in education, she never cautions against film's entertainment status. Instead, the new medium's appeal as mass entertainment is key to the new teaching methodologies that she outlines and which continuously draw on the attraction and spectacle of avant-garde practices like Soviet montage. Her defence of avant-garde cinematic practices and European art films can be linked to her critique of British audience's conformity as viewers and the lack of connoisseurship in British society. Following her first two articles on cinematic interpretations of World War I, her reflections on the British film industry turn to a commentary on viewing practices in Britain, audiences' perception of the film medium, film clubs and amateur filmmaking. These articles provide an overview of film's reputation in Britain, and highlight the possibility for its progress as an art form and an industry, as well as the obstacles that legislation and prejudice might impose.

Moving on from her initial suggestions about film as part of a teaching methodologies in schools, Bryher's later articles on film's perception in British society map out her ideas about the expansion of film culture in Britain as part of a broader idea of education. The articles

²¹⁵ Peter Stead, 'Hollywood's Message to the World,' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 1 (1981) 19-32.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Laraine Porter, "'Temporary American Citizens,'" British cinema in the 1920s,' in *The Routledge Companion to British Cinema History*, ed. I.Q. Hunter, Laraine Porter, and Justin Smith (Florence: Taylor and Francis Group: 2017) 36.

‘What Can I Do?’ and ‘What Can I Do? (II)’ from March and May, 1928, explore the role of film clubs and local cinemas in the promotion of the new medium, and their contribution to the formation of the British film industry. The two articles can be examined in the context of the increasing number of cinema theatres in Britain and the rising popularity of cinema-going as a pastime for the working classes. By 1920, there were 157 cinema circuits that operated 787 cinemas.²¹⁸ The establishment of the main cinema circuits was followed by the consolidation of the ABC and Gaumont as the major exhibitors in the 1920s.²¹⁹ The increasing film production and the growing influence of distributor and exhibitor circuits throughout the 1920s led to changes in viewing practices. Once-weekly screenings in multi-public halls were replaced by continuous film projections in multiple cinemas serving local communities, while large cinemas with orchestras and cafés appeared in the West End.²²⁰ However, despite the proliferation of distributor circuits and the numerous new cinema theatres at the time, Bryher notices faults with exhibitors’ choice of films and blames cinemas’ limited programmes for damaging British amateur filmmakers’ future with their refusal to screen European and avant-garde films that demonstrate artistic experimentation with the medium.²²¹ She compares the cinema programmes in Britain and on the continent, where the availability of art films aids the new medium’s prominence with audiences and aspiring filmmakers in France and Germany.²²² Her texts treat the exhibition of avant-garde films as other industries’ encouragement of their own filmmakers’ experimentation with film and validation of the adoption of avant-garde cinematic practices by the mainstream industry. In these two articles, the author suggests that a self-regulatory network of film clubs, small cinemas and film societies may aid film’s popularity in Britain.²²³

²¹⁸ Ibid. 42.

²¹⁹ Ibid. 42.

²²⁰ Ibid. 42.

²²¹ Bryher, ‘What Can I Do?’ *Close Up*, II - 3 (March 1928) 21-25.

²²² Bryher, ‘What Can I Do? (II)’ *Close Up*, II - 5 (May 1928) 32-33.

²²³ Bryher, ‘What Can I Do?’ 24-25; ‘What Can I Do? (II)’ 32-37.

Bryher sees small, locally-run film clubs as key to the diversification of films screened in Britain. As small organisations, local film clubs could evade censorship and show new films, untainted by the Board's regulations.²²⁴ Her film recommendations exclude British films from the potential programme of any small film club or society.²²⁵ As none of them come up to the standards of 'Pabst, Pudowkin, Bruno Rahn, Czinner and half a dozen others', they would contribute nothing to the development of British filmmaking and film criticism.²²⁶ Anyone who makes films in Britain is set to simply 'grope' after the European experimentation with the medium.²²⁷ Despite some fear that a newly-established film club may become exclusively foreign for a few years, Bryher claims this is irrelevant as this would advance filmmakers' and audience's knowledge of the new medium.²²⁸ The author's recommendations on how to start a film club and the equipment and documentation necessary underscore her knowledge of the government's legislation on the film industry beyond its censorship regulations. Her awareness of film production legislation also suggests her potential involvement with POOL Productions beyond her sponsorship of Macpherson's films.

Bryher extends her commentary on education and its influence on British society to spectators' engagement with film and censorship, and interprets the notion of censorship beyond its applications to the film medium. Her understanding of film censorship can be linked to her critique of outdated teaching methodologies and the school system that supports obsolete stereotypes and limits the mind in her novels. Censorship's control over film distribution and exhibition enforces a certain perception of the film medium, its properties and appropriate film narratives. Combined with film's ability to record and edit the surrounding world, these externally reinforced expectations influence the public's understanding of life and society. In

²²⁴ Bryher, 'How I Would Start a Film Club,' 31.

²²⁵ *Ibid.* 33.

²²⁶ *Ibid.* 33.

²²⁷ *Ibid.* 34.

²²⁸ *Ibid.* 34.

his commentary of early film spectatorship, Anthony Aldgate points out cinema's potential to act as a tool of social control that screens dominant ideologies and modes of behaviour to audiences.²²⁹ Film's realistic imagery of daily life could additionally encourage spectators' acceptance of film narratives' authenticity and their assimilation of any underlying ideas.²³⁰ Aldgate's thoughts on film's influence over audiences relates to Bryher's perception of the effects of film censorship. Based on her understanding of censorship and the film medium articulated in her novels and articles, film viewership becomes synonymous with freedom of thought and the ability to form personal opinions. The elimination of these personal freedoms begins in school where the child's mind is shaped according to the dominant social principles and continues with other institutional regulations like film censorship. Therefore, film production, viewing, and censorship become part of the author's wider critique of the Establishment and its attempts to enforce prejudiced ideologies, stereotypes, or perceptions in society's collective psyche.

While Bryher's articles demonstrate the author's detailed research and knowledge of film movements and film production, her comments on individual films fit her broader concerns about dominant ideologies. For example, her selection of films for children illustrates state education's role in the erosion of one's individuality and the introduction of convenient stereotypes, something that Richardson also hints at in her discussion of film's potential as a visual medium. In Bryher's article 'Films for Children' in *Close Up*, the recurring pronoun 'they' is coded with the authority of the censor who decides what films children should view.²³¹ The author argues that any child over the age of fourteen should be allowed to see any film and encouraged to form an opinion, not just about the film itself but also about the narratives it depicts.²³² The censor is at fault to restrict films like *Mother* or *Bed and Sofa* as these films can

²²⁹ Aldgate, *Best of British*, 2.

²³⁰ *Ibid.* 2.

²³¹ Bryher, 'Films for Children,' 16-18.

²³² *Ibid.* 16-18.

teach children how to manage difficult situations in life.²³³ Such films are morally rather than academically educational. However, these concepts correspond to one another in Bryher's novels and film articles as they expand the meaning of education and offer instructions on how to deal with 'situations outside... experience'.²³⁴ Thus, film as an educational tool functions as a resolution to the faults with education identified in Bryher's *Development* and *Two Selves*. As Nancy's frustration corresponds with the author's feelings from the war years, it indicates the origin of education's multiple functions identified across Bryher's texts. Education should prepare one academically and professionally, and also provide life experience. A medium that does this should be adopted and encouraged by state education because any form of control or restriction on such an education acts as censorship of the public's perception of life.

The author's understanding of film's role in education is briefly referenced in the anecdotal article 'A Private Showing of *Cosmos*', which recollects the POOL group's attempt to rent and view privately the German documentary *Natur und Liebe* (1928), re-titled *Cosmos* in Britain.²³⁵ Having seen the film both in its original form in Germany and its 'mutilated' British version that is later completely banned, the author notices that a scene has been cut out of the British version.²³⁶ The scene depicts a large cat stalking another cat along the house tops.²³⁷ Uncomprehending as to why this is deemed 'immoral', the author notes that the origin and birth of man are omitted in the film altogether.²³⁸ She compares *Cosmos* to a Russian documentary on the same biological process and suggests that the film's choice to include such a scene is the reason for the banning of *Cosmos* from British screens.²³⁹ Drawing on Bryher's understanding of education, the visualisation of a series of biological processes in nature in the

²³³ Ibid. 18.

²³⁴ Ibid. 18-19.

²³⁵ Bryher, 'A Private Showing of *Cosmos*,' *Close Up*, IV - 9 (May 1929) 42-45.

²³⁶ Bryher, 'A Private Showing of *Cosmos*,' 42.

²³⁷ Ibid. 44.

²³⁸ Ibid. 44.

²³⁹ Ibid. 44.

documentary is more fascinating and exciting to a child than a text that describes the same processes. The government censorship is at fault for its 'neglect and scorn' that deprive adult audiences and children of the chance to learn from film.²⁴⁰ The article's dismay at the censorship's control over the documentary and its recollection of the precautions necessary to rent a film privately hint at society's failure to grasp film's mechanism and purpose.

The author's critique of the film industry presents legislation on film production as a form of censorship in itself when she implies that authorities at the time had little understanding of the purpose and properties of the film medium in her article 'A Certificate of Approval'. Like 'A Private Showing of *Cosmos*', 'A Certificate of Approval' is a comic account of the POOL group's attempt to make a film in Iceland despite the bureaucratic obstacles that amateur filmmakers faced in Europe in the 1920s.²⁴¹ As it reveals that local authorities in Iceland and Britain perceive film not so much as an art form but rather as an inexplicable and expensive new recording method, the article implies that amateur filmmakers need not only an understanding of the medium's artistic and technical properties but also a comprehensive knowledge of international policies on film production, distribution, and exhibition.²⁴² In a series of eighteen bullet points, the article lists the administrative processes the group has to follow and the fees they pay in order to import their footage from Iceland into Britain.²⁴³ The authorities' perception of film's properties and their effect on audiences are accompanied by their scepticism towards filmmakers. Uncomprehending of the medium's traits, the public adopts the same attitude. Their collective incomprehension results in different policies and prejudice on the import and export of film, authorship, and the approval of a film's content.²⁴⁴ Film production and even renting is rendered an increasingly exasperating task as restrictions

²⁴⁰ W.B. (Bryher) 'The Film in National Life' in 'Comment and Review', *Close Up*, IX - 3 (September 1932) 211.

²⁴¹ Bryher, 'A Certificate of Approval' 483-487.

²⁴² *Ibid.* 483-487.

²⁴³ *Ibid.* 484-486.

²⁴⁴ Bryher, 'How I would start a film club' 30-36.

limit aspiring filmmakers' freedom to work in the new medium, and see films that might help them improve their own skills. Once again, Bryher indicates that the inability to define the purpose and functions of film are not only a symptom of British film criticism and the censor but also the authorities and society itself, as the complexities surrounding the organisation and issue of the certificate of approval demonstrate the legislation's potential to make filmmaking and distribution as difficult as possible for filmmakers.

Close Up's opposition to film censorship led to the launch of the journal's own petition for the revision of censorship regulations in 1929.²⁴⁵ The petition proposes that since film has reached peak popularity with British audiences, it has the potential to become 'a sound international trade, capable of ever wider development' and a new grading system for its 'artistic, scientific and educative value' should be introduced.²⁴⁶ The new system could avoid the need to heavily censor and edit films in order to follow a set of regulations that allow them to be shown to universal audiences.²⁴⁷ The re-evaluation of censorship is an important process that would allow British filmmakers to develop and produce films in Britain as opposed to their preferred route to artistic freedom realised by defecting to European film industries.²⁴⁸ The document further takes into account the film industry's development as a business and demands that films with limited circulation should be 'entitled to a large rebate in customs duties, and reduction of entertainment tax'.²⁴⁹ A year after the petition's launch, *Close Up* published Dorothy Richardson's report on its progress. As the *Close Up* contributor responsible for the correspondence and administration on the journal's petition, she reviews the events that follow the document's announcement.²⁵⁰ Richardson insists that there are two barriers that prevent British audience's access to foreign films: the first one is censorship restrictions' 'account for

²⁴⁵ 'A Petition for Revision of Film Censorship', Bryher Papers, Box 169, Folder 5653.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 2

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 3

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 3

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 3

²⁵⁰ Richardson, 'The Censorship Petition,' 7-11.

the mutilation to the point of destruction of almost all foreign films’; the second obstacle that the British film industry faces is the customs duties ‘whose rates are prohibitive for all but those films that are certain for a large commercial success’.²⁵¹ Despite the POOL group’s effort, however, the petition is dismissed by the government authorities and the only proof of the group’s engagement with censorship remains in their film articles.²⁵² Nevertheless, the petition’s attention to cinema’s artistic and industrial development in Britain suggests the POOL group’s recognition of film as a potential successful industry in a formative period for the formalisation of the British film industry. Although it favoured avant-garde experimentation with the medium and art films dedicated to social issues, *Close Up* recognised the economic potential of the new art. While they often dismissed popular films, the journal’s critics outlined ways that artistic experimentation could become popular and educational, and aid the success of a more formalised film industry in Britain, similar to the ones developed in Germany, France, and Russia.

Bryher’s own articles on international film reveal the author’s persistent critique of censorship regulations on the film industry as well as legislations on film production, distribution, and exhibition. Her critique of such restrictions is related to dimensions to her perception of the problem of education and the need for educational reform. The author’s *Close Up* articles on German films, Hollywood conventions, and the British film industry develop the notions on education and censorship of the mind that emerge in her three autobiographical novels. Other, more marginal, themes like the depiction of the war period indicate further connections between Bryher’s *Close Up* texts and her novels. The recurrence of these topics demonstrates how personal experience continues to inform the author’s understanding of international film and her approach to film analysis. Unlike other *Close Up* critics, Bryher

²⁵¹ Ibid. 8.

²⁵² Ibid. 10-11.

comments less on international films' aesthetic merits and more on their educational benefit for young filmmakers, children, and general audiences who need to learn to form an opinion about art. Restrictions on film exhibition and production not only prevent British film's development but also the progress of film criticism and society's treatment of the new medium. Bryher's critique of film's place in British society and its film industry extends to the audience's complacent attitude to censorship and art. Audiences surrender 'logical processes' and accept film critics' opinions published in the press as sound recommendations on film viewing.²⁵³ British audiences perceive all artistic performance as 'dope' that entrances them into 'a state of intoxication'.²⁵⁴ They are convinced that 'a given star or theatre or idea' will grant them satisfaction irrelevant of the film's artistic qualities or content.²⁵⁵ This aids the popularity of mediocre entertainment films and the lack of artistic experimentation with the medium.

²⁵³ Bryher, 'Dope or Stimulus,' 59.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 59.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 59.

CHAPTER 6

Film Problems of Soviet Russia: Bryher's Approach to Film Literature

In May 1928, Bryher published the first instalment of her two-part article 'What Can I Do'.¹ A discussion of British film clubs and the exhibition of international films, the article laments the lack of quality film literature in Britain at the time.² The text praises Robert Herring's series *Films of the Year* and other publications on film, such as 'French books on different branches of cinematographic art' and 'American magazines such as *Asia* or *National Geographic*'.³ A year later, in 1929, POOL Reflections published Bryher's *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, the author's own critical volume on film and a case study of Soviet Russia's film industry, its notable filmmakers and their cinematic techniques. Advertised as the 'most comprehensive and rational book' on Soviet cinema in *Close Up*'s issue of March 1929, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* is Bryher's attempt at film literature that balances reflections on the medium's aesthetics and technology with suggestions on its potential applications beyond the artistic realm.⁴ The length of the volume and the variety of topics it addresses demonstrate Bryher's abilities as a film critic outside the constraints of the journal's principles. Although often mentioned in explorations of her *Close Up* essays and treated as proof of the author's pronounced interest in Soviet film, the text of *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, its sources, and ideas remain unexamined. Bryher's overview of the Soviet film industry expands on themes that already exist in her *Close Up* articles and her autobiographical novels, such as education, social progress, and gender dynamics in the film industry, and by extension, society. Individual films illustrate these themes in Soviet filmmakers' works. Each director's films are dissected and his work is linked to a concept that becomes definitive of his work. The author's reflections on

¹ Bryher, 'What Can I Do,' 21-25.

² Ibid. 23.

³ Ibid. 23.

⁴ *Close Up*, IV - 3 (March 1929)

individual films indicate her interest in the ways different cinematic techniques shape the viewing experience. As her analysis moves between structural and symbolic aspects such as the rhythm of Sergei Eisenstein's montage or the depiction of human psychology in the films of Vsevolod Pudovkin and Alexander Room, aesthetics and narrative become intertwined with Bryher's overarching ideas about twentieth-century society and film's place in it.

The volume's focus on Soviet films and its analysis of the organisation of Soviet Russia's film industry endows *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* with additional importance as a British critic's book on a little-explored and heavily-censored film movement in Britain. Although European critics and filmmakers celebrated Soviet cinema's innovative artistic practices, British critics remained hostile to the movement, which they interpreted as a by-product of Soviet Russia's ideologies. The reviewers, who reproached Bryher's lack of engagement with Soviet Russia's politics, in fact failed to recognise the views on the relationship between Russian films and politics, articulated in her book's introductory chapter.⁵ While she acknowledges the links between Soviet cinema and Soviet Russia's new social order, Bryher maintains that film as an art form should be separated from politics with the claim that 'Art has little to do with politics, but a great deal to do with truth'.⁶ Her detachment of film from politics may be traced to her insistence that the film medium records the truth about the world, a view she expressed earlier in her commentary of Pabst's films in *Close Up*. Her text suggests that politics are never concerned with the truth about social reality, and instead construct their own ideological agenda and alternative reality.⁷ The Establishment, which dictates such ideological agenda, remains uninterested in the attainability of the ideals it projects to society, or their plausibility in the given socio-historical context. By contrast, the

⁵ 'The Cinema in Russia: Intensive Training for Film Directors, Artistic Lead to the World' in *Morning Post* (April 1929), Bryher Papers, GEN MSS 97 Series VIII Film, Box 171, Folder 5704, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁶ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 9-11.

⁷ *Ibid.* 11.

‘truth’, which Bryher recognises in the film medium, lays bare the realities about modern society’s problems and removes them from the political context of the Establishment. Although the state might attempt to commandeer the new medium for its own purposes, film’s ability to record the world would reveal the issues the Establishment has failed to address, and thus circulate the faults of the state’s dominant ideologies. Bryher’s rejection of any connections between film and government politics is also evident in the films that she chooses to discuss in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*. Her attention is drawn to films that interpret historical events or social problems, emphasising narratives, which challenge audiences to formulate their own opinions on complicated moral questions.

As *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* unfolds the concerns of Bryher’s autobiographical novels and *Close Up* articles in the context of Soviet films, new meanings are attached to the core themes of education and women’s place in society. An extension of the reflections on post-war femininity in *Two Selves*, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* dwells on cinematic depictions of femininity and women filmmakers’ role in the Soviet film industry. Bryher suggests Soviet women filmmakers’ work is free from the cinematic conventions that otherwise govern the films of male directors.⁸ As the author maintains that the female mind abandons the conventions that govern male directors’ work, Olga Preobrazhenskaya’s films illustrate the sense of truth that the medium is able to capture.⁹ References to international teaching methodologies exemplify film’s role in education in different cultures and once again question the meaning of education and the practicality of purely academic education, available to only a fraction of society.¹⁰ Besides Soviet montage techniques’ contribution to film’s artistic achievements, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* presents montage editing and newsreels as educational films. Alongside its conceptual analysis of Soviet films, *Film Problems of Soviet*

⁸ Ibid. 85.

⁹ Ibid. 85.

¹⁰ Ibid. 122-124.

Russia also proves a valuable manual of the structural organisation of the Soviet film industry and an indication of the author's recognition of film production's business potential. The text maps out the connections and sources for the author's research into Soviet filmmaking: apart from VOKS and the London Film Society, the text cites the German film distribution companies Prometheus and Derussa.¹¹ Bryher's connections to these companies in the late 1920s enabled her attendance to the screenings of films that were prohibited in Britain. She saw the majority of the Soviet films discussed in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* at private screenings in Germany or Switzerland. Soviet films' availability in Europe and European filmmakers' appreciation for the artistic qualities of montage practices further motivated her dismissal of British film critics and film clubs that restricted the exhibition of Soviet films.

This chapter proposes three main strands of analysis of Bryher's critical volume. First, it reflects on the place of *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* in the context of other film books published in the 1910s and 1920s, including texts printed by POOL Reflections, and clarifies its significance as a critical volume solely dedicated to Soviet film in the context of early film writing in Britain. Then it separates Bryher's volume in two main parts: one dedicated to individual filmmakers' works, and another, focused on trends in Soviet filmmaking. The following chapter examines these two parts of the book separately in order to underscore the importance of Bryher's critical approach to Soviet film and the text's thematic and stylistic parallels to other examples of her fiction and non-fiction prose. The following exploration also highlights new topics that emerge in Bryher's analysis of Soviet films and their relationship to the existing concerns of her work from the 1920s and 1930s.

Film Problems of Soviet Russia: A Manual on Soviet Film

Film Problems of Soviet Russia is the result of the most productive period of Bryher's

¹¹ Ibid. 56, 76, 94, 97, 99, 105, 108, 112, 115.

engagement with film. The book appeared a year before Bryher slowly assumed some of Macpherson's editorial responsibilities. Later, between 1930 and 1932, she contributed fewer long articles to *Close Up*. The letters Bryher wrote to H.D., who at that point no longer published in *Close Up* and travelled frequently to Vienna for her sessions with Freud, describe Bryher's anxieties over the Ellerman family affairs, the Kenwin household, and *Close Up*.¹² As a result of the author's preoccupation with other concerns, *Close Up*'s issues from 1930-1931 are dedicated to individual cinematic practices or avant-garde trends, and are dominated by the journal's international correspondents. Although she contributed fewer longer pieces in this period, Bryher featured in the journal's 'Comment and Review' sections with film reviews or commentaries on books or plays. Signed 'WB', these include reviews of films like Wilhelm Dieterle's *Geschlecht Im Fesseln* (*Sex in Fetters*, 1928) and the play *Once in a Lifetime* by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufmann.¹³ In this context, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* is often treated as a summary of the author's concerns with film from her early *Close Up* essays published between 1927-1929. These connections between Bryher's early articles and her volume have become the basis for previous scholarly explorations that examine *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* in Bryher's wider body of film texts but refrain from differentiating them thematically or structurally. Laura Marcus explores *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* as an extension of the POOL group's opinions on Soviet films.¹⁴ Although she emphasises the book's impact through its numerous reviews, Marcus maps out Bryher's opinions of Soviet cinema in relation to other *Close Up* critics, and Bryher's individual opinions never become the focus of this exploration.¹⁵ Rachel Conor also recognises the volume's singularity in its focus on Soviet cinema but the

¹² See H.D. Papers, Box 3, Folders 94-102.

¹³ W.B. *Geschlecht Im Fesseln/Sex in Fetters* in 'Comment and Review', *Close Up*, III - 6 (December 1928) 69-71; W. B. 'Once in a Lifetime by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufmann' in 'Comment and Review', *Close Up*, IX - 2 (June 1932) 141-142.

¹⁴ Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, 336-343; 367-375.

¹⁵ Ibid.

issues the text raises remain unexamined.¹⁶ Like Conor, Maggie Humm lists *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* only as part of Bryher's body of work on film.¹⁷ In her exploration of women's place in modernist visual cultures, Humm notes *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* as yet another expression of the POOL group's interest in Soviet film.¹⁸ Her texts examine Bryher's film writing as a collective body of work that 'negotiates cinematic issues of gender, politics, education and avant-garde aesthetics', but refrain from analysis of individual texts.¹⁹

Like *Development*, Bryher's *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* received numerous reviews that reflected on its choice of subject, its research into the Soviet film industry, and the author's stance in relation to an unpopular film movement in 1920s Britain.²⁰ Despite its controversial topic, the volume was largely reviewed positively with critics acknowledging its expertise as a critical text on film and its importance as an exploration of Soviet film. For example, a review from the *Yorkshire Post* praises Bryher for her recognition of the 'psychological background which distinguishes Russian films from the purely commercial entertainments of Hollywood'.²¹ The review's recognition of Bryher's desire to underscore the psychological depth of Soviet films suggests the volume's success as an overview of the Soviet film industry and its traits. Its emphasis on the films' psychological depth and the critics' subsequent acknowledgement of these trends in Soviet cinema demonstrates *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*'s encouragement of changing attitudes towards Russian film and culture. Similar appreciation for Bryher's insight into the Soviet film industry and Russian society appears in another article in the *Manchester Guardian*.²² Bryher is also complimented on her choice of

¹⁶ Conor, *H.D. and the Image*, 23.

¹⁷ Humm 'Women Modernists and Visual Culture,' 150.

¹⁸ Humm *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures*, 174.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 174.

²⁰ See Bryher Papers, Box 171, Folder 5704.

²¹ 'Film Problems of Soviet Russia' in *Yorkshire Post* (April 1929) Bryher Papers, Box 171, Folder 5704.

²² Robert Herring [R.H.] 'The Week on the Screen: Russia and Hollywood' in *Manchester Guardian* (April 1929), Bryher Papers, Box 171 Folder 5704.

films and the ‘cinematic style’ of her writing ‘that recaptures in lucent and swiftly moving phrases the rhythm and power of her subjects.’²³ Critics further linked the publication of *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* to a deal struck between the censors and the production company British Instructional Films that allowed the limited distribution and exhibition of Soviet films.²⁴ A review in *The New Age* refers to the ongoing discussion of Soviet film’s reputation as a tool of ideological propaganda, while another discusses *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* in the context of the possibility for additional restrictions on Soviet films’ exhibition and content.²⁵

Published alongside other early texts on cinema, film production, and film criticism, one of the missions of *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* and Bryher as a film critic was to define the new medium and understand its properties. Unlike other such publications, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* combined film criticism, industry observations, and the author’s subjective viewpoint of the medium’s purpose in a case study dedicated to a single film movement. Bryher’s focus on Soviet cinema as an individual movement allowed her a more detailed look into the films’ artistic trends and structure, the development of montage techniques, the Soviet film industry’s organisation, and film’s overall place in Russian society. Based on these observations, she made recommendations on film’s adoption as a tool of social change in other societies and cultures. By contrast, other texts reflected on film’s mechanical origins and their application in narrative construction but avoided a more detailed engagement with a specific film movement or filmmakers.

The origin of such publications on cinema’s technology can be traced to the early 1910s, when texts concentrated on the medium’s recording mechanisms and the applications of different techniques in the creation of early photoplays. In 1915, the poet Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931) published his first volume on film, *The Art of the Moving Picture*, an investigation

²³ F. ‘Book Reviews’ in *Cinema* (April 1929) Bryher Papers, Box 171, Folder 5704.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ David Ockham, ‘The Russian Cinema’ in *The New Age* (April 1929) and ‘The Cinema in Russia’ (April 1929), Bryher Papers, Box 171, Folder 5704.

into the technical aspects of filmmaking and the expected effects film genres have on audiences.²⁶ Although the text explores the formation of early film genres' basic conventions, it never delves into film movements or the works of individual filmmakers in the way Bryher approaches Soviet film. Myron Lounsbury's introduction to Lindsay's second book, *The Progress and Poetry of the Movies*, points out the poet's scepticism towards European avant-garde films.²⁷ In his discussion of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, Lindsay questions German Expressionism's claustrophobic sets and 'diabolical' plots.²⁸ His views on Robert Wiene's film translate into a critique of the American elite's preference for this 'foreign art', as he emphasises the superiority of American filmmakers and actors, such as D.W. Griffith and Douglas Fairbanks.²⁹

Although Lindsay's first book relates film's mechanism and cinematic techniques to narrative approaches in early film genres, his text is largely focused on film's mechanical origin and its connections to painting, photography, and theatre. As such, it is intended as a manual that educates viewers on film's symbols and conventions, and the importance of preserving them for a basic understanding of film narratives. In the words of Laura Marcus, Lindsay develops a 'fixed and universal lexicon' of hieroglyphs and symbols that enables the viewer's reading of the film.³⁰ As he compares early film genres to existing art forms with the claim that 'Action Pictures are sculpture-in-motion, Intimate Pictures are paintings-in-motion, Splendour Pictures are architecture-in-motion', he reveals the mechanisms by which film techniques typical of each genre elicit appropriate reactions from the audience.³¹ Lindsay's hieroglyphs and their meaning to the viewers also underscore his observations on elements of the mise-en-

²⁶ Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (New York: Macmillan, 1915)

²⁷ Vachel Lindsay, *The Progress and Poetry of the Movies* (Lanham, Md. & London: The Scarecrow Press, 1995 [1925]) 90. Citations refer to the 1995 edition.

²⁸ Ibid. 90

²⁹ Ibid. 90, 256-270.

³⁰ Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, 161.

³¹ Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture*, 4.

scene.³² Each shot becomes coded with the meaning of the mise-en-scene, often specific to each film genre, and therefore easier to decipher.

In his attempt to dissociate the new medium from the rest of the arts, Lindsay points out the faults in society's perception of film as not anyone can handle the medium's mechanism.³³ Despite film's unique appeal, the vaudeville's owner 'cannot manage an art gallery with a circus on his hands'.³⁴ Further examples of the exhibitors' incompetence in dealing with the new medium is their belief that a musical accompaniment enhances the viewing experience.³⁵ Instead, the poet advises a 'deeper study of the pictorial arrangement': producers and audiences should focus more on developing film as a visual art rather than mere entertainment indebted to other arts.³⁶ His position on film's visual nature can be aligned to the opinions some *Close Up* critics articulate on silent and sound film, and musical accompaniment. Lindsay's commentary on musical accompaniment resonates with Dorothy Richardson's comparison of musical accompaniment and sound film technology.³⁷ Both Lindsay and Richardson favour a silent film-viewing experience, accompanied by music only in the intervals when advertisements are exhibited on the screen and not during the main narrative action.³⁸ Richardson praises musicians' attempts to provide suitable music to different films and in her article on musical accompaniment she draws attention to a violinist's successful performance during a screening's interval.³⁹ In his glossary of film terminology, Lindsay defines sound film as the 'phonoplay' and distances the new technology from the

³² Ibid. 113-129.

³³ Ibid. 189.

³⁴ Ibid. 189.

³⁵ Ibid. 189.

³⁶ Ibid. 189.

³⁷ Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Pictures*, 189-190; Richardson 'Continuous Performance II: Musical Accompaniment,' 58-62.

³⁸ Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Pictures*, 189-190; Richardson, 'Continuous Performance II: Musical Accompaniment,' 60

³⁹ Richardson, 'Continuous Performance II: Musical Accompaniment,' 60.

medium's original visual properties.⁴⁰ His definition indicates the danger sound film poses to the artistic experimentation that silent film could offer with its emphasis on visuality, an opinion similar to Kenneth Macpherson's defence of avant-garde filmmaking practices. Nevertheless, Lindsay concedes that sound film's narratives may be easier to decipher, unlike the visual codes constructed by silent films, and suggests that speech's emergence as film's leading tool may be a benefit for the medium's popularity.⁴¹

Lindsay's reflections on the different strands of film criticism resonate with Bryher's critique of society's perception of European avant-garde films and specifically Soviet films. Lindsay divides critics into two groups: one that caters to Hollywood fan magazines, and another that appeals only to a group of aesthetes whose tastes he relates to Hugo Münsterberg's theories for 'the methodical reading of movie texts'.⁴² In his own text *The Film: A Psychological Study* from 1916, Münsterberg discusses the film medium's ability to record life and the ways it engages viewers.⁴³ He claims that film's 'photographic reproduction' detaches the medium from the existing traditions of theatre and argues for its own 'esthetic independence', similar to the *Close Up* critics.⁴⁴ The aspects of film that Münsterberg discusses are unique to the medium such as the film image's two-dimensionality, which is nevertheless able to create the impression of a three-dimensional world through the medium's record of reality's plasticity and movement.⁴⁵ The 'photoplay' additionally offers the viewers an 'omnipresence' that is unique to the medium.⁴⁶ It allows the viewer to follow multiple narrative strands, as it intercuts three storylines.⁴⁷ The photographic replication of movement and ability

⁴⁰ Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Pictures*, 193-196.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 196

⁴² Lindsay, *The Progress and Poetry of the Movies*, 388-389.

⁴³ Hugo Münsterberg, *The Film: A Psychological Study; The Silent Photoplay* (New York: Dover, 1970 [1916]). Citations refer to the 1970 edition.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 16.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 22-26.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 45.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 45.

to explore several narratives through montage and editing are characteristics distinctive to film. Münsterberg's discussion of these characteristics as typical to the film medium suggests that he appeals only to a narrow group of critics and cinephiles who similarly recognise and understand film's unique properties, unlike the mass audiences who regard film as cheap and accessible entertainment. His interpretation is similar to the position *Close Up* critics took in relation to trade journals and gossip magazines. *Close Up* critics, including Bryher, encouraged a new form of engagement with the film medium that was different from society's tendency to only focus on popular narratives and entertainment. As the journal insisted on the importance of film's different aesthetic properties and functions, it suggested that audience's awareness of these elements could change their perception of film and improve its status as an art form.

Although Bryher discusses cinematic practices and techniques in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, the specificity of her observations and case studies distinguishes her from other critics' definitions of the new medium. These include POOL Reflections' other film publications like the second edition of Eric Elliott's *Anatomy of the Motion Picture Art* and Oswald Blakeston's volume on film production *Through a Yellow Glass*, both published in 1928, a year before *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*. Like Lindsay, Blakeston and Elliott reflect on different elements of film production, and underscore the importance of each stage of production to the final film. In *Through a Yellow Glass* Blakeston traces the technical process of filmmaking from writing the script to the final cut and the organisation of labour in film production. An art critic and a filmmaker himself, Blakeston describes the preparation that the script, the mise-en-scene, the location, and the actors undergo.⁴⁸ These observations are linked to case studies from different national industries' creative approaches. The book's chapter on script-writing remarks on Hollywood's 'watertight' film scripts and describes the five stages of script development: 'the first treatment, the second treatment, the yellow scenario, the white

⁴⁸ Blakeston, *Through a Yellow Glass*, 18.

scenario, the final treatment'.⁴⁹ Hollywood's mechanised approach can turn anyone into a filmmaker with the industry's technical advantages.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, studios exploit literature as a never-ending source of film plots, which they can adapt to the generic conventions audiences recognise.⁵¹ Blakeston's description of Hollywood's approach to filmmaking coincides with Bryher's later critique of Hollywood filmmaking. In her two consecutive *Close Up* articles on Hollywood filmmaking of 1931, Bryher recognises Hollywood's reliance on conventions that appeal to the public's taste. Film production's reliance on the audience's familiarity with conventions ensures Hollywood's success and expanding control over the American and other national film industries. However, even if Hollywood were to forget 'the formula' and audiences abandoned the cinemas, this would not last for long.⁵² Since 'a Californian... reacts quickly and forgets easily', Bryher predicts that audiences would return to the cinema, expecting to encounter the familiar narratives they have witnessed before, thus rendering attempts for deviation from the established norms futile.⁵³ Bryher's arguments indicate that there is little room for the 'experimental mind' because any such endeavours with the established Hollywood film conventions would risk to be rejected from audiences.⁵⁴ Any practical experimentation with the medium and abstract imagery threatens this well-established model.

Blakeston's discussion of cinematography and camera models transforms his *Through a Yellow Glass* into a manual on filmmaking, containing valuable advice to young and amateur filmmakers, a mission supported by *Close Up*'s insistence on the importance of young filmmakers' development. As he praises German Expressionist lighting techniques and Soviet films' realistic treatment of the diegetic world, his advice reminds of his own articles on Soviet

⁴⁹ Ibid. 18.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 18.

⁵¹ Ibid. 18, 38.

⁵² Bryher, 'The Hollywood Code II,' 281.

⁵³ Ibid. 281.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 281.

films in *Close Up*'s issues of August 1929 and January 1930.⁵⁵ As each sentence in his text focuses on an individual image or camera movement, his reviews underscore Blakeston's own expertise in filmmaking and interest in Soviet filmmakers' experimentation with the medium. For example, in his review of Dziga Vetov's documentary *The Eleventh Year (Odnadtsatyy/Odinnaдцатый, 1928)*, he writes:

Three lines of movement; men and lorries on a road, bridge, and under an archway. That is so careful there must have been a reason for taking us up in the air. Ah! we are going under the ground.⁵⁶ He continues: 'The screen is split horizontally into two long-shots; one moves away, the other is static. It is magnificently done. Men walking home; away from the mines but the ideals in state. The black and white smoke is building.'⁵⁷

Blakeston's review draws attention not only to the narrative action but also to the use of cinematic technique in the narrative's representation on screen. The execution of cinematic technique and its application to the film's narration are privileged over the actual plot. As the rhythm of the sentences highlights the intercutting of shots, Blakeston's descriptions of narrative action follow the movements of the camera's omniscient eye. The alignment between text and cinematic technique continues in Blakeston's description of Raismann's film *Prison* in his second article on Soviet films. In this text sentences are limited to expressions and single words that describe individual shots and emphasise the effect of montage editing: 'Clouds. Thousands of pictures start with clouds, but this picture has not yet started. Not dramatic clouds; a curtain. Cloud curtain.'⁵⁸ The structure of Blakeston's comments on Soviet film's visuality indicates similarities between his and Bryher's film texts. His texts' focus on individual images suggests that his interest in Soviet films lies with the possibilities that such

⁵⁵ Oswell Blakeston, 'Three Russian Films,' *Close Up*, V - 2 (August 1929) 144-150; 'Three More Russian Films,' *Close Up*, VI - 1 (January 1930) 27-34.

⁵⁶ Blakeston, 'Three Russian Films,' 144

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 145.

⁵⁸ Blakeston, 'Three More Russian Films,' 27.

experimentation offers for film's development as a medium of visual narration and its depiction of reality. As his comments remain reserved for the movement's choices of technique and its contribution to mainstream filmmaking, Blakeston refrains from discourses on other potential applications of Soviet film as a tool in education or social reform unlike Bryher in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*.

Similar to Blakeston's text, Eric Elliott's *The Anatomy of the Motion Picture Art* sheds light on the technical processes of film production. Elliott compares film's uncertain status as an art form to critics' initial scepticism against early photography.⁵⁹ In their observations on photography's inability to 'respond to the individual touch of the artist', critics targeted its potential to depict only one selection of reality at a time.⁶⁰ However, Elliott points out that unlike photographs, which may or may not reproduce a staged version of reality, film scenes are composed: a scene is 'the work of flesh-and-blood artists in its composition' and photographic only in the method of its reproduction.⁶¹ As such, film art's value lies in its ability to depict realistic and imaginary worlds alike.⁶² However, the film director's aim should be to apply film's 'pictorial, symbolic and... all imaginative design in light and form' and not waste the medium's potential on depictions of 'actuality'.⁶³ The text argues that while film's visual effects and ability to accurately reproduce moments of reality are important to its appeal to audiences, these are not the medium's most valuable qualities.⁶⁴ Instead, its most powerful tool is the illusion it creates in the spectator's mind.⁶⁵ Film's illusion is aided by the medium's connection to photographic realism and its ability to capture the image in motion. Elliott's belief in film's ability to create illusions echoes the parallels between Hellenic imagery and

⁵⁹ Elliott, *Anatomy of the Motion Picture Art*, 25.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 25.

⁶¹ Ibid. 25.

⁶² Ibid. 32.

⁶³ Ibid. 32.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 33.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 33.

film imagery that dominate H.D.'s film reviews. H.D.'s articles treat film projection as a manifestation of the psyche that is endowed with the cathartic powers of Greek tragedies. Unlike the poet, however, Elliott limits film's illusory worlds only to the screen and the space of the cinema. His reflections connect film to the imagination only as far as the film narrative and depiction of the diegetic world are concerned. He never dwells on the parallels between film projection and psychoanalytic theories in the ways H.D. or Bryher do. Nevertheless, his position on the diegetic world and its influence on viewers is akin to Bryher's understanding of the uses of Soviet film in society. Bryher explores the characters' psychology and the motivation of their actions in Soviet films. The case studies of individual filmmakers' works in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* insist on the educational qualities of these films' controversial narratives and suggest that they may serve as sample resolutions to similar problems in real life.

Like Blakeston, Elliott reflects on film's technology and the camera in particular as a tool of artistic expression. According to Elliott, the film camera records and dissects motion, and endows it with particular symbolism.⁶⁶ Shot composition and the motion within the frame are endowed with such symbolic connotations, regardless of whether the camera depicts a 'single motion', a 'monotonous motion' or a 'repetitional motion'.⁶⁷ Elliott delves into film's depiction of motion by outlining three main qualities: 'Velocity, Disposition and Tendency'.⁶⁸ Besides their importance to the realistic rendering of motion on screen, each of these elements can be directed independently.⁶⁹ The artistic decisions that govern film motion constitute new symbols for the audience to decipher in relation to the film's main narrative. A 'wheel that rotates but makes no relative progression is indicative of "continuation or perpetuity"'.⁷⁰ If the

⁶⁶ Ibid. 52.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 89.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 92.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 92.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 96-97.

same wheel is part of a moving vehicle, however, it serves as an example of progressive movement, determined by the vehicle's direction.⁷¹ Film's symbolism emerges from the artistic use of the medium's technology and the structural details of film images and sequences. Like Lindsay, Elliott merely refers to film movements and directors' works but never dwells on an individual movement in the way that Bryher does in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*. For example, Elliott uses the films of D.W. Griffith and Fritz Lang as illustrations of the camera's artistic uses but never analyses individual films.⁷² Bryher, on the other hand, provides a detailed overview of an entire film movement in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* and bases her observations on its applications outside popular entertainment and avant-garde cinematic practices.

Bryher's *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* is part of the tradition of film texts, which recognised the need to define the film medium's nature and purpose, and urged audiences to engage with it as a new art form and not simply as entertainment. In the same time, the volume also stands out as a comprehensive study of a single film movement that combines the technical knowledge critics like Elliott and Blakeston demonstrate in their texts, and Bryher's own ideas about film's application beyond art. Bryher's commentary on Soviet montage films is informed by her knowledge of film terminology and techniques, as well as her research into the Soviet film industry. Unlike Elliott's and Blakeston's book, Bryher's analysis of films in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* is coloured by her personal viewing experiences. The autobiographical elements of these accounts brings *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* into close proximity to the autobiographical connections that inform Bryher's fiction prose and the social commentary she articulates through her protagonist Nancy. However, in the case of *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, the author's substitution with another character is omitted, rendered

⁷¹ Ibid. 97.

⁷² Ibid. 28, 33.

unnecessary by the text's genre and its overall aims of social and film criticism. Bryher's research into Soviet film production contributes to *Film Problems of Soviet Russia's* establishment as a key early text on Russian film. Paul Rotha uses it as a source for his own observations on Soviet films when he refers to Pabst's comparison between American and Soviet films, and their influence on British cinema's development quoted in Bryher's text.⁷³ The significance of Bryher's volume as a text on Soviet film is further demonstrated in Jay Leyda's volume on Soviet and Russian film, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*.⁷⁴ Leyda points out Bryher as one of his 'predecessors' in her engagement with Soviet film and her extensive exploration of Soviet film industry's development and most notable filmmakers.⁷⁵ He further praises her accounts of Alexander Room's and Vsevolod Pudovkin's films, as well as her summary of the Soviet film industry's organisation.⁷⁶ These references to *Film Problems* establishes Bryher's volume as an early encyclopaedia on Soviet film industry facts and the international opinions about its films.

The Directors of Film Problems of Soviet Russia: Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Kuleshov and Room

The structural organisation of *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* reserves the volume's first four chapters for Bryher's exploration of individual filmmakers' work, and the following six for the author's views on film's educational qualities, depictions of social minorities, and women's contribution to Soviet film culture. The chapters on Soviet directors are dedicated to discourses on film plots and actors' performances in the context of the dominant themes of Bryher's work, such as the individual's development and education, social and political prejudice, perceptions of childhood, and censorship. In these chapters Bryher's observations combine analysis of film

⁷³ Rotha, *The Film Till Now: a Survey of World Cinema*, 111.

⁷⁴ Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (London, Boston, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1983)

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 214-215; 240; 247.

narrative, structure, and cinematic technique with the filmmakers' backgrounds and the production environment. The author recognises each of these elements' contribution to the films' overall effect on the audience as well as their significance for Soviet Russia's new social order. The text of *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* also showcases the importance of language in the author's film analysis, as language and syntax constructions become symbolic to her understanding of each film's effect on the viewer, just as the changing language of her novels implies Nancy's mind-set in different periods of her life.

The attention to an individual filmmaker's work is an approach that originates in Bryher's *Close Up* articles. Unlike H.D. who considers the film director to be a function of patriarchal norms in film form, Bryher privileges his role in shaping the film narrative's ideological discourses. Her approach is exemplified by her article in G.W. Pabst's films in *Close Up* and her articles' continuous engagement with aspects of his work throughout the journal's run.⁷⁷ In the same way, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* connects Sergei Eisenstein's work to the author's ideas about Russian history and the events that lead to the formation of Soviet society. Although the text refers to Eisenstein's ideas about 'intellectual cinema', it presents Lev Kuleshov as the original authority on Soviet cinematography and montage editing.⁷⁸ Kuleshov's mastery can be further detected in his films' emotional charge and the actors' natural performances. Vsevolod Pudovkin's films fit the author's idea of academic and moral education because of their depiction of realistic social dilemmas on screen. Meanwhile, Abram Room's work constitutes a never-ending social study that correlates with Bryher's own social activism. Contrary to British critics' scepticism to Soviet films and reviewers' critique of *Film Problems of Soviet Russia's* rejection of a deeper engagement with Soviet Russia's politics, Bryher acknowledges the controversies of the country's ideology.⁷⁹ However, she

⁷⁷ Bryher, 'G.W. Pabst: A Survey,' 56-61.

⁷⁸ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 38, 18-24.

⁷⁹ 'The Cinema in Russia: Intensive Training for Film Directors, Artistic Lead to the World' in *The Morning Post* (April 4th, 1929) Bryher Papers, Box 171, Folder 5704.

separates Russia's dominant political ideologies from her observations on filmmakers' work. As in Bryher's writing on Pabst, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* privileges the film medium's ability to record the 'truth' about reality.⁸⁰ In the case of Soviet films, the medium's truthful recording of reality is evident in the films' focus on Russia's social reality and different social milieux. As she disregards political ideologies that may fuel film production in Soviet Russia, the author emphasises the films' courageous depiction of society's struggle with the modern ways of life and points out the universality of the problems they face, similar to her views on German films of the early 1930s in her *Close Up* article 'Notes on Some Films'.⁸¹

The idea that Soviet films 'attack life itself, as opposed to politics' dominates the author's discussions of Eisenstein's historical films.⁸² A *Close Up* correspondent from 1931 until 1933, Eisenstein formed a close friendship with Bryher throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Oksana Bulgakowa's biography of Eisenstein reveals that he met Bryher and Macpherson in Berlin in 1928.⁸³ While Bryher and Macpherson collected information on the German film industry for *Close Up* and viewed films that were censored in Britain, Eisenstein and the cinematographer Grigori Alexandrov were on their European tour, which consisted of a series of lectures that promoted Soviet film abroad. At the time, Eisenstein hoped to publish a book that combined incompatible fields of study in its analysis of film, but never finished it.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, he contributed a series of articles to *Close Up*. Besides his joint piece with Vsevolod Pudovkin and Grigori Alexandrov 'The Sound Film: A Statement from the USSR', his *Close Up* contributions include 'The Dinamic Square' Parts I and II, 'The Principles of Film Form', 'Detective Work in GIK', 'Cinematography *With Tears*', 'The New Language of

⁸⁰ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 11.

⁸¹ Bryher, 'Notes on Some Films,' 196-199.

⁸² Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 27.

⁸³ Oksana Bulgakowa, *Sergei Eisenstein: A Biography*, trans. by Anne Dwyer (Berlin and San Francisco: Potemkin Press, 2001) 89.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 89.

Cinematography’, and ‘The Fourth Dimension in the Kino’ Parts I and II among others.⁸⁵ His articles served as an exposition of Soviet film theories on the pages of *Close Up*, alongside the journal’s wider promotion of Soviet montage and individual critics’ discussions of Soviet films. Besides the original content he authored for the journal, his connection to Bryher enhanced her own expertise in Soviet film theories.

Despite her initial disinterest in the October Revolution, Bryher treated Eisenstein’s depiction of historical events as the most influential of all other Soviet filmmakers.⁸⁶ In *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, the author comments little on his films’ production history or the accuracy of their depiction of historical events. Instead, her analysis focuses on Eisenstein’s application of cinematic techniques in order to produce the maximum effect on viewers’ perception of his historical films, marked by his ‘swiftness and hardness and impenetrable inhumanity, which is perhaps the greatest humanity’.⁸⁷ His films’ emotional charge emerges from the depiction of grand historic events’ impact on communities and rejection of the individual protagonist since each character’s personal perception of events is irrelevant to his films’ mission of privileging the collective psyche. In a more recent analysis of *Battleship Potemkin*, Richard Taylor notes the importance of characters’ names in the director’s treatment of strained international relations.⁸⁸ The film’s first part visually distinguishes the characters of Vakulinchuk and Matuishenko, whose names are etymologically Ukrainian, and juxtaposes them to the three main officers, who are depicted as Russian.⁸⁹ The officers’ higher rank in the

⁸⁵ Sergei [S.M.] Eisenstein, ‘The New Language of Cinematography,’ *Close Up*, IV - 5 (May 1929), ‘The Fourth Dimension of the Kino Part I,’ *Close Up*, VI - 3 (March 1930), ‘The Fourth Dimension of the Kino Part II,’ *Close Up*, VI - 4 (April 1930), ‘The Dinamic Square Part I,’ *Close Up*, VIII - 1 (March 1931), ‘The Dinamic Square Part II,’ *Close Up*, VIII - 2 (June 1931), ‘The Principles of Film Form,’ *Close Up*, VIII - 3 (September 1931), ‘Detective Work in the GIK,’ *Close Up*, IX - 4 (December 1932), ‘Cinematography With Tears,’ *Close Up*, X - 1 (March 1933).

⁸⁶ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 25, 27.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 27-28.

⁸⁸ Richard Taylor, *The Battleship Potemkin: The Film Companion* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000)

16.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 16.

ship's hierarchy suggests the director's statement on the two countries' colonial past and strained political relationship.⁹⁰ Taylor's comments evoke Bryher's own interpretation of the 'humanity' of Eisenstein's use of film in order to represent problems concerning entire communities. Although these characters are differentiated from the rest through their given names, they remain underdeveloped as individuals, and function as symbols in the director's political discourse. Unimportant beyond their ideological statement, they are metaphors of the nations' perceptions of each other, and as such demonstrate the director's ability to use the film medium to articulate ideas beyond the historical narrative of the mutiny of 1905, depicted in *Battleship Potemkin*.

Bryher's dissection of Eisenstein's montage techniques revisits *Battleship Potemkin* and posits that despite its modest premiere in Russia, the film gained international popularity after its release in Berlin.⁹¹ However, Oksana Bulgakowa's account of the Russian premiere of *Potemkin* suggests a more complicated situation. Following a preview at the Bolshoi Theatre, *Battleship Potemkin* premiered on January 18, 1926 in two cinemas: the Metropol and the Khudozhestvennyy film theatre.⁹² During its tumultuous advertising campaign and the days that immediately followed the premiere, the film's reception was compared to the success of Allan Dwan's *Robin Hood* (1922) in Russia.⁹³ Nevertheless, the film's montage and cinematography were dismissed by Lev Kuleshov and Abram Room, who claimed that Eisenstein had created a 'kitsch-film' with no artistic merits.⁹⁴ The Soviet Union's inability to import enough film stock in the 1920s meant that there were fewer prints of *Potemkin* available to distribute in the provinces following the film's premiere and supposed success.⁹⁵ Therefore, in retrospect, any claims made about the film's artistic merits and performance at the box office in Russia were

⁹⁰ Ibid. 16.

⁹¹ Ibid. 30.

⁹² Bulgakowa, *Sergei Eisenstein: A Biography*, 61.

⁹³ Ibid. 62.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 62.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 62.

based on rumours and limited screenings.⁹⁶ The film's Berlin premiere, described in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, took place three days later, on January 21, and solidified the film's success abroad.⁹⁷ Screened at Berlin's Großer Schauspielhaus, the film was noticed by Willi Münzenberg, a media representative of the worker's press in Germany.⁹⁸ After the German distribution company Lloyd turned down *Potemkin*, Münzenberg started Prometheus Film GmbH and signed a distribution deal with Sovkino.⁹⁹ As a result, *Potemkin*'s Berlin premiere not only consolidated Eisenstein's reputation in Western Europe but also facilitated the distribution and exhibition of other Soviet films in workers' film clubs in Germany and across Europe.

A summary of Russia's revolutionary spirit, *Potemkin* functions as a trope of British prejudice against Soviet films throughout *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*. Bryher writes that one 'must leave the room because *Potemkin* is mentioned' as 'it appears that the whole British Army will go down one after another like ninepins'.¹⁰⁰ In 1926 *Potemkin* was considered 'so dangerous in London that instant imprisonment is threatened to anyone who shows a foot of it, even privately!'.¹⁰¹ Fears of the film's revolutionary content forced censors to completely ban it until 1929 when it was screened as part of the Film Society's fifth season.¹⁰² Such concerns over its content and symbolism indicate its impact on audiences and critics alike, as well as the importance of the cinematic techniques that narrated the film's story of rebellion and tragedy. The prejudice against *Potemkin* exposed British society's limited perception of film art in the 1920s. While it allows the possibility that viewers would 'cheer at the end' should they attend a screening of *Potemkin*, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* laments British audience's perception

⁹⁶ Ibid. 61-62.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 62.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 63.

⁹⁹ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 63.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 11.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 31.

¹⁰² *The Film Society Programmes 1925-1939* 130.

of film as entertainment but not art, a prevalent topic in Bryher's *Close Up* articles like 'Dope or Stimulus' from 1928.¹⁰³ Rather than appreciate the film's technical and artistic accomplishments, British audiences would wonder if 'they could catch their bus, ... was it raining, ... weren't those Russian faces odd, and wasn't it queer the way those women got hysterical on the steps'.¹⁰⁴ Their perception of the 'foreign' film's depiction of the sailors' misery on board of *Potemkin* is a further revelation of their lack of critical thought.¹⁰⁵

These comments on viewers' lack of critical engagement with Soviet film are also similar to Bryher's critique of education in her autobiographical novels and *Close Up* articles, where the author blames obsolete teaching methodologies for stripping the individual of their own critical judgement. Schools' oppressive routines and old-fashioned concepts of education force young people away from original thought and into society's dominant mind-set. The inability to appreciate Soviet films' artistic features stems from this incapacity to form an opinion without the aid of critics' limited understanding of film art. The Establishment and the censors further fuel the nation's scepticism of Soviet culture. The opposition between Soviet film's popularity with some journals and collectives like the *Close Up* circle of critics, and the Establishment's scepticism towards it, establishes Soviet film's controversial place on the British cultural scene of the 1920s and 1930s. By contrast, *Battleship Potemkin* is celebrated in Berlin because of its influence on film's artistic development in Germany.¹⁰⁶ Other countries with notable film industries appreciate *Potemkin*'s montage techniques and visual style: Austria, Switzerland and France all show censored versions of *Potemkin* and a 'mutilated' copy is sent to America.¹⁰⁷ However, Britain, where the film industry still lacks organisation and a definitive style, struggles with Eisenstein's aesthetic and privileges his film's narrative over its

¹⁰³ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 32; Bryher, 'Dope or Stimulus,' 59-61.

¹⁰⁴ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 33.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 33.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 30, 32.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 32.

use of the medium's properties.

Film Problems of Soviet Russia's chapter on Eisenstein underscores montage's impact on the audience's viewing experience through Bryher's own descriptions of his films. An example of her analytic approach is the volume's analysis of the film *October* (1928), which appears under the alternative title *Ten Days That Shook the World* in the text. However, this longer title is actually the name of the film's shorter version, edited for release in Germany and the US, and potentially the one Bryher viewed on her trips to Berlin.¹⁰⁸ Commissioned by the government as part of the celebrations for the Tenth Anniversary of the October Revolution, *October*'s narrative was ideologically convenient for Soviet Russia's political climate at the time.¹⁰⁹ As she disregards the accuracy of the film's treatment of historical events, Bryher records the effects of its striking imagery and the visual rhythm of montage. Her text narrates the film plot by following the shot changes and intercutting, and describing the technique's impact on the viewing experience. It sets the scene: 'St. Petersburg, 1917' and provides historical context for the reader: 'The Provisional Government is perched upon conflicting intrigues and emotions.'¹¹⁰ The following sentence constructions mirror the film's intercutting of shots and the pace of montage: 'Huge statues watch wide streets. They are guarded in turn by a gigantic figure of the Tsar.'¹¹¹ As she describes individual shots, the author inserts the images' effect on herself as a spectator: 'These architectural shots have the cruelty and impressiveness and power of old temple walls in the East.'¹¹² A new sentence marks each shot change and imitates the visual rhythm that montage introduces to the film: 'A Government official telephones the order for the bridge to be lifted. Shots ring out. Machine guns scatter the

¹⁰⁸ David Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005) 109.

¹⁰⁹ David Gillespie, *Early Soviet Cinema: Innovation, Ideology and Propaganda* (London: The Wallflower Press, 2000) 50.

¹¹⁰ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 33.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 33.

¹¹² *Ibid.* 33.

crowds. The giant mechanism of the bridge begins to revolve and move.’¹¹³ The sentences’ reflection of the scene’s montage and shot changes reveals the author’s interest in the film form, and the ways this structures her paratactic prose. As this style of prose persists across other chapters in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, it confirms Bryher’s interest in Soviet montage’s ability to structure the viewing experience and direct the attention to the core themes of each film. The text’s reproduction of the rhythm and effects of montage also reveals the importance of personal experience to Bryher’s prose, a quality of her early autobiographical texts. Although their topics are unrelated, both Bryher’s early novels and *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* adopt the narrator’s psyche as the central consciousness of their narration. In the case of the novels, the narrative events are all refracted through the perception and worldview of Bryher’s substitute in the text: her protagonist Nancy, thus establishing her as the central consciousness of the texts. In *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* where the substitute between the text’s narrative voice and the author herself is removed, Bryher’s own psyche dictates the book’s records of film montage. As she discusses films that are not widely available to British audiences, Bryher relates her personal impressions of individual scenes or even shots for readers who are potentially unable to see the films. The stylistic convergence between Bryher fiction and non-fiction texts introduces a thematic confluence, which begins with the author’s preoccupation with the topic of education.

Vsevolod Pudovkin’s *Mechanics of the Brain* (1926) serves as an example of an ‘educational’ film and a Soviet filmmaker’s interpretation of a documentary.¹¹⁴ The film’s educational quality arises from its realistic depictions of scientific processes. These experiments and the biological processes they prove are clarified by the medium’s visual properties and are made accessible for a wide audience.¹¹⁵ Unlike its observations on the artistic

¹¹³ Ibid. 34.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 44-45, 124.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 46.

merits of Eisenstein's editing and cinematography, Bryher's analysis recognises Pudovkin's film for its realism and its detailed representation of its subject matter. Shown widely across Russia, *Mechanics of the Brain* was never screened to the European public.¹¹⁶ Although Ivor Montagu acquired the film for the London Film Society, it was not screened until 1930.¹¹⁷ Instead, Bryher saw the film in Berlin through a German-Russian agency.¹¹⁸

Based on the scientific experiments and theories of the physiologist Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936), *Mechanics of the Brain* is noted in several accounts of Pudovkin's work, such as Amy Sargeant's account of the film's production history.¹¹⁹ Sargeant also draws on Bryher's own thoughts of the film, treating *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* as an example of early film critics' appreciation for the film.¹²⁰ In his *The Film Till Now* Paul Rotha connects the structure of Pudovkin's film with his own understanding of the experiments and processes the director documented, as he argues that *Mechanics of the Brain* is 'an exposition of the methods which he [Pudovkin] employs for the selection of his visual images, based on an understanding of the working of the human mind'.¹²¹ However, unlike in her engagement with Eisenstein's films, Bryher delves less into Pudovkin's application of cinematic techniques than in his film's educational value. Above all Bryher's commentary emphasises the film's representation of some of society's 'taboos' such as the pain of childbirth and a child's mental development.¹²² As it highlights the medical ignorance that surrounds the question of painless childbirth, the text treats Pudovkin's film as an instance of Russia's forward approach to women's health.¹²³ Listed as one of the 'scientific films' in the volume's chapter on educational films, *Mechanics*

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 45.

¹¹⁷ *The Film Society Programmes 1925-1939*, 169.

¹¹⁸ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 45.

¹¹⁹ Amy Sargeant, *Vsevolod Pudovkin: Classic Films of the Soviet Avant-Garde* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000) 36.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 36.

¹²¹ Rotha, *The Film Till Now*, 233.

¹²² Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 47-49.

¹²³ Ibid. 47-48.

of the Brain is as ‘cold... full of possibility and check, as a page from da Vinci’s notebook’.¹²⁴ The author suggests that the film’s didactic merit lies in its depiction of topics that are rarely discussed in public but remain vital for one’s mental and physiological development. Although not part of traditional academic education or vocational training, the science of *Mechanics of the Brain* introduces the public to complicated processes in an accessible way and raises questions that should be discussed in the public domain. The educational potential that Bryher ascribes to Pudovkin’s film can be treated as an extension of her suggestion of film as an educational tool and the multiple applications of its visual properties.

The realistic depiction of human emotions and pain also permeates Pudovkin’s third film *Mother* (1926) and it becomes a definitive trait of the director’s work in the context of *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*. Having seen the film three times, Bryher highlights the religious dimensions of the film’s narrative and negates the influence of government politics.¹²⁵ This makes *Mother* ‘universal’ and ‘not red... not even particularly Russian’.¹²⁶ Unlike the volume’s chapter on Eisenstein, where the syntactical constructions of sentences establish a paratactic rhythm that mimics the intercutting of shots, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*’s summary of *Mother* emphasises the order and causality of characters’ actions and clarifies their motivation: ‘The son is chased (and there is all the terror of pursuit in this sequence), but escapes. Coming back to his home, where his mother sits by his father’s corpse, he is arrested’.¹²⁷ The narrative action develops so quickly that descriptions of individual shots in separate sentence constructions as in the volume’s Eisenstein chapter are irrelevant. Actions merge sentences into longer constructions that seek the psychological motivation of the characters’ actions. The dynamism of the film’s action elicits the fluidity of Nancy’s dreamworld in *Development*, as the child protagonist’s dreams are connected to the memories

¹²⁴ Ibid. 49.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 49.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 50.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 51.

of her travels and books. The long constructions of *Development's* first part reflect the complexity of the child's mind in the same way *Film Problems of Soviet Russia's* descriptions interpret the psychological vigour of Pudovkin's film narratives. The psychological depth that Bryher detects in Pudovkin's characters can be traced to the filmmaker's own understanding of on-screen depictions of psychology and its mediation by the actors, outlined in his essay 'The Naturshchik instead of the Actor' from 1929.¹²⁸

The essay's meditation on acting techniques privileges the 'real raw material' over the 'stagy acting' of the theatre.¹²⁹ Multiple rehearsals allow the stage actor more opportunities to explore the character's emotional and psychological dimensions.¹³⁰ Filmmaking, by contrast, is a more dynamic process and there is little time for rehearsals. Films are produced in shorter time periods and scenes are not recorded in a sequential order that would otherwise permit the actor to build a character arc.¹³¹ The speed and expense of film production, and the character's quick development demand discipline from the actor that is not as essential in theatre. Therefore, according to Pudovkin, the film actor can never be simply a 'naturshchik', an acting stereotype proposed by Lev Kuleshov.¹³² The figure of the 'naturshchik', who is described as 'a real person, a real life, in whatever fantastic forms, but unfailingly real', first appears in Lev Kuleshov's early interpretations of the actor's role on screen.¹³³ The gestures, facial expressions, and overall performance of the 'naturshchik' are void of theatricality.¹³⁴ A term often employed in Russian discussions of theatre, dance, and performance, the 'naturshchik' is someone whose ability to perform is determined by the natural properties of

¹²⁸ Vsevolod Pudovkin, 'The Naturshchik instead of the Actor' [1929] in *Selected Essays*, ed. Richard Taylor and trans. Richard Taylor and Evgeni Filippov (London, New York and Calcutta: Seagull, 2006).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 161.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 226.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 226.

¹³² Pudovkin, 'The Naturshchik instead of the Actor,' 224.

¹³³ *Ibid.* 224.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* 137.

their physicality. This is a ‘natural’, ‘naturally-gifted’, actor whose talent is only enhanced by training. A realistic depiction of the film character, the naturshchik is someone who could ‘present some interest for cinema treatment’ through their physicality or emotional response according to Kuleshov.¹³⁵ As a professionally trained actor, the naturshchik imbues his cinematic presence with realism, a ‘distinctive identity’, and ‘definite sharply defined character’.¹³⁶ However, Pudovkin contradicts Kuleshov and rejects the naturshchik’s physical gestures and facial expressions as inadequate for film. Film’s fragmented creative process exposes the gaps between the naturshchik’s performances of individual gestures and demonstrates the lack of logical links between them.¹³⁷ The constant emphasis on the physical gesture and a logical character arc overlooks ‘the creative process of acting and its technique... the methods which attempt to discover a feeling for the living fabric of the image so that each individual act, however separate it may be from another, is ... associated ... within the actor himself’.¹³⁸ Pudovkin demonstrates these principles through the continuity of human actions as well as the physical gestures that manifest characters’ emotions and mind-sets in his films.

Pudovkin’s understanding of the actor’s contribution to the film’s realistic depiction of the human psyche can be related to the emphasis on characters’ actions and psychological motivations in Bryher’s own analysis. The sentence ‘A drunk father, a son, a mother cleaning up the kitchen’ marks the beginning of the author’s description of Pudovkin’s *Mother* in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*.¹³⁹ This sentence not only establishes the main characters but also maps out the relationships and social context, which the film implies. The father is a drunk who neglects his family and exemplifies a generation that cannot cope with the new social order because of its obsolete mind-set. A synecdoche for the domestic space, the ‘kitchen’ binds the

¹³⁵ Ibid. 137.

¹³⁶ Ibid. 137.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 233.

¹³⁸ Ibid. 233.

¹³⁹ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 50.

mother through patriarchal norms that she cannot overcome. Meanwhile, both parents overlook the son and his development. The family's dysfunction illustrates the Establishment's failure and society's conformity to outdated ideas of life and education, both topics that appear in Bryher's own set of social concerns in her autobiographical novels. The father's urges are repressed by society's dominant norms. His life has become so 'monotonous' that it is only a matter of time for something to 'break' in him under the need to conform to a widely-accepted stereotype.¹⁴⁰ His crises manifests in his drunkenness and his cruelty towards his wife and son.¹⁴¹ He is not only unfit for work but he is also unfit for a family. The system, which has shaped him according to its expectations and given him a place in society that is inadequate to his individuality, has betrayed him. The text sketches out society's dominant norms as incomparable to the manifestations of one's individuality. The characters in *Mother* are forced into social roles in the way a stereotype of femininity is imposed on Nancy, regardless of her own thoughts and individuality. Unlike Bryher's protagonist, however, Pudovkin's characters assume these roles and serve as a warning against repressions of one's individuality. Acceptance of these norms ultimately may lead to one's ruin as the father's character in *Mother* illustrates. In line with the author's insistence on one's individuality, the social analysis of *Mother*'s opening scenes encourages respect to the individual's mind, qualities and desires. In addition, the text's emphasis on social injustice and obsolete norms justifies the son's desire for social change later in the film when he joins the revolutionary cause and is sentenced to the labour camp. The text describes other characters' actions with similar attention to detail and emphasis on the connections between the characters' psychology and the psyche's behavioural manifestations:

The defending lawyer hiccups; he is very nervous.', 'The judges glance over the papers, up at the clock.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 50.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 51.

Among the few people seated in the body of the court is a middle-aged woman, the personification of conventional morality. She puts up her eyeglass and her lips curl with the sadistic pleasure of seeing a human being legitimately - to her mind - tortured.¹⁴²

The minute actions and gestures Bryher notes provide an insight into each character's psyche and motivation. As the text highlights these gestures, it demonstrates their importance for the depiction of human psychology in Pudovkin's films and the different social stereotypes the film depicts.

While *Mother's* narrative is a discourse on Soviet people's motivation to join the revolutionary cause, Bryher's analysis further stresses the similarities between the social dilemmas the film depicts and life in British society. The premise of Pudovkin's *Mother* is compared to 'a Sudanese hut, a New York tenement or a London slum', while the standardised education system that forces the father into a crisis is aligned to English schools where boys learn nothing but to conform to principles.¹⁴³ Although Bryher draws her examples from different cultures, her text insists that such stereotypes and situations are not unlikely in any society and further underscore the films' educational potential. The parallels between the author's critique of education and society's conformity to established norms indicate her belief in Soviet films' relevance to Britain's social issues at the time. This suggestion renders Bryher's defence of Soviet films even more controversial as her analysis erases the national differences between Soviet Russian and British societies. Instead, her analysis implies that many of the social and gender stereotypes that dominate Russia and Britain in this period are not specific to each nation, and are simply manifestations of human nature.

Bryher delves further into the universality of Soviet films' depiction of human psychology in her analysis of Lev Kuleshov's work. Kuleshov was one of the film directors

¹⁴² Ibid. 52.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 50-51.

who helped launch the theoretical and practical experimentations with montage in the Soviet film industry in the 1910s and 1920s. His experimentation with scenes of the actor Ivan Mosjoukine, known as the Kuleshov effect, illustrated the process of meaning construction through the associations of consecutive shots in film and formed the basis for later montage theories. After the Soviet film industry was nationalised in 1919 by the People's Commissariat of Education, Kuleshov headed the first filmmaking courses at the National Film School, now the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography, with Pudovkin and Eisenstein among his students.¹⁴⁴ In his analysis of the Soviet film industry, Jay Leyda indicates parallels between the narratives of Kuleshov's films, and American adventure films, which were imported into the country before the international blockade on Soviet Russia's markets following the revolution.¹⁴⁵ These films sparked Kuleshov's interest in American editing techniques, which he tried to introduce alongside the adventure storylines of his films as in his *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (1924) or *By the Law*.¹⁴⁶

As Kuleshov's only film shown outside Russia, *By the Law* is central to Bryher's engagement with the director's work. The film was exhibited under different names outside Russia: in Germany and Switzerland the film was called *Sühne*, in France it was *Dura Lex*, and the English title remained *Expiation*, which was the title H.D. used for her own review of the film in *Close Up*.¹⁴⁷ Based on Jack London's short story 'The Unexpected' (1906), the film's storyline and setting near the Yukon river imply Kuleshov's interest in American adventure films.¹⁴⁸ *By the Law* follows the fate of a company of five gold-seekers, whose co-existence is disrupted when only the Irishman Michael Dennin finds gold. After an argument and the death of two characters, three characters remain: Dennin, Hans, the group's self-proclaimed leader,

¹⁴⁴ Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*, 142-143.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 172-175.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 172.

¹⁴⁷ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 21.

¹⁴⁸ Jack London, 'The Unexpected', *McClure's Magazine* (August 1906) 372

and his wife Edith, played by Aleksandra Khokhlova. What follows is an exploration of the consequences of greed on the human psyche, developed through the three performances in the enclosed space of the cabin. Bryher's chapter on Pudovkin draws attention to the symbolism of the landscape and its connections to the narrative's moral dilemmas and the characters' psyche. Alexandra Khokhlova's performance is aligned to the film's wild landscape as the 'madness and greatness' of Khokhlova's performance lies in her depiction of a mind going mad as a consequence of her crimes.¹⁴⁹ As the landscape becomes wilder and colder, the parallels between nature and the characters' suffering become more explicit. Shut in the cabin, the three remaining gold-seekers are prisoners of nature and of their own remorse. The images of the 'storm', the 'ice', the 'snow', the 'wind' are metaphoric expressions of the characters' psychological turmoil.¹⁵⁰

Bryher concludes that *By the Law* is not 'a pleasant film' because 'one is caught up into it as if one were actually there... having to decide one's self if this is justice or cruelty'.¹⁵¹ The author's remarks on the film's dramatic intensity presents the narrative as a provocation of the audience's moral judgement and ability to understand the director's on-screen interpretations of the human psyche. As *By the Law* was the only Kuleshov film that Bryher saw, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* offers sparse observations on Kuleshov's use of cinematic techniques. Nevertheless, the author's emphasis on the film's incorporation of symbolism and mise-en-scene indicate her expertise in reading film form and her ongoing discussion of the depiction of human psychology in film, an approach that continues in her chapter on Abram Room.

Renamed Alexander in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, Abram Room (1894-1976) is noted for three of his films: *The Death Ship* (*The Bay of Death/ Bukhta Smerti/ Byxma cмepmu*,

¹⁴⁹ Bryher *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 22-24.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 22-23.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 23.

1926), *Bed and Sofa* (*Meshchanskaya Number Three/ Tretya Meshchanskaya/ Третья мещанская*, 1927) and *The Pits* (*Potholes/ Ukhaby/ Ухабы*, 1928). The text claims that Room's interest in Freud's work and modern psychoanalysis influenced his depiction of the human psyche and emotions on screen by helping the director identify 'the correct psychological basis for all actions' and incorporate 'symbols of the brain processes, in pictures'.¹⁵² As in its chapter on Pudovkin, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* draws parallels between the depiction of Russian society and British audiences, and underscores the universality of Soviet films' narratives. These connections appear in the analysis of *Bed and Sofia*, a film Bryher recommends to general audiences as well as children in her *Close Up* article 'Films for Children'.¹⁵³ The dynamics between the three main characters, a married couple and a guest, may appear in 'hundreds of English homes' but the participants are 'not confined to the same bedroom'.¹⁵⁴ However, the housing crisis in Moscow forces the three main characters into the same apartment and therefore renders the film's main theme even more problematic. Room's choice of plot challenges the audience's expectations of film narratives with depictions of marital life, communal living, adultery and abortion. Liuda's pregnancy is a moral dilemma that is rarely shown on screen but is also a common but rarely-discussed occurrence in society.¹⁵⁵ Although the author criticises the film's ending and Liuda's choice to have the child, she indicates the motivation of her actions: her affair and subsequent pregnancy are the result of her husband's neglect.¹⁵⁶ When the husband, Kolia, and his friend Volodia return to their flat and realise that Liuda has left, their looks are not of men, concerned for their loved one's fate, but rather of two men left with no one to 'wash and cook for them'.¹⁵⁷

Bryher's reflections on Room's film can be traced to her own thoughts on gender

¹⁵² Ibid. 71; 75.

¹⁵³ Bryher, 'Films for Children,' 16-20.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 74.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 74-75.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 75.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 75.

dynamics and stereotypes of femininity in a patriarchal society. Throughout her second and third novels, her protagonist Nancy articulates the author's own discontent with society's desire to force women into clearly defined stereotypes and bind them to the domestic space by limiting their opportunities for work and education, and disparaging their individuality. These themes emerge in *Two Selves*'s account of Nancy's experience of World War I and the protagonist's conversations with other women characters like her friends Doreen and Eleanor, and her fencing teacher Miss Cape.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, in her third novel *West*, the author privileges women's opinions over men's voices in both private conversations and Nancy's debate on literature with the men at a party.¹⁵⁹ The perpetuation of the author's discussion of gender stereotypes in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* not only superimposes her critique of society's gender dynamics in Soviet films, but also erases national differences between societies and underscores the topicality and importance of the films' narratives.

The theme of marital life and motherhood, which Bryher detects in Room's *Bed and Sofa*, become intertwined with her later observations on childhood and child psychology in Room's *The Pits*. According to Bryher, *The Pits* depicts children 'as they are and not as adults would have them to be'.¹⁶⁰ The core themes that she detects in Room's work converge with her interest in early psychology and her own aspirations to become a qualified psychoanalyst, evident in the materials on childhood, early education, and child psychology kept in her personal archive. Her collection of academic texts, such as the works of the Austrian-American child psychologist Christine Olden and the psychoanalyst Melitta Schmideberg, and extracts from the popular press dating to the late 1970s indicate the persistence of her ongoing research into the topics of early education and psychoanalytic theories long after she stopped writing

¹⁵⁸ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 198-201; 230-239; 244-249.

¹⁵⁹ Bryher, *West*, 34-45; 145-151; 156-157.

¹⁶⁰ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 76.

about film.¹⁶¹ The origin of Bryher's preoccupation with these topics can be traced back to her own experiences as a child recorded both in her memoir *The Heart to Artemis* and voiced through her substitute Nancy in her autobiographical novels. The author's fascination with the child's psyche and its significance in the formation of the young person's individuality clarifies the lucidity and maturity of Nancy's voice throughout *Development*, often dismissed by critics at the time of its publication. Therefore, the maturity of Bryher's autobiographical protagonist may be treated as an early indication of the interests in child psychology she articulates in her *Close Up* essays and *Film Problems*. In both her fiction and non-fiction texts her explorations of the childhood mentality are expression of her desire to define the world from the child's perspective and juxtapose the child's individuality and sense of selfhood to preconceived notions of what children's behaviour and education ought to be.

As the themes of her autobiographical novels and *Close Up* essays are re-interpreted in her perception of Soviet films, they are developed beyond the author's own experience and according to her broader observations of early twentieth-century society. The critique that forms the basis for Nancy's ongoing commentary in the three novels, and Bryher's own account of early film culture in Britain and abroad, is aimed at the works of the most celebrated Soviet filmmakers and defines their depictions of Soviet Russia's society. Bryher's observations not only prove the universality of the films' narratives and characters, but also diversify her own definitions of the moral categories and social issues that permeate her writing. Published in 1929 and halfway through the author's most productive engagement with film and film culture, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*'s structure is an intersection of Bryher's expertise on film, demonstrated in her early *Close Up* essays, and the articles she published in the journal following her volume. While her initial *Close Up* articles choose to focus on individual

¹⁶¹ Melita Schmedeberg, 'After the Analysis...' *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, III-1 (January 1938); Christine Olden, 'Notes on Child Rearing in America', *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* (New York: The International Universities Press, 1952); Bryher Papers, Box 129 Folder 4524.

directors and comparisons between different films, her later articles expand her observations to early film culture and the problems it might face both as an art form and an industry. This new approach can be traced back to the structure of *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, which balances her interest in individual filmmakers and the core themes of their work in the volume's first five chapters, and Soviet Russia's film culture in subsequent chapters. Nevertheless, the volume's chapters, and Bryher's *Close Up* articles and autobiographical volumes still remain united by their thematic and stylistic patterns, which only evolve further in the context of the author's engagement with Soviet Russia's film industry and social conventions.

Film's Problems: Social Dynamics, Education, and Soviet Russia's Film Industry

Having explored the films of Soviet Russia's most celebrated directors in its first five chapters, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia's* remaining chapters elaborate on Soviet films' social and didactic applications in Russian society and by extension, film's overall applications in society outside art. The volume's second part elaborates on existing themes in Bryher's fiction and non-fiction prose such as education and society's gender dynamics, and recognises other topics that emerge specifically from the author's engagement with Soviet films. These include the contribution of women filmmakers, the depiction of minorities, and the specifics of Russia's film industry.

The volume's commentary on women's depiction on screen and involvement in the Soviet film industry is an extension of the author's commentary on society's treatment of women in her novels. Bryher's film analysis highlights the roles of actresses and women filmmakers in Soviet film, as well as the films' ongoing discussion of women's rights in Soviet Russia's society, starting with Aleksandra Khokhlova's performance as Edith in Kuleshov's *By the Law*.¹⁶² Bryher connects Khokhlova's disappearance from Soviet films to the public's

¹⁶² Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 23-24.

opinions of her appearance: ‘People have said she is ugly’.¹⁶³ A student and wife of Lev Kuleshov, Aleksandra Khokhlova appeared in a number of his films in the period between 1924-1940, including *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of Bolsheviks* (*Neobychnyye Priklucheniya Mistera Vesta v Strane Bolshevikov/ Необычайные приключения мистера Веста в стране большевиков*, 1924), *The Great Consoler* (*Velikii Uteshitel'/ Великий утешитель*, 1930) and *Siberians* (*Sibiriaki/ Сибиряки*, 1940). However, she was often criticised for her unusual physical appearance, her theatrical training and the bourgeois characters she portrayed. Sergei Eisenstein addressed these critiques in his essay ‘However Odd – Khokhlova!’, where he claimed that Khokhlova was the ‘only original actress’ in Russia in that period.¹⁶⁴ He differentiated her from the on-screen stereotypes of the ‘Komsomol girls’, ‘peasant women’, or the ‘women chieftains’ because her physicality did not conform to the appropriate character features: ‘chubby’, ‘fat’, or ‘meaty piece’.¹⁶⁵ Her appearance added individuality to her characters that took them beyond the role of a ‘female’ on screen.¹⁶⁶

Bryher’s comments on Khokhlova are part of the chapter’s overall reflections on the moral dilemmas of Kuleshov’s film *By the Law*. Unlike the ‘average Hollywood heroine’, Khokhlova is able to portray ‘mind... instead of merely body’ on screen.¹⁶⁷ As the only woman character in *By the Law*, Edith progresses from a bystander to a participant in the conflict. She defends her husband from Dennin, and later stands up to Hans and demands a fair trial for the Irishman. Her eccentric physicality, the ugliness for which she is dismissed by Russian audiences, accentuates her character’s mental states and the transformation she undergoes in the course of the film. In the opening scenes, when all the characters live in peace, she sits in the sunshine and smiles. However, after the murder of two of their fellow gold-seekers and

¹⁶³ Ibid. 23.

¹⁶⁴ Sergei Eisenstein, ‘However Odd-Khokhlova!’ [1926], *Selected Works: Volume I, 1922-1934*, trans. Richard Taylor (London: BFI, and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) 71-73.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 71.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 71.

¹⁶⁷ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 23-24.

Dennin's imprisonment, her trademark grin suggests the hysteria that overwhelms her and becomes a visual manifestation of her stunted consciousness. Despite her presence in the space of the cabin, her psyche refuses to reconcile with her involvement in the crimes that have taken place. Bryher's own analysis of Khokhlova's Edith and her references to H.D.'s review of the film for *Close Up* confirms the impression that the actress's performance made on them. Their interest in Edith's damaged psyche can be traced back to the roots of their reflections on the female psyche in their respective autobiographical novels. The female psyche and its suffering under patriarchal oppression is a central theme in H.D.'s *Asphodel* where it defines the fragmented style of the novel's prose as an articulation of Hermione's confused thoughts. Reflections on the female psyche also govern Bryher's language in *Development* and *Two Selves* where Nancy needs to overcome the limitations imposed on her by her parents, her school mistresses, and patriarchal society. As the theme of the female psyche unites Bryher's fiction and non-fiction work, her analysis on cinematic depictions on femininity further develop her ideas about women's role in society through observations on motherhood and childbearing in Pudovkin's and Room's films.

The volume's analysis of *Mother* raises the issues of childbirth and laments the lack of medical research on painless child-birth.¹⁶⁸ These reflections continue in a commentary of social prejudice against single mothers and children's placement in nurseries in Room's *Bed and Sofa*.¹⁶⁹ Although single mothers are excluded in the author's novels and the figure of the mother is segregated to the realm of Victorian femininity, young mothers still fit the stereotype of the women who struggle in vain against obsolete patriarchy. Room's Liuda in *Bed and Sofa* is a forewarning against society's complacency on young mothers' difficulties and the choices it forces them to make. The critique of men's entitlement of Bryher's novels translates into her

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 47-48.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 71-83.

analysis of the men characters in Room's film, where Volodia and Kolia's neglect of Liuda's needs renders them responsible for her experiences and reveals their adoption of patriarchal stereotypes of domestic femininity.¹⁷⁰

The relationship between 'mother and father and child' in Room's films evokes the ideas about childhood and parenthood that dominate Nancy's mind-set in Bryher's novels.¹⁷¹ In her analysis of Room's *The Pits*, Bryher concludes that a woman's role as a mother leads to her becoming too 'emotionally close to the child' and as a result may 'spoil its character, through love, through hatred, through ignorance'.¹⁷² The context of the author's comments indicates her opinion that such an approach is not necessarily the most fitting attitude to childcare both from the mother's and the child's perspectives. These observations are similar to Nancy's complaints about adults' intense control over her life and its effect on her own mind-set. In *Development* Nancy's childhood adventures come to an end with her enrolment at Downwood school, announced by the anonymous voice that alludes to her parents' authority, a constant presence in the protagonist's life that nevertheless remains undeveloped.¹⁷³ Still a child, she is unable to make these decisions for herself and her protests and attempts at rebellion are dismissed. Adults also take hold of Nancy's daily routine in Downwood school and yet again in *Two Selves*, where influential older women like Lady Cockle maintain the pre-war patriarchal norms.¹⁷⁴ Inept parenthood and misunderstood child-rearing approaches are intertwined with the child's suffering and deprivation of freedom that could have otherwise been key to its own development. As her ideas on women's status in society engages with women's depiction on Soviet screens, Bryher claims that a woman should be reduced to 'neither a serf nor a marriage-licensed gold-digger' but also refutes common stereotypes of

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 75.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 81.

¹⁷² Ibid. 81

¹⁷³ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 79-80.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 245.

motherhood through suggestions that child-care be delegated to more knowledgeable individuals like nurses.¹⁷⁵ Liberating women from the obligations of childcare would instead give them the freedom to develop in areas beyond domesticity, in the way that men assert themselves in their chosen professional field or other social circles.¹⁷⁶ Bryher's proposals on child-care are by no means a rejection of motherhood. Combined with Nancy's resentment of the external control exercised on her individual, they are instead a rebuke of society's assumption of women's potential to care after children and the State's 'right to demand life'.¹⁷⁷ Her suggestions that a woman should be granted not only control over her life and choices but also her body are interspersed in her commentary on Soviet film and her remarks about Soviet Russian society's treatment of topics like birth control and abortion.

Bryher extends her analysis of depictions of motherhood to Olga Preobrazhenskaya's best-known film *The Peasant Women of Riazan* (*Baby Riazanskiel/ Бабы рязанские*, 1927), an example of a female director's work. Preobrazhenkaya (1881-1971) started her career as an actress in the films of Yakov Protazanov (1881-1945) and Vladimir Gardin (1877-1965) and in 1919 started teaching at the National Film School. Her marginality as a woman filmmaker in Soviet Russia exemplifies Bryher's belief that while Soviet films depended on their women stars, few women were given access to the filmmaking process.¹⁷⁸ Described as 'an amazing sociological and constructive document', *The Peasant Women of Riazan* is 'utterly free from propaganda'.¹⁷⁹ Directed by Preobrazhenkaya and scripted by another woman, Olga Vishnevskaya, the film illustrates Bryher's argument that 'a woman who thinks is freer than a man, from political trammels'.¹⁸⁰ The man filmmaker adheres to the established conventions that govern the film industry on an international level and follows the social, political and

¹⁷⁵ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 82, 83.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 83.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 90.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 85.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 85.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 85.

gender structures of filmmaking and narrative construction. By contrast, the woman filmmaker's reliance on her own thoughts and imagination often breaks conventions and results in original work. The author's discussion of women filmmakers' creativity can be traced back to her record of Nancy's urge for creative and personal freedom. Bryher sees the new film medium as a potential tool of expression for women, not only because of its artistic merits but also because of its industrial organisation: film is not an art form delegated to exclusively male circles, but can be made accessible to women through the various professional roles established in the film industry. Women's involvement in filmmaking could also grant them the opportunity to discuss problems they face from their own perspective rather than having to concede to a male perspective of women's lives, like other films directed by men and discussed on the pages of *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*.

The volume's analysis of Preobrazhenskaya's film compares two women characters, Anna and Vassilissa, and their respective places in their community's gender dynamics.¹⁸¹ Unlike Vassilissa, Anna is 'sensitive and submissive and weak' and her acceptance of the village's norms leads to her death.¹⁸² Anna's weakness relates to the old-fashioned female stereotypes Bryher criticises in her autobiographical novels. A victim of patriarchy, Anna exemplifies the women who are overwhelmed by 'baseness and evil and jealousy and death because they are unable to protect themselves'.¹⁸³ By contrast, Vassilissa embodies the strength and decisiveness that Nancy seeks in war-time women in *Two Selves*. Vassilissa dares to take the child away from the village and its backward perceptions of gender dynamics. As a woman who is able to look after herself and those around her by taking men's responsibilities she embodies the future of modern femininity and by extension, Bryher's own understanding of women's place in modern society.¹⁸⁴ The comparison between the two characters supports

¹⁸¹ Ibid. 86-89.

¹⁸² Ibid 89.

¹⁸³ Ibid. 89.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 89.

Bryher's comments on childbirth and social attitudes towards child-care, as well as her claim that women 'unfitted psychologically to bear children or more than one child' ought not to be allowed to have children.¹⁸⁵ This not only spares the child from potential difficulties but also ensures a woman's freedom of choice and control over her own body. Only women who are in control of their bodies, minds, and own free will ought to have children. As the psyche of mother and child are intertwined, a child born under traumatic circumstances may struggle mentally as an adult. The issues of women's reproductive rights and their children's future become an essential part of the volume's discussion of Soviet films' realism and the 'truth' of Preobrazhenskaya's film.¹⁸⁶

As in her novels and *Close Up* articles, in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* Bryher intertwines her insistence on social reform with the urgency for innovative approaches to education. Bryher's chapters on Soviet filmmakers or even individual films remark on education's importance for Soviet Russia's new social structures and for social reforms on an international level. In a separate chapter on educational films, Bryher develops the ideas she articulates in earlier *Close Up* articles by organising Soviet cinema into four main groups: the 'geographic and ethnographic films', 'the serious scientific films', 'films dealing with sociological problems', and 'films dealing with the problems of labor or the management of large works'.¹⁸⁷ Each group includes certain film genres and the potential purposes they can serve. The films that depict 'sociological problems' include Kuleshov's *By the Law* (*Expiation*) and a film called *The Abortion*, potentially an alternative title for Pudovkin's *Bed and Sofa*.¹⁸⁸ Documentaries like Pudovkin's *Mechanics of the Brain* exemplify the scientific category for their realistic depictions of scientific and natural processes.¹⁸⁹ The concept of education is

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. 90.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 11, 90.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. 123-124.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. 124.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 124.

dispersed into numerous areas of life of which one should be knowledgeable as one's 'capacity to profit by what is ever being discovered'.¹⁹⁰ While documentary films can enlighten audiences on scientific matters and introduce them to cultures they haven't encountered, social dramas can depict dilemmas that are universal to all communities and offer potential resolutions.

The approach to film's incorporation in education developed across her film texts derives from Russia's attempts to use film for mass education in schools and through 'travelling cinemas'.¹⁹¹ These suggestions are informed by the author's research and connections in VOKS and exemplified in the success of 'travelling cinemas' sent on trains to Russia's remote villages.¹⁹² Bryher's praise for Russia's application of film as part of the state's mass education approach combined with her recognition of montage editing's effect on audiences establishes avant-garde montage practices as equally important to artistic experimentation with narrative film as well as to informative documentaries and newsreels, accessible to wide audiences. Unlike Soviet filmmakers, American directors are forced to adhere to a 'tradition', which hinders the progress of their artistic development, a central topic for Bryher's later *Close Up* articles on Hollywood filmmaking in 1931.¹⁹³ American films show nothing that is 'linked to the vital facts of existence, or if these are mentioned they must be rightly in accordance with an obsolete hypocritical tradition'.¹⁹⁴ Here *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* articulates the author's understanding of education as a concept beyond the academic curriculum. This theory originates in Bryher's discussion of censorship in *Close Up* where she claims that British audiences need to be educated about film art and its potential, and not be left to rely on critics' opinions about the new medium. Once again, in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, Bryher

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 123.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 122.

¹⁹² Ibid. 122.

¹⁹³ Ibid. 122.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. 122.

suggests that education also lies in one's development of a personal opinion and the 'ability also to discriminate.'¹⁹⁵ Soviet films' variety of topics and footage, and Soviet Russia's exhibition practices render educational films accessible to anyone regardless of one's social status or location. Such practices confirm Bryher's belief in film's potential as an educational medium and teaching tool and additionally underscore her insistence on the importance of accessible education for modern society. Montage techniques and Soviet directors' experimentation with documentaries and newsreel further develop the educational potential of geographic and ethnographic films, besides their artistic application in Soviet narrative films.¹⁹⁶ With this claim the author indicates Soviet montage practices' potential as an educational tool in a practical context and not only a form of avant-garde experimentation with the properties of filmmaking.

Her analysis of montage practices focuses on the work of the director Dziga Vertov (1896-1954), a filmmaker rarely discussed on the pages of *Close Up*.¹⁹⁷ Bryher describes the subject of Vertov's films as 'real material', once again referring to her insistence on film's ability to document the truth about reality.¹⁹⁸ In the case of Vertov's films, filming reality was the director's penultimate goal: Vertov's early newsreels for the *Cine-Eye* movement depicted *zhizn' vrasplokh*, often interpreted as 'life caught unawares' or 'candid filming'.¹⁹⁹ Jeremy Hicks interprets the realism of Vertov's newsreels as a cinematic version of the literary traditions of the *feuilleton* and the *ocherk*, both typical genres of Soviet observational journalism.²⁰⁰ The films' unassuming nature is demonstrated in Vertov's approach to cinematography: the camera is hidden and never intervenes in the events it witnesses.²⁰¹ In

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. 123.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. 123-124.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 126-127.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. 126.

¹⁹⁹ Jeremy Hicks, *Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007) 23.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 10.

²⁰¹ Ibid. 23.

Man with a Movie Camera (*Chelovek s Kino-apparatom/ Человек с кино-аппаратом*), an anthropomorphised camera walks the cities of Moscow, Kiev, Kharkov, and Odessa, and records snippets of footage of people's daily lives. Vertov's film merges the human cinematographer, performed in the film by his brother Mikhail Kaufman, with the mechanical eye of the camera by building visual parallels between the man's eye and the camera lens in a series of montage sequences. The metaphoric relationship between the man and the movie camera raises questions about the mechanisation of modern life, and questions the purpose and future of both the film apparatus and film art. Although the film's themes approximate the ideas of urbanity, society, and the purpose of art, which dominate Bryher's own texts, her discussion of Vertov's regular *Cine-Eye* newsreels and *Man with the Movie Camera* is drawn to the possibility of viewing 'the actual pictures of the Revolution and the film made for the October anniversary'.²⁰² She recognises Vertov's newsreels first and foremost for their documentary purposes; they are true records of Soviet lifestyle and society that could serve as educational films for both Soviet audiences and foreign viewers, unfamiliar with the events of the Revolution and Russia's new social order.

Bryher's engagement with Soviet film ends with her dissection of its industry organisation and the problems Soviet Russia faces in its film production. These are articulated in the volume's introduction and final chapter. Bryher obtains this industry information after she applies to 'headquarters in Moscow or to their officials abroad'.²⁰³ It is possible this is another indirect reference to her contacts in VOKS, Russia's film department, established in Moscow in 1925, and evident in her correspondence about VOKS's *Close Up* subscription.²⁰⁴ Despite the Soviet film industry's organisation and multiple companies and production branches, its prominence abroad, and especially in Britain, was hindered by foreign markets'

²⁰² Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 127.

²⁰³ *Ibid.* 13.

²⁰⁴ V. Milman to Bryher, March 5th, 1929; V. Milman to Bryher, March 28th, 1929, Bryher Papers, Box 169, Folder 5662.

hostility to Soviet Russia's politics. The book's chapter on Soviet Russia's film problems raises questions on the longevity of the Soviet film industry, when Russian production companies are unable to export their films.²⁰⁵ Highlighting Soviet film's artistic experimentation and multiple applications for the film medium, the author warns that such exclusion not only threatens the industry's financial state, but also its future artistic development. This could cause the lowering of production costs and the subsequent damage of Soviet films' quality and their ability to compete with foreign films, the lack of artistic criticism to champion Soviet films and provoke the descent of Soviet films' creative genius.²⁰⁶

The obstacles that prevent Soviet films' exhibition abroad include 'censorship, the popular press, timid renters and untrained audiences'.²⁰⁷ Bryher's attack on foreign misconceptions of Soviet films resonate with her critique of audiences and censorship regulations in her *Close Up* articles. In her journal contributions she faults British audience's complacency to critics' recommendations and censorship regulations for their lack of critical judgement and inability to appreciate European art films.²⁰⁸ This critique is extended to Hollywood films' influence on the British film industry's own productions and society's treatment of the film medium as a form of mass entertainment rather than a new art form.²⁰⁹ In *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* Bryher intertwines her attack on British film criticism with society's prejudice against any products of Soviet culture and the critics' reluctance to oppose prevalent social and political opinions.²¹⁰ The critics who contribute to the 'daily, weekly or monthly journals' lack a clear understanding of the film medium and language that distinguishes film criticism from theatre criticism.²¹¹ They are unable to acknowledge the 'gulf

²⁰⁵ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 128.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 128.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 130.

²⁰⁸ Bryher, 'Dope or Stimulus', 59-61.

²⁰⁹ Bryher, 'The Hollywood Code (I),' 234-238; 'The Hollywood Code (II),' 280-282.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.* 130.

²¹¹ *Ibid.* 131.

between... theatre and the cinema' and point out that the 'excellence of a play is defect in a film'.²¹² The critics' reliance on theatre for their interpretation of film creates false criteria for film criticism and promotes an interpretation of the new medium that fails to acknowledge its key properties. The critics' own ignorance leads to a lack of 'trained' audiences who really understand film art.²¹³ If no one points out the merits of film art and distinguishes various cinematic practices and their origin for the mass audience, viewers will judge a film based on standards 'passed abroad, five years ago'.²¹⁴ These arguments develop the author's commentary on British film audiences and exhibitors from her article 'Dope or Stimulus' in *Close Up*'s issue of September 1928.²¹⁵ In order to understand a film, viewers relate films to individual actors, theatre or conventions they recognise. Instead of engaging with a film critically themselves, they rely on the critics' verdict and therefore are unable to appreciate film art beyond its entertainment status. Renters will only supply and show films that have not been condemned by the press or the censors, it is impossible for audiences to find cinemas and clubs that offer extensive film programmes.²¹⁶ The renters' reliance on the critics' recommendations secures a set number of viewers who will visit their cinemas regularly and ensures their cinemas' future business but prevents audience's and budding filmmakers' from developing a sophisticated expertise in the new art form. Censorship causes further issues: as the censorship regulations are connected to high customs duties, renters would never rent a foreign film that might not please the audiences and risk investing too much but losing their loyal viewers.²¹⁷ The legislative connection between censorship and film exhibition not only hinders the import and distribution of Soviet films, but also German and French films that

²¹² Ibid. 131.

²¹³ Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 132.

²¹⁴ Ibid. 131.

²¹⁵ Bryher, 'Dope or Stimulus,' 59-61.

²¹⁶ Ibid. 131.

²¹⁷ Ibid. 131.

might appeal to audiences but are not championed by the critics or censors.²¹⁸ With Hollywood's domination of British screens, this also poses a danger on British film's artistic development too.

Bryher's engagement with Soviet film in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* expands the author's insistence on film's applications in society as it finds case studies for the film medium's application in education and social reform. The volume's careful film analysis reveals the author's interest in the ways the structure and visual rhythm that Soviet montage practices introduce to narrative and non-narrative cinema structure the viewing experience. As the author draws on her own personal experience of viewing montage films, her analysis becomes intertwined with her fascination of film's ability to affect the spectator's psyche and inform the cinephile's relationship to film's moving images. Film's visuality further fuels discourses on the human psyche as Soviet filmmakers incorporate social and class stereotypes in their films, and characterise them with their respective physical gestures or appearance. The accurate depiction of such traits allows audiences to form relationships to characters and make their own judgements on the moral dilemmas that underscore Soviet films' narratives. As she additionally draws on her novels and *Close Up* articles informed by her views on twentieth century society, Bryher continues her discourses on film's educational value and its depiction of women. Parallels can be drawn between the stereotypes of femininity depicted in Bryher's three novels and her suggestions that Soviet films offer progressive models of femininity despite their limited budgets and narratives grounded in Soviet Russia's post-revolutionary reality. The parallels between the concerns of her autobiographical novels, her *Close Up* articles, and *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* indicate the extent to which Bryher's personal experience shapes her perspective on society and art. The role of the author's views and overarching themes in her writing extends to the style of her prose in each chapter of *Film*

²¹⁸ Ibid. 131.

Problems of Soviet Russia as the text's syntactical structures mimic the author's impressions of each filmmakers' works and highlight the most notable properties of their films. Therefore, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* not only articulates the author's opinions on Soviet film and the film medium's application in society but also demonstrates the development of her critical approach to the new art form and the style of her prose.

Conclusion: Bryher after *Close Up*

Bryher's fiction and non-fiction texts of the 1920s and early 1930s formulate a stylistic and thematic network that extends over the author's experimentation with autobiographical prose and her discussions of film, early British film culture, and international film industries. Issues of artistic and social relevance permeate her texts and translate into her film analysis. Apart from examinations of film art, the author's *Close Up* articles and critical volume *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* are meditations on education, social inequality, women's rights, and film's ability to expose and tackle such issues. The thematic homogeneity between the novels and the film texts renders Bryher's work of this period into a record of the problems of twentieth-century society as the author experienced it. Despite its generic diversity, the author's early body of work insists on the transgressive quality of the main issues they raise and these problems' relevance to a variety of national cultures. In her writing, Bryher posits that problems of education, social inequality and obsolete gender stereotypes are not specific to British society but can be found in other national cultures, including Soviet Russian society. The author equalises the issues she recognises in British society and the narratives depicted in Soviet films by separating Soviet films from Soviet Russia's politics and celebrating film's ability to show the truth about life itself. Although British film critics considered Soviet films to be coloured by Soviet Russia's political ideologies, Bryher insists that such discourses are not to be mistaken for the medium's real identity. Throughout *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, she makes the case that political ideas are merely attached to the finished films but are not part of film's mechanism or cinematic practices of narrative construction.

As the author rejects the political ideologies that other critics emphasised, the universality of the core themes of her early texts informs her critical approach to film criticism. *West's* comments on the restrictive social conventions in British and American societies

extends to her *Close Up* articles where the author describes national communities' anxieties over film's place in education.¹ In *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, she posits that British and Russian societies have similar experiences of World War I and the modernisation of life that follows.² These reflections demonstrate different individuals' or communities' shared problems despite their nationalities or the political systems, which govern their societies. The experience of war becomes a recurring topic in the author's autobiographical prose, as well as her reflections on national cinema's treatment of historical events, complicated by the gender or social stereotypes, which inform Nancy's youth, or the depictions of society's struggle in its adoption of a new social order in Soviet films. By developing the gender stereotypes and the memory of war that emerge in her novels in the context of Soviet cinema, Bryher reveals common problems caused by the same hierarchies in both Britain and Russia. Both her fiction and non-fiction texts refer to examples of traditional models of femininity and progressive women who challenge society's established status quo. Although they inhabit a different social environment, both Nancy's mother and her Downwood mistresses fulfil the same traditional domestic stereotypes that Bryher points out in her analysis of Alexander Room's film *Mother*. However, such social structures are obsolete and as a result, restrict the characters' development and access to opportunities that may grant them a better role in modern society. As the mother in Room's film is neglected by the protagonist's father, Nancy's own mother is similarly overlooked: she rarely voices an opinion or contributes to the household's discussions on politics. Similarly, Nancy's school mistresses perpetuate obsolete Victorian norms by enforcing them on Downwood's school girls. The school mistresses' adherence to the established norms bears similarities to Anna's acceptance of the village community's expectations in Preobrazhenskaya's *The Peasant Women of Riazan*. The parallels between the

¹ Bryher, *West*, 47-48; Bryher, 'Film for Children,' 17.

² Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 19-20.

behaviour of Bryher's characters, and the patterns of character development she notes in Soviet films indicates the broader connections between her prose and her film texts, as well as the extent to which her experiences as a young woman in early twentieth-century society informed her approach to film criticism.

By transferring these themes to her film texts, the author develops additional elements to the thematic concerns of her work in the 1920s and early 1930s and defines her understanding of the film medium and avant-garde films. The origin of Bryher's thematic continuity can be traced to the incorporation of her personal experience in both her fiction and non-fiction work. Her three autobiographical novels, *Development*, *Two Selves*, and *West*, become sites of identity creation as the author devises her protagonist Nancy. A prosopopoeial tool that distances the author from her family's social status and the potential critique that her opinions on the Establishment might attract, Nancy reflects Bryher's own journey of self-discovery and acknowledgement of her queer identity. Like Nancy, Bryher leaves the confines of her family home in order to establish herself as a publisher, editor, and author, forms a life-long relationship with the poet H.D., and friendships with numerous figures of modernism like the novelist Dorothy Richardson, the film critic Robert Herring, the filmmaker Oswald Blakeston, G.W.Pabst and Sergei Eisenstein. The framework of autobiographical fiction highlights the author's own perception of each period of her life. Her three novels overlook details such as characters' backgrounds and never describe the spaces Nancy inhabits. Instead, they privilege Nancy's opinions and feelings as the author explores the historical events and the social dynamics of wartime society through her protagonist's eyes. The texts' emphasis on the protagonist's experiences renders other agencies irrelevant to Bryher's narrative, while its focus on Nancy's psyche demonstrates the author's interest in the workings of the female psyche. As she explores Nancy's thoughts, the structure and style of Bryher's prose is modified according to the psychological processes and experiences it articulates. The prose of her novels

alternates between long constructions of multiple clauses to short paratactic expressions, establishing Bryher's novels not only as records of Nancy's experiences but also as visualisations of her mental states.

Similar to her novels, her *Close Up* articles and *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* draw on the author's personal experience of film spectatorship and expose her detailed knowledge of the Soviet film industry. As her film texts explore different directors' works and European and Hollywood cinematic movements, they also contribute new dimensions to existing core themes that inform her novels. Her observations on film intertwine the topics of education, films for children, censorship, and early British film culture with the themes of individual directors' entire body of work. *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* remarks on details such as Eisenstein's re-interpretation of historical events and Pudovkin's attention to manifestations of the characters' psyche through physical gestures. By contrast, Room's films are explorations of Soviet Russia's social reality and gender stereotypes while Lev Kuleshov's films are marked by complicated narratives and symbolism, influenced by the Hollywood films that were popular in Russia in the early twentieth century. Bryher intertwines these topics with the problems of education and social progress, and encourages society's involvement with the new medium, either as spectators or filmmakers. The language of the author's reflections on each filmmaker's work reflects the dominant themes of his films. As a result, the prose of *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* evolves according to the topics it discusses in each chapter. As in the prose of her autobiographical novels, where the style of the prose is modified according to the protagonist's thoughts and feelings, the language of Bryher's film volume adapts according to the author's own experiences of film-viewing and the issues she discusses in each chapter. Therefore, Bryher's texts are not only united through a thematic parallelism, which defines both the author's experimentation with autobiographical fiction and her film criticism, but also by an analogous approach to the structure of the texts' prose.

The stylistic parallels between the language of Bryher's fiction and non-fiction prose can be taken even further, as they adopt similar syntactical patterns, expressive of a certain feeling, impression or recurring topic. This is exemplified in the similarities of the sentence constructions that dominate the first part of *Development's* accounts of Nancy's dreamworld and the descriptions of Pudovkin's films in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*. As both texts focus on the characters' psyche, ideas of human behaviour and psychology are articulated in long and fluid sentence constructions that elaborate on the characters' states of mind. Similarly, in *Two Selves* and *West*, the fast-paced environment of war-time London and the New World are narrated in a series of short sentence constructions. Such short constructions convey the sense of urgency, urban dynamism and the protagonist's constant movement from space to space, as they introduce rhythm to the text. The rhythm of the text not only channels a young girl's exploration of her limited freedoms in early twentieth-century society but also builds an impression of the city at war. Similar fragmented prose relates the sensation of viewing Eisenstein's montage films. In *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* shorter sentences articulate the films' narrative action, alongside the rhythm of shot changes and the effect of the film's intercutting on the spectator. The similarity in the sentence constructions additionally suggests the influence of the author's own impressions of the films on her commentary in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*. The stylistic parallelism between the different texts manifests the significance of the personal experiences that informed both her novels and her opinions about film.

Although she incorporates her personal impressions in her film writing, Bryher's approach to film criticism is distinct from those of other *Close Up* critics in its sole focus on the films and their effects. Unlike H.D., who includes remarks unrelated to the films she discusses in her film articles, Bryher documents what she sees and never digresses into personal observations in the way H.D. does. H.D.'s film reviews mediate a personal experience of film spectatorship that clarifies the poet's own reasons for seeing a film and reflects merely on her

impression of viewing a certain film. Although H.D. writes about the viewing experience and film's visual style and performance, her texts still function as an exploration of her psyche through the topic of film rather than an analysis of aesthetics or technique. She aligns herself with the characters on the screen rather than the audience members, as she continues to reflect on her own identity and psyche. By contrast, Bryher's film texts analyse films as potential suggestions for other spectators and not herself. This intention results in the author's lists of films that audiences should see, like her lists of films for children in *Close Up* or categories of educational films in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*.³ Her film summaries relate films' plots in the greatest possible details, focusing on frame compositions, mise-en-scene, and montage, as well as the characters' actions and the context necessary for her readers to be able to visualise films they are unable to view in their local cinemas or film clubs. However, Bryher refrains from positioning herself in any relation to the characters she discusses or the filmmakers whose work she explores. Instead, her texts draw parallels between characters and filmmakers and the viewers she addresses in an attempt to clarify the films' relevance to the artistic and social concerns she raises throughout her novels and her film texts. The author's emphasis on these concerns establishes her as a central voice in *Close Up*'s community of critics. She is not merely a spectator who analyses film's artistic merits or the audience's reactions but identifies possible routes for film's development as an art form and an industry. As she turns film into another medium of self-exploration, H.D. fits film into her own understanding of aesthetic categories and treats it as a visual manifestation of a dreamworld that is otherwise only accessible in one's mind.

Dorothy Richardson shares Bryher's approach to film analysis to the extent that she takes the position of the spectator and records the emergence of early British film culture by treating the film theatre as a sample pool for her social analysis of British film-goers' habits.

³ Bryher, 'Films for Children,' 16-20; Bryher, *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, 123-124.

The novelist is less interested in the films themselves or in individual filmmakers' work than in the cinema theatre as a democratic space, inhabited by audiences of different social groups. The space of the cinema theatre is free of social prejudice or gender stereotypes, while film is a social and cultural phenomenon rather than an avant-garde art form. Unlike Richardson or H.D., Kenneth Macpherson lacks the expertise of a novelist or a poet. Instead, his editorials discuss film's artistic qualities and compare international film practices. His texts recognise the problems the British film industry faces but never offer any resolutions to these issues. Although other critics like Bryher and especially Richardson are keen to explore entertainment films as well as art films, Macpherson only focuses on avant-garde filmmaking techniques and filmmakers, often rebuking popular entertainment for its exploitation of film's mechanism.

As *Close Up* critics, H.D., Richardson and Macpherson offer contexts for film analysis based on their individual artistic backgrounds. H.D. seeks out the poetic in the projected image, Richardson describes the social habits and stereotypes found in the space of the cinema, and Macpherson draws on his artistic background and experience in filmmaking. Bryher, however, suggests that one should abandon all pre-existing frameworks and definitions when one approaches film: as a new art, film calls for a new approach to understand its mechanical nature and purpose in twentieth-century culture. Though it might serve as an antidote to a multitude of social and artistic concerns, film should be treated as an art form separate from existing arts. Film communicates through its own expressive features such as the recorded moving image, cinematography, editing, and Soviet montage. As these traits create the impression of dynamism that is akin only to film's mechanism, their specificity prohibits film's adoption of a pre-existing semantic framework. Instead, film's mechanical ability to record and draw connections between unrelated images through montage indicates artistic cinematic practices' potential to advance audiences' imagination and encourage them to think for themselves beyond the habits and stereotypes that have been ingrained in their daily lives. By doing so,

film not only serves as a medium of entertainment but also education in the ways of film art and broader universal categories.

Besides her own contributions, Bryher's involvement with *Close Up* as the journal's founder, sponsor, and editor helped establish a whole community of film critics, including Dorothy Richardson, Oswald Blakeston, Robert Herring, and Hans Sachs, who all formed close friendships with Bryher. The journal also printed Charlotte Arthur's early short story of two parts 'In the Old Days'.⁴ Charlotte Arthur (née Wilson) was married to Chester Alan Arthur III, who was the grandson of American President Chester A. Arthur and who also adopted the name Gavin Arthur for his artistic endeavours. Both of them appeared in POOL Productions' film *Borderline*: Charlotte as the barmaid alongside Bryher's manageress in the bar, and Gavin Arthur as Astrid's husband Thorne. Apart from the two short pieces she published in *Close Up* and her appearance in *Borderline*, Charlotte Arthur published her novel *Poor Faun* in 1930.⁵ *Poor Faun* explores the mentalities of its central characters and the love triangle that forms between the married couple Barbara and Jocelyn, and their family friend Steve. An exploration of the intricacies of marital life, the novel juxtaposes the female and male psyche, depicted in Jocelyn's childish recklessness as opposed to Barbara's rationality and love for her husband. Their tumultuous relationship and Barbara's changing perspective of her husband's problematic temper are additionally complicated by the strain of Jocelyn's strive for financial and social success in the context of the novel's various communities and classes. Although Arthur's literary work remains largely unexplored, the emphasis on social and gender stereotypes in *Poor Faun* links her novel to the explorations of the psyche and social hierarchies in Bryher's own novels. As Barbara realises her husband's inability to fit into the hierarchies to which she belongs, the novel points out the faults with early twentieth-century American

⁴ Charlotte Arthur, 'In the Old Days I,' *Close Up*, V - 4 (April 1930) 297-303; 'In the Old Days II', *Close Up*, VII - 5, 369-377.

⁵ Charlotte Arthur, *Poor Faun* (London and New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1930)

society and the expectations forced on both men and women in the context of the stereotypes that govern this society. Although not as explicit as Bryher's social critique, Charlotte Arthur's novel shares some traits with Bryher's observations on American society's rigidity in *West*. However, it paints a more comprehensive picture of the various social milieux of its period by taking up multiple characters' perspectives rather than concentrating on a single protagonist, like Bryher's Nancy. *Poor Faun*'s inclusion of male and female points of view and the experiences of characters of several social groups renders Arthur's novel a more democratic exploration of early twentieth-century society than the discriminatory approach, which Bryher's novels employ in their depiction of men characters and traditional women's roles.

Bryher's tenure as an editor came to a close when *Close Up* folded in 1933 and her further involvements in film criticism were limited to her sponsorship of the magazine *Life and Letters To-Day* and its *SURVEY* series. Nevertheless, she remains an active writer of fiction until 1972 when she publishes her second and final memoir *The Days of Mars*. The themes and narrative voice that emerge from her novels and film texts from the 1920s and 1930s transpose on her later work of the 1950s and 1960s, dominated by historical novels, which Barbara Guest describes as 'adventure stories... with settings in which a lone boy, faced by danger, would conquer all... historical fiction upon which children can build their early concepts of history'.⁶ The thematic and stylistic continuity across the author's early novels and her later historical fiction develops her core concerns by placing them in new socio-cultural and historical contexts. The experience of war, social stereotypes and generational conflict are once again negotiated in relation to the concept of homosexuality and one's relationship to one's own gender, community, or family relations. In the novel *The Player's Boy* (1953) Bryher continues her practice of employing the protagonist's psyche as the focal point of her explorations of a certain historical and social context. However, other novels, like *Beowulf* ([1948], 1956) and

⁶ Guest, *Herself Defined*, 115.

Gate to the Sea (1958), forsake the singular perspective that governs previous narratives and instead adopt a shifting narrative consciousness that moves between characters. The novel's shifting perspective allows a thorough exploration of World War II's impact on different sections of the characters' community through multiple points of view of the narrative events. This new approach to her prose also accommodates the myriad of thematic concerns typical of author's Bryher's texts, irrelevant of the characters' backgrounds and the historical context of the narratives' settings. The texts' sentence constructions endow the narrative action with a cinematic quality akin to the author's film summaries and impressions of montage recorded in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*. The cinematic quality of the author's 1950s novels underscores the ongoing discourses of social stereotypes, differences between generations, and gender dynamics in Bryher's work.

Bryher finishes her novel *Beowulf* on January 18th 1944.⁷ However, the novel is published years later: in France in 1948, and with the help of Sylvia Beach and Adrienne Monnier.⁸ It is not until 1956 that *Beowulf* is finally published in English, but in America. The novel is never published in Britain because, as Bryher presumes in her second memoir *The Days of Mars*, British society 'had had enough of war' at the time of the novel's publication.⁹ *Beowulf* describes the interactions of a small group of characters during the Blitz on London in 1940-1941. Based on the patrons of the real *Warming Pan* teashop and the events Bryher witnessed there herself, the novel takes its name from the plaster bulldog featured in the narrative and the book's dust jacket.¹⁰ As a record of the human experiences during the Blitz and British society's perceptions of World War II, *Beowulf* develops the discourses on war that originate in *Two Selves*. However, unlike *Two Selves*, which examines the experience of war only from Nancy's individualised point of view, *Beowulf* allows several perspectives on the

⁷ Bryher, *The Days of Mars: A Memoir, 1940-1946*, 119.

⁸ Ibid. 119.

⁹ Ibid. 119.

¹⁰ Ibid. 12-13, 15, 21.

war experience. For the elderly painter Horatio Rashleigh, based on the author's friend Rashleigh, the war is an everyday struggle that is only made worse by his old age and loneliness. The novel begins with his decision to contact a daughter of his acquaintance Mrs. Johnson and ask for financial help with his rent and bills, and his reflections on Evelyn's frivolous behaviour.¹¹ Meanwhile, Selina Tippet and her companion Angelina worry that the shortage of fresh food and the financial burdens of running the *Warming Pan* might hinder their already modest business.¹² Selina's troubles, the thoughts of the waitress Ruby while she waits for the bus, and Horatio's financial concerns underscore the small community's experience of war against the backdrop of London's larger urban cosmos London.¹³ Each character demonstrates an individualised perspective on the hardships of war thus allowing the novel to explore class differences, gender perspectives, and opinions.

Beowulf continues Bryher's exploration of different generations' attitude to life and women's relationships and place in war-time society, both themes that emerge in the author's meditation on her experience of World War I in *Two Selves*. Bryher's novel on World War II contrasts generational differences in Horatio's attitude to his niece Evelyn's behaviour when he mentally rebukes the young girl's nonchalance to pre-war social norms as she leaves the house 'in a leather coat without even the pretence of a cap on short, smooth hair'.¹⁴ His attitude to Evelyn's gentleman is similarly sceptical. The text records his internal critique of the young man, Joe, as he notices his lack of acknowledgement of the difficulties of war.¹⁵ In his conversation with Evelyn, Joe admits that 'most of the time since I joined up I've been doing the things I really enjoy'.¹⁶ Although Joe enjoys having 'oil on his hands and the rhythm of an engine in his ears', Horatio's thoughts rebuke him for asking for a second plate of cakes despite

¹¹ Bryher, *Beowulf* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956) 11, 12-14.

¹² *Ibid.* 95-97, 131.

¹³ *Ibid.* 9-14; 21-32; 75-77.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 131.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 131.

this is ‘against the regulations’ of the *Warming Pan* and its rationing regime.¹⁷ Joe’s request is a testament to young people’s lack of responsibility to the difficulties of war and his ‘muttering between mouthfuls’ is dismissed as a poor attempt at a conversation with Evelyn.¹⁸ Horatio’s mental commentary of Evelyn’s attitudes and company resonate with the comments of Nancy’s mother whose authoritative voice advises her daughter to wear her white muslin dress to dinner in *Two Selves* and brush her hair, and criticises her outspoken nature.¹⁹

This scepticism against women’s assumption of new roles is part of the text’s reflections on Selina and Angelina’s relationship, and their position as women business partners in wartime society. While the two conform to inter-war stereotypes, Selina’s dream of running her own teashop is considered a folly and bewilders her companion, who sceptically discourages her because ‘people always lose money’ on such endeavours.²⁰ The teashop is a two-fold metaphor for Selina’s ‘freedom’: it is a symbol of the freedom granted to her by her employer on her free days from work and a connotation of a metaphorical freedom from conventions and social expectations that allows her to be her own person, once she opens the teashop.²¹ These interpretations of the notion of freedom are significant to Bryher’s discourses on women’s place in patriarchal society and social stereotypes as Selina’s position as a business owner is an extension of the limited freedoms Eleanor and Nancy discuss in *Two Selves*.²² The women characters in *Two Selves* and Selina illustrate the development of these freedoms and social change throughout the decades that follow World War I and chart the beginning of World War II. Selina’s start as a maid places her in the class of women like Eleanor whose limited means and opportunities render them vulnerable to society’s expectations and the authority of others. Nevertheless, Selina rejects her social role and defies her critics when she takes the

¹⁷ Ibid. 131.

¹⁸ Ibid. 131.

¹⁹ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 208-209.

²⁰ Bryher, *Beowulf*, 24-25.

²¹ Ibid. 24.

²² Bryher, *Two Novels*, 244-249.

inheritance her employer Miss Humphries' leaves her and opens the *Warming Pan*.²³ The seven years during which Selina owns and runs the *Warming Pan* merge into one as the text claims 'there had not been a day when she had not felt vibrantly, excitedly alive'.²⁴ Angelina's concession to become Selina's partner and their support for each other indicates the importance of women's relationship in the interwar social climate. Despite the three decades that separate the events of Bryher's *Two Selves* and *Beowulf*, the initial tension between the two women over Selina's plans indicate that social moods have evolved little and progressive women who seek freedom from obsolete stereotypes can eventually find support only in each other.

Beowulf perpetuates the models of progressive femininity that originate in Bryher's early novels also through Angelina's determination to affirm herself as an educated woman in war-time society. Similar to Nancy who attends lectures in Egyptology and archaeology in *Two Selves*, Angelina is also interested in Egyptology and political science.²⁵ Angelina justifies her awareness of revolutionary politics through the claim that such education is important for 'the future of us women', voicing one of Bryher's own core beliefs.²⁶ Her political awareness is further demonstrated in her discussion of the Ministry of Food's legal requirements and the poster of marching young girls under rows of Russian letters that hangs in her room.²⁷ These elements, alongside the text's emphasis on her scarlet gloves and beret, also symbolise her revolutionary tendencies and align her with Nancy's own transgressive convictions.²⁸

Selina and Angelina's partnership continues the discourses on femininity and female companionship that originate in *Two Selves*. *Beowulf*'s exploration of their relationship evoke the depictions of Nancy's friendship with Eleanor and Doreen in *Development* and *Two Selves*, and later with Helga in *West*. Although both of her early novels and *Beowulf* draw on Bryher's

²³ Bryher, *Beowulf*, 26-27.

²⁴ Ibid. 26.

²⁵ Ibid. 28-29; Bryher, *Two Novels*, 190-191.

²⁶ Bryher, *Beowulf*, 26.

²⁷ Ibid. 95; 96-103.

²⁸ Ibid. 65.

personal experiences, the focus of the novels' reflections on women's relationships varies. The three early novels privilege the protagonist's opinions of the other women characters and her perception of her relationships with them. As she realises her differences from other girls early in her childhood and regrets being a girl, Nancy seeks a friend who can understand her sensitivity and intellect.²⁹ Her decision is an allusion to the text's acknowledgement of its protagonist's queer identity and an introduction of female companionship in Bryher's exploration of gender dynamics and femininity across her early prose. In Nancy's case female companionship enables her crossing into traditionally masculine spaces. Despite the other characters' occasional comments on Nancy's behaviour, Bryher's first three novels favour Nancy's perception of her relationship with other women. Therefore, the three early novels mediate one-dimensional impressions of female companionship that privilege the protagonist's perspective. By contrast, *Beowulf* records both Angelina's and Selina's behaviour and perspectives. Although at first it focuses on Selina and her motivation to open the *Warming Pan*, the text explores her relationship with Angelina and transitions to Angelina's thoughts through the two characters' interactions and dialogue. An example is the episode when Angelina brings a plaster bulldog to display in the teashop as a sign of hope and national pride.³⁰ Selina's scepticism against Angelina's behaviour is justified by the indirect narration of Selina's internal monologue as it informs about the *Warming Pan*'s financial problems and the character's conviction that she is 'born with a sense of responsibility' and 'others utterly, completely, and finally without it'.³¹ Selina's thoughts are the text's indication of the dynamics of the women's relationship as well as the author's move from a single point of view to an exploration of multiple psyches in one narrative.

Though fragmented, the author's own opinions can still be detected in the

²⁹ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 24.

³⁰ Bryher, *The Days of Mars*, 13; Bryher *Beowulf* (1956) 64-67.

³¹ *Ibid.* 65.

relationships and thoughts of the women who run the *Warming Pan*, whose goals and woes in life evoke Nancy's difficulties and, by the autobiographical nature of the first three novels, Bryher's own experiences. Angelina's strive for education reproduces the discourses on education that dominate Nancy's internal monologue across *Development* and *Two Selves*, as well as Bryher's film criticism in *Close Up* and *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*. Although the text cites Angelina's interests in academic disciplines like Egyptology and Eastern cultures, she is also interested in politics, an allusion to her recognition of government issues and her social activism. Meanwhile, Selina, with her determination to create and sustain a business, develops the stereotype of women characters like Eleanor. Despite the connections between *Beowulf's* women characters and Bryher's own experiences are not as clear as the autobiographical origins of her first trilogy, the similarities that Selina and Angelina share with Nancy and her friends still root the events of the novel in the author's memories. Not only that, but they also perpetuate earlier texts' ideas about education and women's status in society, as well as their attack on Victorian stereotypes of femininity in the figures of Selina, Angelina, and Ruby.

Beowulf's travelling perspective not only allows for the narrative focus to move between characters, but also introduces a cinematic dimension on the novel's narrative and structural levels. Certain events in the novel are witnessed by most of the characters such as the episode when Angelina first brings *Beowulf*, the plaster bulldog and wartime symbol of the national spirit, to the teashop.³² The event is witnessed by Rashleigh, Mrs Spencer, and Selina. Apart from their opinions, their reactions also indicate their views of Angelina. Selina's scepticism originates from her complex relationship with her partner. Although she realises the importance of Angelina's support of herself and the *Warming Pan*, she is annoyed at her

³² Ibid. 64-65.

partner's frivolous purchase given the teashop's financial problems.³³ The statue's 'placid, overfat plaster jowl' becomes a physical reminder of her anxiety in the space of the teashop. Meanwhile, Mrs Spencer describes bulldogs as 'stubborn' and leaves soon after her exchange with Angelina.³⁴ Although she empathises with Angelina who is unable to keep a 'herbal garden with a terrier at her heels', another woman character, Mrs. Hawkins admires her as she is 'more alive... than either Alice or the prim old Tipett'.³⁵ Meanwhile, Horatio Rashleigh admits to Angelina that the statue and its name are 'gallant', but internally reflects on Angelina's behaviour: 'An ugly woman... she bullied her conscientious little partner'.³⁶ The refusal to align the narrative perspective with a single character and the divergence in the opinions the characters articulate and their thoughts complicates the novel's depiction of character relationships. Unlike in previous novels, the narrative perspective in *Beowulf* also refuses to acknowledge a single perspective as the dominant mind-set of the novel but instead allows for characters' tempers and perceptions of life to clash, thus revealing the conflict of values in the war-time climate.

The same mechanism is at work in the episode that centres on Evelyn and Joe's visit to the *Warming Pan* and the characters' experience of the raid in the final chapter.³⁷ The text's tendency to move between characters' opinions of a single event and map out their relationships to each other through their thoughts endows the novel's narrative with a cinematic quality. Different characters' perspectives are examined in the same way montage intercuts between individual perceptions of the same events. Instead of describing the events in detail, the text relates the entire episode as a construction of individual characters' reactions to the same events. Bryher's use of multiple character perspectives in these sections of *Beowulf* lies

³³ Ibid. 70.

³⁴ Ibid. 66-67.

³⁵ Ibid. 67.

³⁶ Ibid. 66.

³⁷ Ibid. 125-138; 173-201.

on the intersection of Laura Marcus's and David Trotter's analysis of Virginia Woolf's use of the characters' consciousness in *Mrs Dalloway*.

Marcus' exploration of *Mrs Dalloway* remarks on the text's 'shifting consciousness' as the narrative moves from one character to another and relates their experiences.³⁸ Trotter, by contrast, focuses on Woolf's discussion of the 'queer sensation' that emerges from her experience of film spectatorship.³⁹ This unsettling sensation is induced by the viewers' awareness that the events they witness started before their arrival and will continue after they leave.⁴⁰ This is particularly the case with early practices of film spectatorship when audiences entered and left the film theatre at will or with newsreels that showed only a certain length of footage on a specific topic. In the episodes when *Beowulf's* characters share an experience, their perspective is united by spatial and temporal proximity that occurs only in episodes when a group of characters witness the same event. In its record of Evelyn and Joe's conversation, the text positions them as the focal point for the other character's attention. The other characters, like Rashleigh, interrupt their activity in order to pay attention to the young couple. While the text notes Evelyn and Joe's actions as well, it travels through each character's psyche and records their opinion of Evelyn and Joe's behaviour. It moves from the couple's thoughts about the shop to Rashleigh's mental critique of their behaviour to Selina's internal monologue on the teashop's difficulties while she serves everyone.⁴¹ Although it grants license to multiple perspectives and therefore opinions of the situation, this travelling perspective limits the objectivity of the text's record of the narrative events. Similar to Bryher's early three novels, the narrative never stops in order to deliver a detailed description of the locales the characters inhabit or a specific element of an event. Instead, all these elements are related through the

³⁸ Laura Marcus, *Virginia Woolf* (Devon, UK: Northcote House in association with the British Council, 2004 [1997]) 20. Citations refer to the 2004 edition.

³⁹ Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism*, 169.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 169.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 125-129; 131.

characters' conversations or perception. Therefore, its record of the actual event is still partial, in the same way Nancy's conciseness filters details irrelevant to her opinions or the main narrative. As Trotter remarks of Woolf's 'queer sensation' of cinema, the event starts before the spectator's attention is drawn to it and will end after the spectator has moved on. In *Beowulf's* case, these episodes are never resolved as the text privileges its exploration of the characters' experience of these events and moves on to the next episode. Thus, as the novel only provides snippets of narrative events, it presents a montage of episodes organised in individual chapters that focus on characters' thoughts.

Bryher's prose in the 1950s maintains this cinematic quality through other mechanisms besides the narrative's travelling perspective. *Beowulf*, as well as later novels like *The Player's Boy* (1953) and *Gate to the Sea* (1958), emphasises the importance of dialogue not only as an expression of the characters' interactions but also as a mechanism that furthers the narratives. *Beowulf's* use of dialogue as a narrative tool relies on an inherent familiarity with the narrative world and its characters, an approach Bryher adopts in her second and third novels. As the narrative consciousness moves between characters and privileges their thoughts' importance to the narrative, the text explores the locations and spaces they inhabit through their actions and omits other explanations. In *Beowulf* each character inhabits their own space besides the shared space of the *Warming Pan*. The text's assumed familiarity with each narrative location emerges from the respective character's attachment to this setting. For Horatio Rashleigh, this is the room above the *Warming Pan*, where he writes letters to Mrs. Johnson's daughter to ask for financial help.⁴² Ruby's encounter provides an insight into the crowded space of the bus and the milieu of workers who normally travel home after work.⁴³ Selina is associated with the space of the *Warming Pan* or the private rooms with faded curtains

⁴² Bryher, *Beowulf*, 12.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 75-89.

where she and Angelina discuss the problems of running their business.⁴⁴ Similarly to *Two Selves*'s record of war-time London and *West*'s descriptions of the New World and Nancy's journeys through these spaces, *Beowulf* explores these rooms as the characters move through them. The description of characters' assigned spaces increase the novel's cinematic quality. As each chapter is dedicated to an exploration of individual characters' thoughts, the narrative consciousness is limited to the spaces these characters inhabit and becomes saturated with the symbols of their identity and respective experience of the war. All surfaces in Angelina's room are cluttered with various 'oddments' and the walls are 'the only tidy spaces in the room', alluding to the character's passionate but chaotic personality.⁴⁵ The text maps out the space of Rashleigh's room as he leaves his bed to write the letter, saturating it with the memories of the painter's past.⁴⁶ The novel's second chapter similarly charts the teashop's geography as Selina goes through the post at her desk and Timothy prepares the shop before it opens.⁴⁸ The confinement of her small room at the back of the teashop, the kitchen and the shop's front mark the boundaries of Selina's small world and define her identity through the achievement of founding and running her own business. Similar to the multiple narrative perspectives that Bryher records in her impressions of montage films, the novel allows these insights into the characters' intimate moments as it moves between episodes without providing a clear resolution to the characters' problems. The novels that follow *Beowulf*'s completion demonstrate a similar approach as their narratives and characters develop chiefly through dialogue.

According to *The Days of Mars*, Bryher starts work on *The Player's Boy* immediately after *Beowulf*'s publication in France in 1948.⁴⁹ Published in 1953, *The Player's Boy*

⁴⁴ Ibid. 93-105.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 95.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 9-18.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 23-27.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 121.

incorporates the author's interests in Elizabethan history and theatre in another interpretation of a *Bildungsroman*. Evidence of Bryher's research on Elizabethan theatre from the early 1600s can be found in her notebooks and first novel.⁵⁰ Some of the plays quoted in her notebooks such as John Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* also feature in *Development* as part of Nancy's internal monologue and further contribute to the thematic continuity of Bryher's novels.⁵¹ In the context of *Development* the quotations hint at the protagonist's precocious young mind and a set of interests that deviate from standard young girls' occupations. As this thesis discusses elsewhere, Downwood school's restrictions oppress Nancy who chooses to distance herself from the rest of the schoolgirls and immerse herself in an imaginary world constructed of historical references and memories from her family's travels. This not only complicates her relationship with characters at her own age and gender but also demonstrates her rebellion against the oppressive social stereotypes of the period's institutional authority.

The Player's Boy follows a similar pattern to the episodic narratives in *Two Selves* and *West*, and is therefore narrated through retrospections and character interactions. The text sets the scene for each episode and develops the rest of the chapter's narrative events through dialogue and the protagonist's thoughts, in the way Nancy guides Bryher's early narratives. In Part One, 'Mouse-Coloured Velvet', the novel introduces Master Awsten as he lies on the bed and speaks to Sands.⁵² The following chapter begins with landscape descriptions as Sands moves through London while his environment and social group change, and then moves on to his interactions with other characters.⁵³ Similar to the dialogues recorded in *West*, the text often lacks clear indications of who speaks to whom. As the author assumes the protagonist's identity through the novel's first-person narration, it is left up to the reader to follow the dialogue and

⁵⁰ Bryher, Notes: Elizabethan literature, Bryher Papers, Box 90, Folder 3318.

⁵¹ Bryher, Notes: Elizabethan literature, Bryher Papers, ,Box 90 Folder 3318; Bryher, *Two Novels*, 109.

⁵² Bryher, *The Player's Boy* (St. James's Place, London: Collins, 1957) p. 11

⁵³ *Ibid.* 37-38.

the narrative action. The text prescribes familiarity with the narrative world in the same way Bryher's three autobiographical novels assume previous knowledge of the characters and narrative events because of the texts' origin. The use of dialogue as the novel's prime form of narration imbues *The Player's Boy* with a sense of dynamism that can be traced back to *Two Selves* and *West*.

An epigraph of the season and the year draws attention to the historical moment of each chapter in *The Player's Boy*: 'May 1st, 1605', 'Spring 1607', 'April 1608', 'October 1618', '1626', while the first paragraph describes the location of individual episodes.⁵⁴ This structure provides a setting for the narrative but it never elaborates on details. Instead, the narrative is driven through the characters' dialogue or their individual mental monologues that clarify their past or relationships. Like *Beowulf*, *The Player's Boy* adopts two structures that emerge from Bryher's autobiographical novels: *Two Selves*' use of dialogue as a mechanism of narrative development and the internal monologues that allow for the exploration of Nancy's psyche in *Development*. By combining the two in its focus on the singular protagonist, the novel explores Sands' relationships to other characters and experiences in different time periods. While the dialogue relates present events and reveals that characters' past experiences and current relationships, Sands' psyche provides insights into his own perception of the narrative world and thoughts that he never shares with the others. These events are related as the narrative momentarily departs from the present episode of their conversation and reflects on Sands' monologue. His thoughts' importance is underscored by the text's first-person narration. While the first-person narration implies the author's identification with this protagonist, it also adds a dimension of intimacy to the narrative. Privy to Sands' intimate thoughts and fears, the reader is encouraged to empathise with his experiences as an apprentice. Therefore, Bryher's fiction novels record narrative events selectively and deny the possibility

⁵⁴ Ibid. 11, 37, 65, 111, 155.

to trace the events from beginning to end or uncover the origin of specific episode. The texts provide a partial record of the narrative events that are compressed in short amounts of time or organised in selective episodes. These episodes' objectivity is tainted by the characters' individual psyches as events are refracted through characters' mind-sets and coloured by their personal experiences of that event in that moment.

Sands' conversation with Master Awsten reveals the nature of his relationship with his master. By underscoring the master's critique of Sands' weakness, the text creates an image of its protagonist through the indirect records of other characters' opinions of him. Awsten points out that Sands' training could be 'the envy of any courtier's child'.⁵⁵ He compares the difficulties of his own childhood and adolescence with Sands' 'fencing and singing' and his playing the lute.⁵⁶ The master's reflections on his apprenticeship, his love for Maudlyne, and his illness are followed by Sands' own monologue about his relationship with his Master.⁵⁷ Sands' idealistic perception of the theatre is articulated in his promise: 'I shall fall in love with the Muses' and then countered by Awsten's realistic ideas about the difficulties of their craft.⁵⁸ Despite Awsten's dismissal of the protagonist's romantic ideas about the theatre and the muses, Sands is oblivious of his master's advice and is instead focused on making him happy in his last hours.⁵⁹ The protagonist's misapprehension of the difficulties of the theatre world and his reverence for his master are another iteration of the ongoing theme of generational differences in Bryher's prose. Similar to Nancy, James Sands refuses to take his master's advice. However, unlike Nancy's strained relationships to her mother or other figures of authority like her Downwood schoolteachers, Sands' reverence for Master Awsten and later Master Philips is at odds with their dismissal of his talents for theatre and his care for them. On Sands' first meeting

⁵⁵ Ibid. 14.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 15.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 15-23; 25-29.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 20.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 20.

with the two of them, Master Phillips, ‘one of Her Majesty’s players’, is a ‘gallant’ with hair like ‘rose noble’ and ‘fine gold’.⁶⁰ Awsten is the shorter man who smiles to Sands as James sees him ‘smile at his daughters later when they played with him’.⁶¹ This description of Sands’ first introduction to the company’s men indicates his infatuation with the actors and singers, and theatre’s illusion. As the novel records his experience in the company and his performances as Bellario through the protagonist’s internal monologues or exchanges with other characters, it underscores the young apprentice’s misleading idealisation of the theatre world and his relationship to the other company men. Sands’ relationship to his masters adds another dimension to Bryher’s exploration of inter-generational conflicts. Sands’ associations with Awsten and Beaumont are the affairs between a student and a teacher. Awsten tries to dissuade Sands from pursuing his dream of a career in theatre and rebukes his ‘lily-livered’ behaviour and lack of understanding or preparation for life’s difficulties.⁶² The protagonist’s constant idealisation of the company and the world of theatre enables the company men’s oppression of his talents and exploitation of his naïveté as a young man and an apprentice. Awsten takes Sands into the theatre company where he is made apprentice to Master Phillips first and then to Awsten himself.

When Sands is cast in the female part of Bellario in Master Beaumont’s play, the narrative turns to an exploration of the protagonist’s relationships with other company men, complicated by his infatuation with Beaumont’s fiancée Ursula. A parallel can be established between the construction of Bryher’s *Development* and *The Player’s Boy* as both novels focus their initial chapters on their protagonists’ formative years. The descriptions of Nancy’s dreamworld before Downwood and Sands’ romantic ideas about the theatre are intertwined with discourses of identity formation not by encounters in real life but by sets of dreams and

⁶⁰ Ibid. 26-27.

⁶¹ Ibid. 28.

⁶² Ibid. 16.

aspirations. Once the protagonists encounter other characters of their age and gender, their world and worldview change. In Nancy's case, these are the schoolgirls at Downwood and her schoolmistresses, all of whom she considers to be ignorant and incapable of life beyond the school's walls. Unlike Bryher's alter-ego who is quick to dismiss other girls, Sands at first tries to form a relationship to an apprentice in Mr. Sly's company. However, as his dedication to his part becomes irrelevant and he realises the company treats Dicky Robison and him differently, as he points out, 'If Dicky forgot his lines, he got a reproof, where I should have got a clout.'⁶³ After his Master's death, Sands' innocence renders him a victim in the hands of the company's men, including Dicky.⁶⁴ Instead of learning his lines or rehearsing his part, Sands is forced to run errands for the rest of the company and thus falls behind in his craft. Blinded by his desire to not only please his Masters, he also attempts to impress Dicky. The sensitivity other characters deride is underscored by Sands' taking over the role of the woman Bellario in Mr. Beaumont's play, an action that additionally picks him out as feminine and vulnerable to the other men's abuse.⁶⁵ Sands' internal monologue reveals that the audience listens to Bellario and not him.⁶⁶ The only one to dress for the part at the rehearsal, Sands hints at a 'gift' that separates him from the rest of the group.⁶⁷ He realises this as his love for Ursula resurfaces.⁶⁸ His sensitivity, paired with the metaphorical notion of his gift, resonates with Nancy's own understanding of her true self and her sensitivities. In the context of *Two Selves*, Nancy's sensitivity is linked to her homosexuality and as the narrative develops, a similar strand appears in *The Player's Boy*.

When Humphries suggests that Sands' desire to please Dicky is a product of his love

⁶³ Ibid. 121.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 122.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 92-94.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 94.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 86.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 86-87.

for him, Sands responds: ‘No, Dicky was, as I see it now, the other side of myself’.⁶⁹ Sands’ recognition that Dicky is his ‘other side’ implies a duality similar to the one introduced in *Two Selves* through Nancy’s recognition of her ‘two selves’. Nancy is torn between the urge to be free to seek out a female companion who would celebrate her sensitive and artistic nature, and the female stereotype that she is supposed to fulfil in early twentieth century society. Nevertheless, her desire to be free overwhelms her insecurities and with her choice to leave her patriarchal upper-class home she also acknowledges her homosexuality. Nancy’s queer identity allows her to travel in the company of other women and explore spaces that are traditionally reserved for men. Although he torments him and becomes the reason for Sands’ exploitation by the rest of the theatre company, Sands treats Dicky as a friend throughout his tenure as the group’s apprentice. In his conversation with Humphries, Sands attributes his strained relationship to Dicky to their different status in the group.⁷⁰ Sands’ relationship to Dicky continues Bryher’s discussions on gender and homosexuality, and the fate that awaits those who cannot find a partner and are unable to navigate a society governed by stereotypes and obsolete norms. Unlike Nancy, James Sands is unable to assert himself in society and eventually his sensitivity leads to his death. Sands’ death is a metaphor for society’s tendency to take advantage of the young and innocent and sacrifice them for its own goals.

Apart from hints from other characters, Sands’ homosexuality is suggested through the author’s association with the author. Unlike Bryher’s early autobiographical novels and its indirect third-person narration, *The Player’s Boy* is written in the first person. While Bryher’s texts on Nancy record their protagonist’s experiences from her own point of view and never permit anyone else’s perspective to intervene in the narrative, the third person narrative voice of the three books distances the author from the protagonist despite the novels’

⁶⁹ Ibid. 121.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 123-124.

autobiographical origins. These autobiographical foundations establish the novels as sites of identity creation as Bryher mediates the difficulties of her coming of age and the acknowledgement of her own homosexuality. The distance introduced by the novels' third-person narration endows the three texts with a level of subjectivity as they map out the young queer protagonist's journey to self-awareness. As the author assumes the identity of her man protagonist in *The Player's Boy*, the merging of author and character aids the novel's critique of society's inability to accept those who are unable to fit its stereotypes. The novel's first person narration is a sign of the author's coming to terms with her own identity. In the period of her life when she started work on *The Player's Boy* the author had already come to terms with her own homosexuality. There was no need for her to reflect on women's relationships as she did in the texts of *Development* and *Two Selves*. Instead she assumed James' identity through the narrative 'I' as an affirmation that she accepted both the sensitive and masculine parts of her own dual self.

The discourses of queer identity of Bryher's early novels and *The Player's Boy* continue in *Gate to the Sea* (1958).⁷¹ *Gate to the Sea* explores a narrative world constructed of the Hellenic imagery of Nancy's dreams and typical of H.D.'s poetry. Conquered by the war tribe of the Lucanians, the Poseidonians are a small enslaved community and the novel's narrative focus. As Harmonia, the priestess of the temple of Hera, finally concedes to help a group of slaves escape the city walls, her long-lost brother Archias appears in the company of a young child, Myro.⁷² When she introduces herself to Harmonia the child emphasises the masculine form of the name: 'Myron'.⁷³ Although the text never dwells on the character's identity, Myro/Myron's insistence on the name's masculine form reintroduces the themes of homosexuality and gender identity that originate in Bryher's autobiographical prose. Despite

⁷¹ Bryher, *Gate to the Sea* (London: Pantheon Books, 1958)

⁷² Ibid. 46.

⁷³ Ibid. 46.

her young age she is the only character who volunteers to accompany Archias on his mission to retrieve the city's token to the Oracle of Cumae.⁷⁴ When she introduces herself to Harmonia, Myro/Myron insists: 'I am a boy and I am going to be a sailor and go with Archias on his voyages.'⁷⁵ Myro/Myron's statement is reflexive of Nancy's desire to be a boy. In *Development* Nancy insists on choosing objects and activities typical of boys, and adopts their perspective. She wants to possess a pocket knife 'like a boy' and 'a boy's story-book and a couple of histories' create her impression of Ancient Egypt.⁷⁶ The text summarises the protagonist's wish to be a boy directly in the sentence: 'She was sure if she hoped enough she would turn into a boy.'⁷⁷ However, in the context of Nancy's world, her desire to be perceived differently is of little importance. She is forced to follow established stereotypes of femininity throughout her childhood and her young adulthood. In order to free herself of these stereotypes, she needs to find a way to reassert her identity in the spaces of masculinity through her relationship with other women like Helga, her poet companion and chaperone.

Like Nancy, Myro/Myron feels 'that she had been born to live on a ship and not be tied up like some mischievous puppy in the women's apartments'.⁷⁸ Despite her father's fears and Poseidonia's dangers, she joins Archias on his journey. However, unlike Nancy who needs to rely on her own gender's limited freedoms to reinstate her independence in the social space, Myro/Myron reshapes her identity by changing into the boy's clothes that Archias brings her and modifying her name.⁷⁹ As she embraces the markers of masculinity that remain unattainable for Nancy, this is enough for the other characters to dismiss her as a boy. When she first meets the child, Harmonia takes Myro/Myron for a boy.⁸⁰ Phila also thinks her an

⁷⁴ Ibid. 46, 92.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 46.

⁷⁶ Bryher, *Two Novels*, 26, 44.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 24.

⁷⁸ Bryher, *Gate to the Sea*, 93.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 92.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 46.

‘urchin,’ and interprets Myro/Myron’s concern for Archias as the boy’s attempt to ‘influence his master’.⁸¹ The ease of her transition from femininity to masculinity is a statement on the fluidity between genders that are otherwise governed by the stereotypes, which society imposes on one’s individuality. Nancy breaks the boundaries between female and male spaces and their respective stereotypes by physically invading these spaces. The text of *Two Selves* follows her through the spaces of war-time London as she defies obsolete norms of femininity. In *West* she enters realms of literary discussions preserved for men and challenges not only the established patriarchal norms but also society’s expectations of women’s knowledge. Nancy’s transition into these spaces demands a level of sovereignty from her family and an awareness of women’s still limited freedoms. Despite her relative independence, Nancy’s transgression of the established norms is countered by society’s scepticism. After she disagrees with the men’s opinions in their literary discussion, one of her most ardent opponents, Paston, withdraws his chair to signify ‘he had no further use for Nancy or her opinions’.⁸² Therefore, Nancy is still subject to the stereotypes of her early years as society’s grasp of gender is governed by a set of obsolete perceptions. These issues are similarly highlighted in Myro/Myron’s necessity to present herself as a boy and the dangers that her real gender might pose. However, the ease of the character’s transition between genders through her adoption of the appropriate physical appearance suggests that markers of femininity and masculinity are immaterial beyond the social constructs they symbolise. In the ancient world of *Gate to Sea*, one’s gender is defined by the assumptions attached to one’s appearance. The ease of their appropriation as in the case of Myro’s disguise jeopardises these widely-established models of femininity and masculinity. Therefore, *Gate to the Sea* develops Bryher’s ongoing discourses on gender and queer identity by questioning the legitimacy of society’s constructs of gender. Since these traits can be easily

⁸¹ Ibid. 91.

⁸² Bryher, *West*, 157.

subverted, they cannot be accepted as definitive of one's gender identity.

As the characters of Nancy, James Sands and Myro/Myron mark the author's continuous exploration of gender discourses, these present the same character stereotype, which is constantly reconstructed in order to fit into the historical and cultural context of each novel. Similar to Bryher's first three novels, *Gate to the Sea* articulates Myro/Myron's experiences in the same free indirect style that is applied to Nancy's perceptions of Downwood and World War I. As it describes the history of Poseidonia's downfall, the impact of the Lucanians' rule is related through the child's eyes thus rendering her Bryher's narrative agent in the novel: 'Myro had expected to find the people in tatters, but not this: nobody smiled or seemed to look at the fluteplayers... There was something that she could not describe about the atmosphere; it was not living and it was not dead, it was simply that nothing moved.'⁸³ Her reflections before the characters' final escape from Poseidonia are related in an indirect style similar to Nancy's final monologue in *Two Selves*. Both characters yearn to escape their current confinements. Nancy realises the dangers of her wish to find a female companion and resolves that it is better to 'drown under the cliffs'.⁸⁴ Although Myro/Myron 'had never felt more alive' she realises the prospect of having to adhere to her family's strict stereotypes of femininity once she is back in Salente.⁸⁵ Despite the 'family verdict' and her initial inclination that it is 'better to die', she is unable to 'fling her thoughts far enough forward to imagine non-existence' and resolves to help Harmonia and the rest of the slaves.⁸⁶

Myro/Myron's youth provides a contrast to the other characters' old age. In the context of Bryher's interest in Ancient Greece and her references to Hellenic imagery in her prose, the child's youth may also be interpreted as an allusion to the eternal youth of Hebe, daughter of Zeus and Hera, and cupbearer of the gods of Mount Olympus. In Ancient Greek

⁸³ Ibid. 55.

⁸⁴ Bryher, *Two Selves*, 289.

⁸⁵ Bryher, *Gate to the Sea*, 118

⁸⁶ Ibid. 118-119.

imagery, Hebe is often depicted alongside her father in the guise of an eagle to whom she offers the cup. Her role as a cupbearer suggests her ability to grant youth, and therefore, new beginnings. The relationship between Hebe and Zeus can be read into Myro/Myron's assistance to Archias during his mission to return to Poseidonia and recover the city token. Myro/Myron's youth and Hebe's power to grant youth and new life are also symbolic in the context of the characters' escape. However, a more accurate parallel between the novel and Ancient Greek culture would be the origin of the names Myro/Myron and their significance to Bryher's knowledge of Ancient Greek art and poetry. 'Myro' is the alternative spelling of Moero, a Hellenistic poet and mother of Homer the Young of Byzantium. All that remains from her work are three fragments of an epic poem that deal with Zeus's childhood, and two short epigrams, as well as a curse poem, *Arai*.⁸⁷ In her analysis of Moero's short epigrams, Marilyn Skinner points out the imagery of vegetation and the symbolism of the animal world.⁸⁸ Skinner further draws parallels between Moero's original work and potential references to her in other poets' work, such as a funerary epigram by another woman poet, Anyte.⁸⁹ The poem focuses on the tomb a little girl named Myro makes for her two pets, a grasshopper and a cicada.⁹⁰ Skinner interprets the girl Myro from Anyte's epigram as an allusion to Moero the poet.⁹¹ Anyte writes:

For her grasshopper, the nightingale of ploughed land, and her oak- dwelling cicada Myro built a common mound, a maiden who shed a virginal tear, for Hades, hard to persuade, had carried off both her playthings.⁹²

In her analysis, Skinner claims that when ancient poets spoke of each other or alluded

⁸⁷ Ian Michael Plant, ed., *Women Writers of Ancient Greece and Rome* (London: Equinox, 2004) 61.

⁸⁸ Marilyn B. Skinner, 'Homer's Mother' in *Women Poets in Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Ellen Greene (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005) 101-102.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 104.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 104.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 104.

⁹² *Ibid.* 104.

to each other's works, they would use 'a setting reminiscent of his or her verses'.⁹³ Therefore, the use of images of vegetation and the animal world in Anyte's epigram, and the girl's name Myro are an allusion to Moero's lost work. Skinner posits that Anyte's epigram is a depiction of Moero and her tendency to depict herself as a young girl.⁹⁴ As Skinner suggests, 'Myro' is a nickname invented to suit Anyte's epigram that later entered biographical accounts of the poet Moero's life.⁹⁵ The choice to depict one's self as a young person or a child deflects any potential suspicion and hostility that could threaten her public voice as a woman poet.⁹⁶ Although Sappho legitimises women's status as poets in Ancient Greece, her name is also linked to allusions of sexual license.⁹⁷ Moero's choice to represent herself as a child protects her reputation of such tarnish, confirms her reputation as a woman poet and protects her public voice.⁹⁸ Skinner further points out that Moero was influential enough as a woman poet to be immortalised in her son's honorific stele, a tradition common for sons and their fathers.⁹⁹

Skinner's analysis points out that Moero also wrote a hymn to Poseidon, described by the Greek scholar Eustathius of Thessalonica.¹⁰⁰ Although the hymn no longer survives, Moero's self-characterisation as a young girl and her possible authorship of a hymn to Poseidon indicate the origin of Bryher's character Myro/Myron and the name for Poseidonia, the land occupied by the Lucanians in *Gate to the Sea*. The young girl is both a metaphor for Bryher's authorial figure in the narrative and an allusion to the Ancient Greek poet. Based on the text's references to Greek mythology, the fictional narrative in the novel may be treated as an origin story to the poet and her hymn to Poseidon, the god of the land the other characters flee. While these connections indicate the author's in-depth knowledge of Hellenic culture and poetry, they

⁹³ Ibid. 104.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 104.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 105.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 105.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 106.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 106.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 92.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 93.

also render the novel yet another example of the author's reflections on the issues that define her body of work.

Similar to *Beowulf*, *Gate to the Sea* also condenses its entire narrative in a limited time period and relates the characters' escape from Poseidonia in the framework of two days. As the novel incorporates multiple character perspectives within the narrative's limited time frame it evokes the author's reflections on the intercutting of Soviet films in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*. The text moves between different characters' perspectives within the same chapters. For examples, Lykos and Phila's fears over their survival and their thoughts about the temple of Hera transition to Harmonia's own thoughts about her responsibilities on the festival day and her path to becoming a priestess.¹⁰¹ In the chapter of Archias and Lykos's search of the city token, the text's description of Phila's panic and fear transitions to Myro/Myron's thoughts of concern and then later her acquaintance with Menis.¹⁰² The interchanging point of view once again indicates the influence of cinema over Bryher's prose. Similar to the travelling perspective of *Beowulf*, the shifting narrative perspective of *Gate to the Sea* imbues the story of the characters' escape with a sense of urgency and relates Poseidonia's tragic downfall through their memories. The narrative's intensity and multiple perspectives creates the impression of cinematic account of the narrative events that emerges from the montage films' effect on the author and her own historical novels. This approach enables the novel to both record the narrative event and also explore the core themes of the author's body of work through its multiple characters and recurring symbols such as the dualistic character of Bryher's discourse on queer identity, the couple of women characters who enable the author's exploration of femininity like Angelina and Selina, or the young character who becomes the narrative's focal point and symbolises the tensions of inter-generational conflict.

¹⁰¹ Bryher, *Gate to the Sea*, 9-31.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 86-99.

As these thematic and stylistic parallels intertwine across Bryher's fiction and non-fiction prose of the 1920s and 1930s, they combine with the author's interest in film and define her understanding of the new medium. Their dominance over her critical texts on the new medium determine her approach to film criticism and her research into film and international film industries. These themes on society, education, and gender dynamics distinguish Bryher's figure amongst the rest of the *Close Up* critics. Her roles as a contributor and editor further underscore the importance of her involvement with the journal as she slowly takes over Macpherson's key editorial responsibilities. Bryher's position as a British film critic is further advanced by the author's choice to examine Soviet films and the Soviet film industry in her *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*. The volume's engagement with a film movement that is unpopular with critics and audiences in Britain in the 1920s develops the themes and style of prose that can be traced throughout her autobiographical novels and *Close Up* articles. The text's insistence to align the core concerns of Bryher's early prose to her views of Soviet film presents the social and artistic issues that she discusses as universal problems that transcend national boundaries. Bryher's choice to examine Soviet film as opposed to other European avant-garde film movements further shapes the significance and controversy of her figure as a film critic. As one of the few critics to engage with Soviet film in such great detail, Bryher produces a core text for British film critics' future explorations of the Soviet film industry.

The themes and style that originate in her texts from the 1920s and 1930s translate into Bryher's later historical novels. Bryher's historical novels of the 1950s additionally develop the themes typical of her earlier prose and extend them into semantic and stylistic patterns across her work, regardless of its form. The variety of historical contexts extend these central themes and patterns to new images and metaphors and demonstrate the influence of cinematic imagery and film montage on the novels' structure. The recurrence of these social and artistic concerns establish her as a commentator of cultural and social habits and trends in

the periods of history that she witnessed or research. Her texts note the changes of social norms and stereotypes in different national environments and time periods. Significant historical events like World War I and World War II, or cultural trends like film's popularity as a pastime and art form additionally aid what in the context of Bryher's novels becomes an analysis of early twentieth-century society. A synthesis of artistic, social, political and cultural analysis, Bryher's works of the 1920s and 1930s, and later in the 1950s, establish the author not only as a queer author, critic, and publisher, who enables platforms for other modernist writers and artists, but also a commentator of twentieth-century life and society.

Bryher's approach to elements of twentieth-century culture and her encouragement of audience's engagement with modernist visual culture dismantle existing critical and artistic categories. She identifies alternative interpretations and applications for cultural and artistic products that are presented to society within the framework of a set of pre-existing political, social, or artistic discourses. This approach is exemplified in her own work where the fictional alter-ego she devises for her autobiographical prose challenges the dominant assumptions of women's life-writing through its defiance of conventional plots constructed of exclusively feminine experiences. Her critique of cinematic art and dominant perceptions of Soviet montage equally rejects ideological readings of film. Instead, she indicates alternative critical approaches that detach literary and cinematic texts from the artistic and socio-political frameworks that bind them, and expose them to a wider audience and therefore interpretations. Her novels, film criticism and own limited involvement in filmmaking through POOL Productions indicate her belief that such cultural products could appeal to an audience broader than the circles whose artistic experimentation create those same units of modernist culture. Her writing demonstrates that there are applications for avant-garde cinematic practices beyond pure artistic experimentation. These not only expose audiences to alternative worldviews and narratives, but also expand the purpose of the new medium. The marginality of such critics and

their choice to deviate from the established interpretations of individual works or entire bodies of work often results from their own differences from the society they inhabit. As this study has concluded elsewhere, the subjectivity articulated in Bryher's novels and her film articles departs from both widespread features of women's life-writing and established subjects of film criticism in the first half of the last century. However, her detachment from the accepted mechanisms of criticism also offers an alternative route to the overall understanding of modernist work.

Such tendency to create contexts and histories comprehensible to limited artistic, literary or academic circles still permeates critical approaches to modernism, despite the challenges posed to them throughout the twentieth century by critics like Bryher. Scholarly work in modernism is often encased in an exterior constructed of critical and conceptual discourses, inaccessible beyond purely academic discussions. This not only obstructs attempts to understand the works of modernism without prior knowledge of the philosophical and theoretical frameworks that inform them but also limits modernist studies' impact on a broader socio-cultural level, a problem Bryher herself recognises when she criticises the dominant perception of Soviet montage films. Although Bryher's critical model of alternative interpretations and her negation of established critical conventions targets a limited range of modernist works, it is still a mechanism that could be applied to the academic explorations of modernism. A more democratic approach to the work of well-established figures of modernism, as well as marginalised authors such as Bryher herself, could contribute a diversity of viewpoints and new strands of criticism to a conversation that is becoming increasingly complex but also tiresome. A critical methodology that accommodates both philosophical readings of modernism as well as a more realistic approach to the questions and concepts that modernism raises may indicate previously unexplored layers of meanings, both metaphorical and objective, and new routes to understanding the figures of modernism and their attempts to

articulate their own worldviews through often highly abstract methods.

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