

**REALITY AND CONSCIOUSNESS:  
A STUDY OF SELECTED NOVELS OF  
MAY SINCLAIR**

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of  
the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in  
Philosophy by Mary Theresa Phillips

**LIVERPOOL  
UNIVERSITY**



July, 1993

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in the main body of the thesis, after quotations from novels by May Sinclair:

<u>Mr and Mrs Nevill Tyson</u>	T.
<u>The Divine Fire</u>	DF.
<u>The Helpmate</u>	H.
<u>Kitty Tailleur</u>	KT.
<u>The Creators</u>	C.
<u>The Combined Maze</u>	CM.
<u>The Three Sisters</u>	TS.
<u>The Tree of Heaven</u>	TH.
<u>Mary Olivier: A Life</u>	MO.
<u>Life and Death of Harriett Fream</u>	HF.



## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Sinclair's novels present no particular textual problems for the critic. Where I have compared editions, I have found no discrepancies. Three novels by May Sinclair have, in recent years, been republished by Virago Press: The Three Sisters, Mary Olivier: A Life and Life and Death of Harriett Frean. In the case of these three novels, I have used the Virago editions, on the grounds that these are more accessible to most readers. All her other novels are now out of print and, in these cases, I have used first editions, wherever possible.

## PREFACE

This thesis offers a critical reading of certain novels of May Sinclair, using methods of formal analysis, while giving some consideration to the cultural context within which she wrote. It is not intended to be a comprehensive study of all her work or a biographical study.

I wish to acknowledge the valuable advice and encouragement given to me by the two people who supervised my work, Helen Wilcox and Simon Dentith.

I would also like to acknowledge the support and encouragement of my colleague, Sue Zlosnik. The technical help given to me by John Skelland and Imelda McGeoch proved invaluable in transferring my words to the printed page.

I am indebted to the patience, kindness and the sense of humour of my four children, John, Catherine, Rachel and Isabel.

Above all, I am indebted to the enduring help and support of my husband, John.

REALITY AND CONSCIOUSNESS: A STUDY OF SELECTED NOVELS  
OF MAY SINCLAIR

Mary Theresa Phillips

ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers selected novels of May Sinclair, in the light of her declared interest in the representation of reality. It is written from a theoretical position which recognises that the reflection of reality in works of art is problematic, but which nevertheless maintains that works of fiction have some relationship with the real world. Using Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, as developed in his study of Dostoevsky's novels, it suggests that a novel is more open to the reality it seeks to represent, in proportion to the multiplicity of its voices. Sinclair considered the representation of consciousness to be the key element in the representation of reality. The first chapter explores her representation of consciousness in her novels, employing a close formal analysis of voice and viewpoint, and demonstrating that even in her single consciousness novels, the consciousness of her characters is dialogic. The second chapter extends the study of Sinclair's treatment of consciousness to the more problematic area of the unconscious, demonstrating the variety of methods she employs, and her success in leaving open to the reader the interpretation of her characters' unconscious minds. The third chapter is a reader-orientated approach to the presence of irony in Sinclair's novels, arguing that ironic gaps and signals in the text allow the reader space to assert his/her own voice. The final chapter interrogates Sinclair's representation of reality from a feminist position which challenges the cultural stereotypes, which inevitably construct even novels written from a feminist perspective, paying particular attention to the influence of contemporary psychology on Sinclair's representation of female characters. The dissertation concludes by suggesting reasons why even the feminist movement within literary studies has largely failed to reawaken interest in Sinclair's novels. It suggests possible lines for further research and enters a plea for the re-publication of a wider range of her novels.

## INTRODUCTION

" Reality is thick and deep, too thick and too deep and at the same time too fluid to be cut with any convenient carving knife. The novelist who would be close to reality must confine himself to this knowledge at first hand.<sup>1</sup>

This passage occurs in Sinclair's review of the first volume of Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage. Its style is typical of May Sinclair, in its mildly self-mocking use of metaphor, and the preoccupation with the novelist's search for reality is one that stays with her throughout the novels of her early, and particularly, her central periods.

Although the comment claims only the possibility that the novelist will come 'close to' reality it is nevertheless predicated on the idea that a novelist is concerned with the portrayal of reality. It is important to distinguish at once the reality discussed here, and the 'Ultimate Reality' which Sinclair concerns herself with in her metaphysical works: 'Unity, then, or Ultimate Reality, or both, are the objects of the metaphysical quest.'<sup>2</sup> Although Sinclair, as a philosopher sees a connection between reality and Reality, it is the former with which I am concerned here.

Sinclair's only full length account of an episode of her personal history is A Journal of Impressions in Belgium. The preface to this work acknowledges the difficulties inherent in the portrayal of reality:

This is a "Journal of Impressions," and it is, nothing more. It will not satisfy people who want accurate and substantial information...For many of these impressions I can claim only a psychological accuracy; some were insubstantial to the last degree, and very few were actually set down there and then, on the spot, as I have set them down here.<sup>3</sup>

After elaborating on the speed with which events happened in Belgium, she continues:

I have set down the day's imperfect or absurd impression, in all its imperfection or absurdity, and the day's crude emotion in all its crudity, rather than taint its reality with the discreet reflections that came after.<sup>4</sup>

This passage shows an identical concern with the portrayal of reality, which is to be recovered by means of 'psychological accuracy'. What is regarded as important here is a phenomenological approach to reality, the faithful reproduction of first hand 'impressions', the avoidance of the taint of reflection. So important are impressions considered that they become the title of the book. They may be

paralleled in the Richardson article to 'knowledge at first hand'. The whole of A Journal of Impressions in Belgium which recounts Sinclair's experiences with a field ambulance in Belgium in 1914, shows a concern with being faithful to the 'psychological accuracy' of impressions; for example, one passage reads:

At last we landed. I have no vivid recollection\* of our passage through the town. Except that I know we actually were in Antwerp I could not say whether I really saw certain winding streets and old houses with steep gables or whether I dreamed them...

\*At the time of writing - February 19th, 1915. My Day-Book gives no record of anything but the hospitals we visited.<sup>5</sup>

The passage goes on to elaborate the description of the old streets of Antwerp. Psychological accuracy is preferred to the factual objective evidence of the Day-Book.

Sinclair apparently draws no distinction between fictional and autobiographical reality. Tasker Jevons: The Real Story, published in 1916, betrays in its very title the concern with reality. This novel contains her only fictionalised narrator, the journalist, Walter Furnival, and his relationship to his material is close to that of Sinclair's narrative voice in A Journal of Impressions in Belgium, for

example in this description of an incident in Jevons's life:

But it is impossible to write about this singular adventure as it must have appeared to me at the time. I am saturated with Jevons's point of view...I have impression upon impression of Jevons piled in my memory; I cannot get back to that anger of mine, that passion of violent integrity, that simple abhorrence of Jevons that I must have felt.<sup>6</sup>

The word 'impression' occurs again, this time to express the view that the original impressions, or as the word seems to mean, apprehensions of consciousness, have been superseded by a whole string of subsequent impressions. They still exist at some deep level (the spatial metaphor is indicated by the verb 'piled') but Furnival finds them irrecoverable. A later passage, describing Jevons's activities in the war, manifests Furnival's concern for truthfulness, as he discusses his wife's view of the story he has told:

And not one word about his duty and devotion and self-sacrifice. She says I don't give a serious impression of him. He might have gone out to the war just for fun, and that it isn't fair to him. I don't know whether it's fair or not. I write as he compels me to write. I find that I cannot separate his joy and his adventure from his duty and devotion and self-sacrifice; he didn't separate them himself. I don't even know that self-sacrifice is really the word for it; and the impression he gave me is

just that - of going out for fun. It was the wild humour of his devotion that made it the spectacle it was.<sup>7</sup>

The word 'impression' recurs. Furnival can only be true to his 'impression', not to some abstract sense of justice. This passage raises another problem, not raised by the other examples, that of the mind's relationship to language; the structuring of thought by language.

Sinclair was writing at a time when the possibilities of what has come to be regarded as the classic realist novel had been developed to their limits.

Contemporary philosophy and psychology, in both of which Sinclair was extremely well versed, were causing a loss of faith in the possibility of portraying objective reality. The Richardson article argues for an end to the old critical distinction between 'idealism and realism' or 'subjective and objective', on the grounds that only the subjective can achieve objectivity. It seems that Sinclair saw in Pilgrimage the successful portrayal of reality which she had been seeking in her own writing, at least as far back as The Three Sisters, published in 1914. Her analysis of the narrative technique of Pilgrimage provides a blueprint for the writing of such subjective objectivity, or for what is sometimes called the



psychological novel:

Obviously, she must not interfere; she must not analyse or comment or explain. Rather less obviously, she must not tell a story, or handle a situation or set a scene; she must avoid drama as she avoids narration. And there are some things she must not be. She must not be the wise, all-knowing author. She must be Miriam Henderson: she must not know or divine anything that Miriam does not know or divine; she must not see anything that Miriam does not see. She has taken Miriam's nature upon her. She is not concerned, in the way that other novelists are concerned, with character. Of the persons who move through Miriam's world you know nothing but what Miriam knows. If Miriam is mistaken, well, she and not Miss Richardson is mistaken. Miriam is an acute observer, but she is very far from seeing the whole of these people. They are presented to us in the same vivid but fragmentary way in which they appeared to Miriam, the fragmentary way in which people appear to most of us. Miss Richardson has only imposed on herself the conditions that life imposes on all of us. And if you are going to quarrel with those conditions you will not find her novels satisfactory.<sup>8</sup>

The method is extreme, as the language of the passage suggests. It represents a solution to one of the problems confronting novelists of the time, the problem of how to incorporate into their novels their new found awareness that all so called reality is subject to the perceptions of the individual consciousness. It does not, however, as I shall go on to argue, address other problems attendant on the attempt to represent reality.

One of the problems presented by the prescription for novel writing outlined here is the relationship between the fictional perceiving consciousness through which the narrative is channelled, in this case Miriam, and the author who is to be eliminated from the text. For characters are undeniably created by novelists, which presents problems if they are to be seen as ways of representing the world, problems which Wayne Booth has characterised thus:

How are we to know and to say anything to each other about what our lives mean, without reduction to destructive or irrelevant simplicities? When novelists imagine characters, they imagine worlds that characters inhabit, worlds that are laden with values. Whenever they reduce those multiple worlds to one, the author's, they give a false report, an essentially egotistical distortion that tells lies about the way things are.<sup>9</sup>

One of Sinclair's later novels, Far End, has as one of its central characters an aspiring novelist, Kit Vivart.

Kit outlines to a friend the narrative approach adopted in his latest novel, 'I'm eliminating God Almighty, the all-wise, all-seeing author.'<sup>10</sup>

The verbal echo from the passage in The Little Review is unmistakable. Vivart goes on to detail the method:

I am not wiser than Peter. I don't see an inch farther than he sees. Everything that is vague and uncertain in Peter's mind is vague and uncertain in the book. If Peter misunderstands the other characters they are misunderstood.<sup>11</sup>

The echo of 'If Miriam is mistaken ...' is clear.

However, precisely because it is a novel, not a monologic article, and furthermore a novel of more than one consciousness, there are dissenting voices within the text of *Far End*. Peter's wife asks the question which the Pilgrimage article begs:

"If you can't get beyond your own consciousness how do you get at Peter's?"

"By imagination. That's the only point where art goes one better than life."

"But Peter - he's only Peter as he appears to your imagination."

"But he appears to my imagination as he is. He's real. Because he's a self, containing his own world, he's real."<sup>12</sup>

The discussion shifts to the author's role, leaving the crucial question of the authenticity of Peter unanswered, except by the post-Romantic appeal to the reality of the imagination.

Kit asserts the absence of the author within his text:

There's no author running about, arranging and analysing and explaining and

representing. It's presentation, not representation, all the time. There's nothing but the stream of Peter's consciousness. The book is a stream of consciousness, going on and on; it's life itself going on and on.<sup>13</sup>

This recalls another passage from the article on Pilgrimage, 'It is just life going on and on. It is Miriam Henderson's stream of consciousness going on and on.' It also allows the dissenting voice to reappear, this time from Kit's friend, Burton, who offers another objection:

"Without selection?"

"No, not without selection. I admit that's where I come in. But its only to choose which of Peter's thoughts and feelings are the most purely Peter. So you don't get mixed up with a lot of irrelevant stuff."

"But you can't eliminate your style."

"No I can't eliminate my style. But there again my style is Peter. I'm trying to make it crystal with no stain of me. It's frightfully difficult, because it's all got to be so intensely concentrated. I've got to get the very heat of consciousness into it."<sup>14</sup>

The relationship of this extended passage in Far End to Sinclair's article on Pilgrimage in The Little Review is worthy of some discussion. A gap of six years separates the texts and therefore one suspects that their close verbal similarity is deliberate. However the words of the writer of the 1918 article are, in the case of the novel, given to a central

character who is both arrogant and insensitive, which has the effect of undermining their authority. Furthermore, three related questions are raised which the earlier article does not consider; the authenticity of the fictional consciousness, the hidden presence of the author in the selection of material, and the importance of language or 'style' within the text. It is difficult to escape the view that the treatment of Kit is ironic and that his aims are being seriously questioned. The whole enterprise of the single consciousness novel, at which Sinclair made two attempts of considerable merit, is here not only questioned, but associated with the very sort of authoritarian male arrogance which is suggested by the characterisation of the author as 'God Almighty'. It is as though the wheel has come full circle. The message of Far End seems to be that the author of the single consciousness novel is no nearer to grasping the difficult nettle of reality; or while being nearer in some ways is further away in others.

This is the starting point for my study of Sinclair. I wish to suggest that no novel can claim to completely represent reality, while asserting that there is nevertheless a relationship between the fictional and non-fictional worlds.

May Sinclair was a prolific novelist and a woman of wide ranging interests, whose reputation at the height of an illustrious career extended well beyond her own country. She was born in the Merseyside suburb of Rock Ferry, in 1863 and died in Aylesbury in 1946 after a long and debilitating illness. The main facts of her life are recorded in Theophilus Boll's somewhat hagiographic biography, Miss May Sinclair:

Novelist.<sup>15</sup> Sinclair published a total of 21 novels, over a period of 30 years, beginning with Audrey Craven in 1897 and ending with History of Anthony Waring in 1927. She also published two novellas, one verse novel and five collections of short stories, several uncollected stories and three volumes of poetry. Her literary interests are represented by a range of critical articles on her contemporaries, including several on Eliot, Pound and the Imagists, introductions to the Everyman Series of Bronte novels, and her only full length critical work, The Three Brontes. She also wrote several articles on philosophy and two full length works, A Defence of Idealism and The New Idealism. She was a member of The Women Writers Suffrage League, and a founder member of the Medico-Psychological Clinic of London. In the course of her literary career, Sinclair received widespread critical acclaim. Patrick Braybrooke, writing in 1926, describes her as, 'one of

the best of the intellectual women writers of today'.<sup>16</sup> She is frequently compared to Joyce and Lawrence in contemporary surveys of the novel,<sup>17</sup> and praised for her ability to 'move with the times' and tackle 'the new methods as they arrive'.<sup>18</sup> However, within a comparatively short time, her novels were forgotten. Sydney Kaplan, writing in 1975, comments with justification that 'Her name is now unfamiliar even to serious students of English Literature.'<sup>19</sup> That her name has become a little more familiar, at least to women readers, is a consequence of the interest in women's writing and the attempt to construct a feminine literary tradition which began in the 1970s. Most critics who have commented on Sinclair over the past twenty years have done so from critical positions derived in varying degrees from authentic realism, focusing chiefly on Mary Olivier: A Life as representing the woman's problem of self-definition in relation to the mother figure and in relation to men, although Hrisey D. Zegger's full-length study goes beyond this and contains valuable comments on the relationship of Sinclair's philosophical interests to her novels. Some of the most interesting critical comment remains in the form of unpublished Ph.D. theses, the most interesting of which is Catherine Hoyser's 'Literary Viragos' which, goes beyond the merely representational, providing an

interesting analysis of Sinclair's use of 'the madwoman in the attic' motif in the novel.<sup>20</sup>

Many of Sinclair's novels merit a greater critical airing and a wider discussion of their merits. As some feminist critics have observed, several speak with the authority of historically situated female experience, and therefore merit inclusion in any consideration of feminine narrative in the crucial period of the first quarter of the present century. A number of her novels are also interesting for their technical experimentation, and this aspect of her writing has received less critical attention than it deserves, although some useful comments have been made by Zegger, Kaplan and Diane Gillespie.<sup>21</sup> This lack of attention is possibly because her experimentation is unsustained, but also and more interestingly, because it is always pragmatic. She wrote at a time when the novel was undergoing radical change and her own novels as well as her criticism are key components of that change. While the attempt to place Sinclair within a feminine tradition is clearly valuable, it is time to add to critical appreciation of her work by examining the place of her novels within the problematic category of realist fiction. As suggested above, I wish to start from the premise that there is some relationship between the fictional and



non-fictional worlds but that this relationship is always problematic. My general method of procedure will be a close formal analysis of several of Sinclair's texts. I intend to begin with the question which seems to have preoccupied Sinclair for much of her career, as a novelist, that of the representation of the fictional consciousness.

In this area, the views of Mikhail Bakhtin expressed in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics are particularly helpful. Here Bakhtin claims a uniqueness for Dostoevsky's novels on the grounds that, 'he was able, in an objective and artistic way, to visualize and portray personality as another, as someone else's personality, without making it lyrical or merging it with his own voice'.<sup>22</sup> Dostoevsky's method, according to Bakhtin, is to create characters who develop their own discourse, who are seen in constant dialogic relationship with other characters, and whose voice is never merged with that of the author. Bakhtin's claim for Dostoevsky's uniqueness does not prevent the application of his ideas to the novel form in general, and they may be applied both to ostensibly single-consciousness novels and novels which focus on more than one consciousness. They are however of particular relevance to texts which focus on internally revealed consciousness, rather than

externally revealed character. Sinclair was not, in any case, as single minded in her pursuit of the single-consciousness novel, as her comments discussed above might suggest. At the time of the publication of *Pilgrimage*, she had already written novels which by their use of a range of characters and of devices such as free indirect discourse, were searching for other, though related ways of approaching the problem of the representation of reality. I wish to consider examples of both kinds of novel, in the light of Bakhtin's ideas about the creation of personality as a voice at once distinctive and dialogic. In my first chapter I will demonstrate, by close reading of a range of texts, the degree to which Sinclair's fictional consciousnesses interact with one another and with the authorial voice. The following chapter will consider Sinclair's attempt to find a form of representation for the necessarily silent unconscious. The third chapter will consider the possibilities of ironic readings in Sinclair's texts which allow yet another voice to speak, that of the reader. The reader's space helps to prevent the novels becoming monologic and allows a variety of possible relationships between Sinclair's novels and the real or non-fictional world. In the final chapter I wish to examine the limitations of realistic fiction by considering the way in which Sinclair's own version of

reality is inevitably constructed by the discourses of her time, by examining aspects of her portrayal of female characters.

In my study of her approach to problems of narrative, I have confined myself to certain novels, of what, for convenience, I will describe as her central period: The Three Sisters, published in 1914, The Tree of Heaven, published in 1917, Mary Olivier: A Life, published in 1919, and Life and Death of Harriett Freen, published in 1922. Of the seven novels written between 1914 and early 1922, these four are the most experimental in terms of narrative strategy, although Tasker Jevons as I have already indicated shows an awareness of the problems of narrative in its use of a self-conscious narrator overtly concerned with the question of reality. Of the remaining two novels of the period, The Romantic, published in 1920, although making interesting use of free indirect discourse, particularly in its early chapters, is not sufficiently different, particularly from The Tree of Heaven to warrant separate consideration while Mr Waddington of Wyck, published in 1922, although written a few months before Life and Death of Harriett Freen, is a very different sort of novel which belongs with Sinclair's other comic satire, A Cure of Souls, published in 1924. In my consideration of the role of irony as a means of

inviting the reader's voice into the text, I will include one earlier text, The Helpmate published in 1907, in addition to the four experimental texts. I will finally turn my attention from form to subject and examine the question of what kind of reality is available to a woman writing in the early years of the present century. In this chapter I will discuss Sinclair's portrayal of women in several of her early novels, published between 1898 and 1913, Mr and Mrs Nevill Tyson, The Divine Fire, The Helpmate, Kitty Tailleur, The Creators and The Combined Maze, as well as three of the novels of the central period, The Three Sisters, The Tree of Heaven and Mary Olivier: A Life. Of the early novels, I have not included any detailed comment on the earliest novel, Audrey Craven, since although the female portraits in this novel anticipate some of the later ones, to deal with it separately would become repetitive. Sinclair's later novels are generally regarded with some justification as representing a falling off in her achievement.<sup>23</sup> although Mr Waddington of Wyck and A Cure of Souls are amusing and skilful satiric portraits, while The Rector of Wyck, published in 1925, is a moving and sensitive narrative. Arnold Waterlow: A Life, published in 1924, provides evidence of a loss of interest in narrative experiment since the earliest pages suggest the form of Mary Olivier: A Life but this is fairly rapidly

abandoned, while Anne Severn and the Fieldings, published in 1922 and The Allinghams, in 1927, although the former seems to have been enormously popular, were little more than attempts to preach sexual tolerance on psychological grounds. Far End, while it allows interesting insights into Sinclair's career and preoccupations offers nothing new in any of the areas I wish to discuss. Like her last novel, History of Anthony Waring, it reserves narrative judgement, but otherwise is told in a fairly traditional narrative style.

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Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own (London, 1978);

Hrisey D. Zegger, May Sinclair, Twayne's English authors series, 192 (Boston, 1976).

In addition, I have found the following unpublished dissertations useful:

Catherine Elizabeth Hoyser, 'Literary Viragos: Late Victorian and Edwardian Female 'Bildungsroman'' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Indiana, 1989).

Mary Antonia Steltenpool Gelinias, 'Mrs Brown in the Wasteland: Ordinary Women in the Modern British Novel' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Queens University, Kingston, Ontario, 1988).

Sue Ann Johnson, 'Mother and Daughters in Twentieth Century Women's fiction' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1983).

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## CHAPTER ONE

### I

Sinclair's essay on Richardson, taken together with the preface to A Journal of Impressions in Belgium, makes clear that she is concerned with the representation of reality, and that she sees such representation as being best facilitated, not through the so-called objective authorial discourse of her nineteenth-century predecessors, but through the portrayal of the consciousness of individual characters, characters whose fictional status is not, for Sinclair, a subject of discussion.

Authorial rendering of a character's thought is, of course, a technique widely used by nineteenth-century novelists, particularly those most interested in the inner lives of their characters, such as Austen and Eliot, and, most influentially for Sinclair, Henry James.<sup>1</sup> The difference in certain of Sinclair's novels is simply one of emphasis. One way in which she highlights the thoughts of her characters is by presenting thoughts as parallel to, and often in contrast with, their spoken words. Such a device is explicitly indicated at one point in The Romantic, a comparatively late text, when the narrator describes the heroine thus, 'She talked; but her



thoughts ran by themselves on a line separate from her speech.'<sup>2</sup>

Paradoxically, in view of Sinclair's concern to eliminate the voice of 'God Almighty' and focus on figural consciousness, this presentation of thought depends on a certain degree of authorial presence within the novel, in the form of an authorial narrator, whose presence may nevertheless be limited to indicating divisions between spoken and unspoken thought. This minimal presence allows the consciousness of the character to be more completely revealed in the form of its spoken and unspoken discourse, thus contributing to the 'many-voicedness' of the novel. It is most evident in the two novels which mark Sinclair's transition from a traditional to an experimental novelist, The Three Sisters and The Tree of Heaven. Both are novels which explore motivations and compulsions hidden, not only from other characters, but often from the character's own consciousness.

The Three Sisters appeared after a sustained study of the Brontes on Sinclair's part, culminating in the publication of The Three Brontes, which is generally regarded as having influenced the novel.<sup>3</sup> It describes the lives of the three daughters of the

repressive and repressed Vicar of a remote Yorkshire village, and their rivalry for the only eligible male, the local doctor, Steven Rowcliffe. Rowcliffe is eventually secured by the scheming of the eldest sister Mary; the youngest sister Alice finds sexual fulfilment with a local farmer, Jim Greator, a Lawrentian figure generally regarded as her social inferior; while the middle sister Gwenda, a strong independent woman, originally loved by Rowcliffe rejects his offer of marriage and struggles on alone.<sup>4</sup>

Conflict between characters trapped in the claustrophobic world of Garth, where the story is set, is an important element in the novel. Thus conversations are often, in fact, private wars, masked by seemingly innocuous language. Early in the novel, the following conversation occurs between Gwenda and her father:

"Who told you that?" said Mr Carteret by way of saying something.

"Mrs Gale."

"When did she tell you?"

"Yesterday, when I was up at the farm."

"What were you doing at the farm?"

"Nothing. I went to see if I could do anything."

She said to herself, "Why does he go on at us like this?"

Aloud she said, "It was time some of us went."

She had him there. She was always having him (TS. p.31).

In this instance, the conflict is barely concealed, but its full significance is not conveyed by the spoken language. The narrator's commentary highlights the fact that Gwenda and her father each perceive their conversation differently. The Vicar believes that he is doing his duty by passing the time with his daughters, while Gwenda sees the conversation as an attack, indicated by the phrase, 'go on at' which forms part of a quoted thought and therefore is formulated in exactly the same way as spoken language. Her own motivation is made explicit by the language of conflict, 'she had him there', which is clearly sited in Gwenda's consciousness, and takes the form of a mental commentary on Gwenda's part. It is important to note however that some element of narrative intervention is important, if only to summarise the Vicar's thoughts and introduce Gwenda's. Passages such as this reveal the element of polyphony in the novel, by exposing a clash of discourse on the level of both spoken and unspoken words.

A later conflict, between Alice and her father, is actually presented as part of an iterative summary, indicated by the use of 'would':

"Don't lie there all day, my girl. Get up and go out. What you want is a good blow on the moor."  
"Yes. If I didn't die before I got

there," Alice would say, while she thought, "Serve him right, too, if I did."

And the Vicar would turn from her in disgust. He knew what was the matter with his daughter Alice (TS. p.53).

In this example both participants are consciously in conflict with one another, but what is most significant here is the degree of concealment which is taking place. Alice's thoughts are, like Gwenda's in the previous example, directly quoted in their verbal form from an inner commentary, while the vicar's are summarised by the narrator in a sentence which is strongly coloured by the vicar's language. 'What was the matter' is a careful euphemism by which the Vicar evades full acknowledgement of his daughter's plight, even to himself. The spoken conversation is hostile but it masks an even greater degree of hostility and awareness on the part of both characters.

The most fundamental conflict in the novel is between Gwenda and Rowcliffe, an example of which occurs on the occasion of Gwenda and Rowcliffe's first meeting:

Another pause, not quite so horrid. And then-- "Do you always walk after dark and before sunrise?" And it was as if he had said, "Why am I always meeting you? What do you do it for? It's queer isn't it?" But he had given her her chance. She rose to it. "I've done it ever since we came here."

(It was as if she had said "Long before you came") "I do it because I like it. That's the best of this place. You can do what you like in it. There's nobody to see you." ("Counting me," he thought, "as nobody") (TS. p.67).

This provides a classic example of Sinclair's use of parallel thought and conversation, what might be called inner and outer conversation. Rowcliffe and Gwenda understand each other quite well at this point but choose not to make their understanding explicit. This is, of course, a not infrequent occurrence in the verifiable world to which novelists make reference, but the disparity between the inner and outer conversations is rarely so fully explored in traditional novels. The effect of the dual level of conversation is to subtly mingle courtship and conflict, which are in fact the two elements of which Gwenda and Rowcliffe's relationship largely consists. The suggestion of potential conflict is emphasised by vocabulary such as , 'given her her chance' and 'she rose to it', both uttered in the discourse of Edwardian slang within which both Gwenda and Rowcliffe frequently speak. In this example, the device of inner comment is used as in previous examples, 'Another pause...But he had given her...' 'Counting me...' Here both quoted thoughts, i.e. a character's verbalised thoughts, and indirect thoughts strongly coloured by the character's vocabulary occur. As in

the first two of the previous examples, inner comments emanate from both characters. Although it is generally difficult to categorise Sinclair's use of brackets, here they clearly distinguish Rowcliffe's reactions from Gwenda's, with the effect of giving Rowcliffe a subordinate place in a hierarchy of consciousnesses. The most interesting technical device here is the use of the formula 'it was as if' which Sinclair uses frequently in the two novels under discussion.

It appears as a formula for translating rather than commenting upon conversations, and is interesting in that it seems to beg a consciousness in which to be placed. The reader, encountering this formula, never quite loses a sense of a disembodied narrative consciousness, but often there is, in addition, a strong sense of a character's consciousness, as in the present example, where the first instance clearly refers to Gwenda's interpretation, and the second to Rowcliffe's. A further point, of significance when considering the conveying of pre-verbal (rather than unconscious) levels of thought is that the translation of the spoken words is placed in quotation marks, although the words used are merely hypothetical and are not spoken even in the character's mind. Because they represent intended meaning, they must exist in

some form in the character's mind, although not in verbal form. The words are the neutral narrator's representation. Nevertheless, paradoxically, because they are given verbal form, they give the impression of quoted thought so that, in a sense they are at the same time the narrator's words and the character's words. Furthermore they can be ascribed either to the character who has spoken or to the character who interprets. Thus they are ascribable to the narrator and at the same time to either character. Here again the role of some kind of neutral narrating consciousness within the text can be seen to be important. The whole passage is, in effect, a conflation of three consciousnesses, Gwenda's, Rowcliffe's and the narrator's.

An element of conflict becomes more apparent later on, when it is combined with misunderstanding in a conversation between the two:

"Do you never want to get away?"  
"No. Never. You see, I love it."  
"I know you do." He said it savagely,  
as if he were jealous of the place.

...  
That wasn't what I meant."  
After that they were silent for a long  
time. She was wondering what he did  
mean.

When they reached the Vicarage gate he  
sheered off the path and held out his  
hand.

"Oh - aren't you coming in for tea?" she  
said "Thanks. No. It's a little late.

I don't think I want any."  
He paused. "I've got what I wanted."

...  
Gwenda walked slowly up the flagged path  
to the house door. She stood there,  
thinking.

"He's got what he wanted. He only  
wanted to see what I was like"  
(TS. p.101).

Most of the devices and effects here have already been noted. Gwenda's inner comments are both reported indirectly and quoted directly, in verbal form, and a silence adds weight to meaning. The effect is of veiled communication and, in this example, of partial understanding. Conflict is suggested by the aggressive language, this time of the spoken words, 'got what I wanted' as well as the word 'jealous'. The most interesting element of this example is the phrase, 'as if he were jealous of the place'. It is important to distinguish this phrase from the formulaic phrase mentioned above. The omission of 'it was', by giving the phrase the overtones of a simile, blurs its effect, and increases the uncertainty about the prevailing consciousness, referred to above. There remains the possibility of reading the text in such a way that Rowcliffe is seen to have surprised himself by his jealousy and that the novelist is here approaching the area of unconscious motivation.

Another area of conflict, more subtle, because Mary is



a much more deceitful character than Gwenda, is that between Mary and Rowcliffe, which is exemplified in a conversation ostensibly about the impossibility of inviting Alice to her house:

"How is it different for Gwenda?' She hesitated. She had meant that Gwenda hadn't anything to lose. What she said was, "Gwenda hasn't anybody but herself to think of. She hasn't let you in for Alice."

"No more have you."

He smiled. Mary did not understand either his answer or his smile.

He was saying to himself, "Oh, hasn't she? It was Gwenda all the time who let me in."

Mary had a little rush of affection.

"My dear- I think I've let you in for everything. I wouldn't mind - I wouldn't really- if it wasn't for you."

"You needn't bother about me," he said.

"I'd rather you bothered about your sister."

"Which sister?"

For the life of her she could not tell what had made her say that. The words seemed to leap out suddenly from her mind to her tongue.

"Alice," he said.

"Was it Alice we were talking about?"

"It was Alice I was thinking about."

"Was it?"

Again her mind took its insane possession of her tongue

(TS. pp.312-313).

In the first part of the conversation, authorial comment simply reveals the gap between thoughts and speech, as in several of the previous examples. Then Rowcliffe's thoughts, running counter to the conversation are directly quoted, again emphasising

inner thought on the verbal level. However, in the second half of the conversation, something else happens. Mary's unconscious thoughts come to the surface. That they are unconscious thoughts is indicated by Mary's puzzlement as to why she should have spoken in this way. The apparently non-rational nature of unconscious thought is suggested by the phrase, 'insane'. Paradoxically unconscious thought lends itself most readily to a strongly authorial style of narration, thus in many ways running counter to Sinclair's interest in eliminating the author's voice.

However, here Sinclair succeeds in centering the narration in Mary's consciousness, indicated by the phrase, 'for the life of her', because she is representing Mary as becoming aware of unconscious thought, although at this point she has not come to full understanding.

All the conversations quoted so far are marked by intensity and a varying degree of conflict. Although, as I have said, conflict is a characteristic element in this novel, there are conversations marked by intensity and concealment but not conflict. Such a conversation, if such it may be called, occurs when Rowcliffe visits Greatorex after his father's death:

"Well, Greatorex --"

"Good evening, Dr Rowcliffe." He came forward awkwardly, hanging his head as if detected in an act of shame.

There was a silence while the two men turned their backs upon the bed, determined to ignore what was on it.

They stood together by the window, pretending to stare at things out there in the night; and so they became aware of the men carrying the coffin.

They could no longer ignore it.

"Wull yo look at 'Im, doctor?"

(TS. pp.44-5).

There is a similarity here to some of the conversations between Gwenda and Rowcliffe, in that communication is partial. The two men do not wish to express the fullness of their emotions although each is presumably aware of the other's state of mind; states of mind which are conveyed to the reader by means of authorial comment, 'determined to ignore', 'pretending to stare'. In effect a silent dialogue is carried on between the two characters, totally independent of the spoken word.

Thus an analysis of parallel inner and outer conversations in *Sisters* shows that they are characterised by hostility, misunderstanding (both partial and total), and concealment (sometimes with the complicity of both characters). What might be termed the inner voice of the parallel conversation has the effect of revealing consciousness, in a way which dialogue cannot, but often in the direct form of

verbalised thought. Often such verbalised thoughts are quoted from both characters. The 'as if...' formula provides for the verbalisation of thought, although through the intervention of the narrative voice, with the curious effect that the words are attributable to both the figural consciousnesses and to the narrative consciousness. Thus while the outer and inner conversations show subtlety of technique, they show at times a paradoxical dependence on some element of a narrating consciousness, and because of their placing within dialogue, they inevitably express two consciousnesses, not one. Other, less complex vehicles for the conveying of inner conversations are silence and directly quoted thoughts. Occasionally there is a description of the process of awareness of unconscious thought. The role played by unconscious thought becomes more important in The Tree of Heaven.

The Tree of Heaven is an undeservedly neglected novel which deals with the fortunes of the Harrison family, before and during The First World War. The parents, Frances and Anthony, have none of the repressive characteristics typical of Sinclair's fictional parents. Two of their three sons, Nicky and Michael, an avant-garde poet, die in the war, and the novel closes with the enlisting of the third son, John, while their daughter Dorothy, who is involved in the

Women's Suffrage Movement, loses her fiance.

The techniques for conveying inner conversations in The Tree of Heaven are broadly similar to those used in The Three Sisters, although the pattern of use varies between the two novels.

At the time of the outbreak of war, for example, the men of the Harrison family discuss the possibility of enlisting, against the background of Michael's refusal to support British involvement in the war:

"I," said John, "haven't got anybody to think of. I'm not going to be married, and I haven't any children."  
"I haven't got a wife and children yet," said Nicky.  
"You've got Veronica. You ought to think of her."  
"I am thinking of her. You don't suppose Veronica'd stop me if I wanted to go? Why, she wouldn't look at me if I didn't want to go."  
Suddenly he remembered Michael.  
"I mean," he said, "after my saying that I was going."  
Their eyes met. Michael's flickered. He knew that Nicky was thinking of him.  
"Then Ronny knows?" said Frances.  
"Of course she knows. You aren't going to try to stop me, mother?"  
"No," she said. "I'm not going to try to stop you- this time." She thought: "If I hadn't stopped him seven years ago, he would be safe now, with the army in India."<sup>5</sup>

In the first part of this passage, there is complete

awareness by two characters who each refuse to make painful inner thoughts explicit, as occurs several times in The Three Sisters, for example in the quoted conversation between the Vicar and Alice. Here, although there is much less hostility, there is the same full awareness and partial communication. Two brief comments by the narrator are sufficient to convey the intensity but it is also worth noting the recording of body language 'Their eyes met. Michael's flickered.' Directly verbalised thought is not expressed until the end of the passage, where Frances's quoted thought reveals a concealed reservation. Thus the overall effect of the incident is to represent three consciousnesses, two in hidden communication with one another, and the third, concealing her thought, which is nevertheless a response to the other two speakers.

A more complex communication takes place towards the end of the novel, between Dorothy and her lover, Frank Drayton:

"He said to himself, "She shall come alive. She shall feel. She shall want me. I'll make her. I should have thought of this ten years ago."  
Her face was smooth; it smiled under the touch of his mouth and hands. And fear came with her passion. She thought, "supposing something happens before Friday. If I could only give myself to him now - tonight."

Then, very gently and very tenderly, he released her, as if he knew what she was thinking. He was sorry for her and afraid. Poor Dorothy, who had made such a beastly mess of it, who had come alive so late.

She thought, "But he wouldn't take me that way. He'd loath me if he knew." Yet surely there was the same fear in his eyes as he looked at her (TH. p.267).

The conflict which is so typical of much of the dialogue in The Three Sisters plays no part in this scene, but, in spite of the reconciliation of the lovers, communication is no more than partial. Each holds back something of her/his own thought, while Dorothy, at least, tries to divine the thought of the other. The effect of so much verbalised thought is of two separate dialogues, outer and inner. Three vehicles are used to convey thought: directly quoted thought, comment by the narrator and a third method which is less easy to define. Twice the narrator summarises the thoughts of the characters, 'And fear came with her passion', 'He was sorry for her and afraid'. At other times the more immediate and dramatic device of quoted thought is used, once for Drayton and twice for Dorothy, and quite clearly indicated by the use of quotation marks. 'Poor Dorothy who had made such a beastly mess of it, who had come to life so late' is so heavily coloured by the language of Frank Drayton, that it would at first appear that

Sinclair is moving towards the technical experimentation of direct quotation without the use of inverted commas. This is, however, belied by the tense of the comment. It is simply a case of comment focalised by the consciousness of Drayton but it gains immediacy from its very strong suggestion of Drayton's spoken language. The extensive use of this form of narrated thought outside the field of outer and inner conversations will be discussed later. The final sentence of the quoted passage is similarly placed within Dorothy's consciousness, although the presence of Dorothy's language is not quite so obvious. The effect of the inner conversation here has a great deal of the interaction of spoken dialogue, so that its effect, to use Bakhtin's term, is dialogic.

Interaction based much more obviously on conflict occurs at a tennis party at the Harrisons' home, when a hidden battle is conducted between Frances and a neighbour, Mrs Jervis, who has failed to keep her children at home with her:

"It's very strange that Dorothy hasn't married." Mrs Jervis spoke. She derived comfort from the thought that Dorothy was eight-and-twenty and not married.

"Dorothy," said Frances, "could marry tomorrow if she wanted to; but she doesn't want."

She was sorry for her friend, but she really could not allow her that



consolation.

"Veronica is growing up very good-looking," said Mrs Jervis then. But it was no use. Frances was aware that Veronica was grown up, and that she was good-looking, and that Nicky loved her; but Mrs Jervis's shafts fell wide of all her vulnerable places. Frances was no longer afraid.

"Veronica," she said, "is growing up very good."

...  
It was as if Rosalind's mother had said, extensively and with pointed reference to the facts: "Veronica is dangerous. Her mother has had adventures. She is grown up and she is good-looking, and Nicky is susceptible to that sort of thing. If you don't look out he will be caught again..." So when Frances said Veronica was good, she meant that Mrs Jervis should understand, once for all, that she was not in the least like her mother or like Phyllis Desmond (TH. pp.228-229).

In the part of the conversation which concerns Dorothy, the element of conflict is barely concealed. Two comments clarify the partially expressed conflict.

The first, 'She derived comfort....' is the narrator's. The second, 'She was sorry for her friend....' is strongly coloured by Frances's language and apparently centred on her consciousness. The second part of the conversation is another classic instance of parallel conversations like the conversation between Rowcliffe and Gwenda discussed above, fascinating because the inner conversation 'speaks' at much greater length than the outer. The language suggests that the comments largely emanate

from a narrating consciousness, with the exception of the phrases 'no use', 'all her vulnerable places', 'she herself', 'only driven', 'once for all' and 'not in the least like' which suggest a consciousness slightly less articulate than the narrator's. This merging of consciousness between narrator and character represents a departure from the usual practice in The Three Sisters where it is in most examples an instance of shifting rather than merging. Bakhtin's term 'polyphony' seems useful in considering this phenomenon which will be discussed more fully below. It runs directly counter to the idea of the single consciousness novel which subsequently attracted Sinclair's attention as a way of confronting the problem of realism. The only directly verbalised element is the use of the 'It was as if' formula. It is followed by a lengthy passage of 'thought' contained within quotation marks, but the point made above should be born in mind, that what is here being conveyed is non-verbal, although it has the appearance of quoted thought. Here it very obviously functions as a decoding of the dialogue. Frances and her friend speak their own specialised language with a shared strategy of decoding. One or two of Rowcliffe's remarks in The Three Sisters function in this way but not so obviously as in the present example.

I opened the discussion on The Tree of Heaven with a reference to the consideration given to the unconscious in this novel. The unconscious mind is clearly of importance to Sinclair, and is given greater significance here than in The Three Sisters. The most obvious approach to the unconscious is to depict characters whom the narrator or another character asserts are being influenced by the unconscious mind. Alice and the Vicar are both examples of this, but the approach, as with all strongly authorial approaches tends towards the didacticism manifest in some of Sinclair's later novels, most notably Anne Severn and the Fieldings, but which at this stage in her writing she is clearly anxious to avoid. The alternative approach, through the consciousness of the character concerned, is fraught with difficulty. It is important here to distinguish subverbal thought, mentioned above, which includes ideas of which the mind is aware but which it does not represent in words, from unconscious thought of which the mind is unaware. One example of unconscious thought has already been discussed, from The Three Sisters, concerning Mary's jealousy of Gwenda, where her mind is shown as becoming aware of something previously unknown to it. Unconscious motivation is considered at some length in the scene between Rosalind and Dorothy, in which they argue ostensibly about the suffrage meeting they have just

left, but in reality about their own sexuality. Near the beginning of the conversation, the following interchange occurs:

"She [Dorothy's mother] only really cares for Dad and John and Nicky and Michael."

Rosalind looked fierce and stubborn.

"That's what's the matter with all of you," she said.

"What is?"

"Caring like that. It's all sex. Sex instinct, sex feeling. Maud's right. It's what we're up against all the time."

Dorothy said to herself, "That's what's the matter with Rosalind if she only knew it."

Rosalind loved Michael and Michael detested her, and Nicky didn't like her very much. She always looked fierce and stubborn when she heard Michael's name (TH. p.115).

The method of conveying the unconscious spring of Rosalind's irritability is Dorothy's directly quoted thoughts, thus giving the character a didactic role at this point. Dorothy's language also colours the narrative comment, 'Rosalind loved Michael...' thus reinforcing Dorothy's role as an interpretive consciousness. Here the inner conversation has the effect of monologue rather than dialogue because, although she is responding to Rosalind, on the inner level only Dorothy speaks, thus providing only one interpreting voice and anticipating such a development in Mary Olivier: A Life and Arnold Waterlow: A Life.

Again body language is important, revealing Rosalind's mind more fully than her words.

One of the most interesting studies of unconscious motivation occurs early in the novel when Frances's mother and her three unmarried sisters visit the house and are confronted with John as a baby:

Auntie Louie looked at her youngest nephew. She smiled her downward, sagging smile, wrung from a virginity sadder than Grannie's grief. She spoke to Baby John.

"You really are rather a nice boy," Auntie Louie said.

But Edie, the youngest Auntie, was kneeling on the grass before him, bringing her face close to his. Baby John's new and flawless face was cruel to Auntie Edie's. So was his look of dignity and wisdom.

"Oh, she says you're only rather nice," said Auntie Edie. "And you're the beautifullest, sweetest, darlingest that ever was. Wasn't she a nasty Auntie Louie?....."

She hid herself behind The Times disturbing Jane.

"Where's John-John?" she cried. "Where's he gone to? Can anybody tell me where to find John-John. Where's John-John ..... Oh, he won't pay any attention to poor me."

Baby John was playing earnestly with Grannie's watch-chain.

"You might leave the child alone," said Grannie. "Can't you see he doesn't want you?"

Aunt Edie made a little pouting face, like a scolded pathetic child. Nobody ever did want Auntie Edie (TH. pp.22-3).

The outer conversation of the doting aunts is

contrasted with their inner and, to some degree unconscious, states of mind. The viewpoint is not easily established. In the preceding paragraph Michael is clearly the observer and the sisters are referred to throughout the scene as Auntie. However, elsewhere in the text, although not always, they are frequently described by this appellation which may be taken to suggest their role in life. Many comments are the narrator's, such as, 'her downward, sagging smile wrung from a virginity sadder than Grannie's grief'. The descriptive and analytical quality of this comment clearly suggests that it comes from the narrator, as does the paragraph beginning, 'But Edie.....' although 'new' and 'flawless' might be regarded as the perceptions of Edie, slightly colouring the narrator's language. The narrator offers ironic comment on the disturbing quality of Edie's activity and compares her to a pathetic child. 'Nobody ever did want Auntie Edie' is however, in spite of the third person reference, a clear infiltration of Edie's own vocabulary and thought into the narration. A further means of revelation about the sisters' inner thoughts is provided by the dialogue itself. Edie's comment about Louie draws attention to the half-heartedness of her overtures to her nephew, but at the same time reveals to the alert reader how her own childlessness impels her to relate

to the child and to see her sister as a rival for his affections, the mainspring for such motivation being unconscious. Likewise Grannie's comment draws attention to the failure of the childless woman to relate to her nephew. The whole passage suggests that the aunts are impelled by unconscious frustration.

At this point, one more, rather exceptional scene from The Tree of Heaven should be included, the final parting between Dorothy and her lover, Frank Drayton. This scene is in total contrast to almost all the scenes of inner and outer conversation from The Three Sisters as well as most of those from The Tree of Heaven, because it represents a couple at a moment of close unity. The first part of their conversation is conducted in total silence, but nevertheless a silence in which a great deal happens:

It was not like yesterday. He did not take her in his arms. He sat there, looking at her rather anxiously, keeping his distance. He seemed to be wondering how she was going to take it.

He thought: "I've made a mess of it again.

It wasn't fair to make her want me - when I might have known. I ought to have left it."

And suddenly her soul swung round, released from yesterday. She knew what he had wanted yesterday: that her senses should be ready to follow where her heart led. But that was not the readiness he required from her today; rather it was what his anxious eyes implored her to put away from her.

There was something more.  
He wasn't going to say the obvious things... he knew she wouldn't make it hard for him; he knew he hadn't got to say the obvious things.  
There was something more; something tremendous. It came to her with the power and sweetness of first passion; but without its fear. She no longer wanted him to take her in his arms and hold her as he had held her yesterday. Her swinging soul was steady; it vibrated to an intenser rhythm.  
She knew nothing now but that what she saw was real, and that they were seeing it together. It was Reality itself. It was more than they.  
When realisation passed it would endure.  
Never as long as they lived would they be able to speak of it, to say to each other what it was they felt and saw (TH. pp272-273).

The most obvious point about this scene is that, as no word is spoken between the characters, it is a development of the technique of inner and outer conversations resulting in the complete elimination of the outer conversation. This does occur from time to time in both the novels under discussion, but not in quite the way in which it does here. No battle is being conducted and they are very far from seeing themselves as adversaries. The opening paragraph is a comment centred on the consciousness of Dorothy, as the opening time reference makes very clear. She can judge Drayton only from his mannerisms and expression, but the reader is given the benefit of a switch in narrative viewpoint, which reveals Drayton's directly



quoted thoughts. Dorothy however reacts as though she too has the benefit of this insight, her whole mental reaction is encapsulated by the metaphor, 'her soul swung round' which takes the reader beyond her verbalised thoughts into the area of un verbalised thoughts already discussed. The metaphorical treatment is continued later in the quoted passage, and passion is endowed with the concrete attribute of 'sweetness'. What is being portrayed here is not unconscious thought, as the viewpoint is predominantly Dorothy's, but something which not only goes beyond verbalisation within Dorothy's mind, but also beyond verbalisation between the two protagonists. What Dorothy sees is described as 'Reality' which always, in Sinclair's novels, refers to some kind of mystical experience of the transcendent and should not be confused with the lower order 'reality' which her treatment of consciousness seeks to encapsulate. Such experience epitomises Sinclair's narrative problems. Of its nature it is subjective, but then so is reality. The question remains of how one person's subjective reality is to be communicated to another. Furthermore if such a mystical experience is part of the consciousness of a character, or, as in this case characters, then its source is either the direct experience of the consciousness of the author, that very author who is to be eliminated from the text, or

a construction derived from the reading experience of the author. Apart from Drayton's quoted thought, the whole passage is seen through the consciousness of Dorothy, sometimes introduced by the narrator 'she knew', 'it came to her',; more often quoted indirectly. Drayton's experience is not revealed, but there is no obvious signal of irony which might subvert Dorothy's perception of his experience. As a result, since there is a coincidence of consciousness here, the effect is of a single rather than a dual voice.

Notwithstanding the last example, the device of inner and outer conversations is often used to convey a certain degree of distance between characters, and therefore it is hardly surprising that conflict is still a significant element in the examples quoted from The Tree of Heaven, but it is often less intense than in The Three Sisters, although some emphasis is placed on concealment, which does of course carry overtones of hostility. An examination of this aspect of the narrative techniques employed in the novel does suggest Sinclair's increasing interest in the unconscious mind which will be examined more fully later. As in The Three Sisters, the focus of the narration shifts between the protagonists and the narrator. The 'it was as if' formula, which focuses both on the mind of the character and on the narrator

as a kind of translator of the signifiers of the spoken dialogue, is restricted to those scenes in which conflict plays an important part. Increasingly the emphasis is on a dialogue of consciousness beneath the level of the apparent conversation and if consciousness as opposed to spoken words is regarded as being nearer to reality, then this may be seen as a move by Sinclair towards greater reality. On the other hand, it must be pointed out that although, in the examples I have used, other methods of conveying consciousness are employed which I will discuss later, in all the examples, thought is at some point represented as a direct verbal formulation.

## II

The method which Sinclair espouses in both the foregoing novels, by the use of devices such as parentheses, the frequent interposition of quoted thought, and the use of an economical narrative intervention represented by the 'it was as if' formula, gives greater emphasis to characters' verbalised thoughts and to the disparity between their thoughts and their spoken words, than is given in a more traditional novel. Nevertheless the formal differences are in fact comparatively superficial, and Sinclair, although investigating its limits, is still

working within the narrative paradigm of the traditional nineteenth-century novel, employing her narrator, although in an elliptical way, to convey the thoughts of a variety of characters to her reader.

One way, although by no means the only way, as Virginia Woolf was to show, of eliminating the narrator's role, was clearly suggested to Sinclair by the publication of Pilgrimage which led her to embark on the writing of novels based on a single consciousness. At this point I wish to show how the device of inner and outer conversations is developed in a novel which is written from the viewpoint of a single character. While the multiplicity of viewpoint and the resulting sense of conflict is to some extent lost, the use of a single viewpoint to comment on conversations, while they are in process, produces its own subversion of the external conversation, so that in fact a dialogic interaction is taking place. This can be seen most notably in Mary Olivier: A Life

Mary Olivier: A Life, published in 1919, is generally regarded as the novel most influenced by Pilgrimage. Zegger and Kaplan both discuss the relationship between the two novels.<sup>6</sup> The novel is usually regarded as being to a greater or lesser extent an autobiographical novel and Sinclair herself

acknowledged autobiographical elements in the novel.<sup>7</sup> It traces the life up to middle age of Mary, the only girl in a family of three sons, Mark, her mother's favourite, Dan and Roddy. The novel focuses on her struggle for the affection of her mother, who loves her sons more than either Mary or Mary's father, and the conflicting impulse of her fight for independence against repressive social and religious influences which seek to turn her into a dutiful daughter.

Quite early on in the novel, Mary develops her own private conversational world, learning early in life the futility of arguing with her family. However, occasionally, the reader finds her in a social context taking part in conversations reminiscent of those in The Three Sisters and The Tree of Heaven, such as the occasion when two of her mother's neighbours, Miss Frewin and Mrs Waugh invite her for tea and she observes one of them doing some kind of handiwork:

"Do you like doing it?"

"Yes."

She thought: "What a fool she must think me.

As if she'd do it if she didn't like it."

The arching eyes and twitching mouth smiled at your foolishness.

Mrs Waugh's voice went on. It came smoothly, hardly moving her small, round mouth. That was her natural voice.

Then suddenly it rose, like a voice that calls to you to get up in the morning. "Well, Mary-so you've left school. Come home to be a help to your mother." A high, false cheerfulness, covering disapproval and reproach. Their gentleness was cold to her and secretly inimical. They had asked her because of Mamma. They didn't really want her.<sup>8</sup>

Miss Frewin's polite outer conversation is interpreted by Mary's directly quoted thoughts, as well as her narrated comments on Miss Frewin's facial expression, which suggest that the politeness is merely exterior. However since Mary is the sole interpreter of the scene, there remains the possibility that Mary misinterprets by endowing Miss Frewin with an intelligence equal to her own. Mary's description to herself of the changes in Mrs Waugh's voice is followed by her interpretation of Mrs Waugh's meaning. Thus Mary's comments and a description of Mrs Waugh's non-verbal language combine to suggest a polite outer meaning, masking a hostile inner meaning, without necessitating any recourse to the narrator's intervention. It should be noted that although Mary is the only 'speaker' in the inner dialogue, it is nevertheless a dialogue, since Mary's thoughts are a response to the other people present, and therefore, dialogic.

- Mary's superior intelligence and independent opinions

render her an isolated figure in the novel. In her infancy she makes attempts to communicate her feelings, as when she tries to explain to her mother and Jenny, the reasons for her tears when her birthday is over:

"Oh," said Mamma, "if you only love people because they give you birthday presents -"

"But I don't - I don't - really and truly -"

...  
Why couldn't they see that crying meant that she wanted Papa to be sacred and holy every day? (MO. pp18-19).

This variation on the inner and outer conversation works economically through a single sentence of Mary's narrated thought, combined with her inarticulate attempt at expressing complex motivation. The use of narrated thought in more general contexts will be discussed elsewhere. The phrasing of Mary's self-addressed question has the effect of emphasising the obtuseness of her interlocutors. Although Mary speaks there is a sense in which the dialogue is between Mary's thoughts and her mother's words which prompt those thoughts.

After her infancy, the surface dialogue tends to disappear altogether. Mary's conversations are portrayed as private ones, reflecting the uselessness of trying to communicate with her family, as, for

example when her mother forbids her to express her unorthodox religious opinions:

"There was a reason why then; and there's a reason why now. Your father has been very unfortunate. We're here in a new place, and the less we make ourselves conspicuous the better."

"I see."

She thought: "Because Papa drinks Mamma and Roddy go proud and angry; but I must stoop and hide. It isn't fair" (MO. p.170).

Here Mary's direct thoughts have something of the effect of the 'it was as if' formula in the two earlier novels, but the act of translation is given to the figural consciousness, the narrator's role being restricted to 'she thought'. Mary makes a direct verbal translation of her mother's words, but keeps its import to herself, concealing her real opinions. The effect of the single viewpoint is to undermine her mother's words and expose her hypocrisy much more effectively than if a multiple viewpoint had been involved, while retaining something of an alternative voice, or dialogic element, represented by her mother's words.

Later in the novel, her mother's words are subverted with even greater force, when she refuses to intervene in Dan's affairs:



"I daresay! You can't treat a man of thirty as if he was a baby of three." She thought. "No. You can only treat a woman...." 'There is one eternal thinker - " (MO. p.276).

Mary's directly quoted thoughts are a transition from her internal reply to her mother, to the subject matter she is reading, The Upanishads. This time her thoughts are actually in the form of a rejoinder, conveying something of her suppressed rage and frustration at total non-communication. Their rapidity and immediacy convey the impression of one who has long given up vocalising her objections, and at the same time, with a directness often lacking in the earlier novels they completely subvert her mother's words.

On the occasion when Mary reads the Bible to her mother, while her father's funeral is proceeding, her reading is interrupted by three bracketed comments. The first and the last are simply thoughts about the pace of her reading and the progress of the funeral, but the central comment is subversive of her reading, expressing her profound hostility to what she sees as the hypocrisy of those around her:.

"'Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts: shut not Thy merciful ears to our prayers: but spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and

merciful Saviour ---'"  
(Prayers, abject prayers for themselves.  
None for him. Not one word. They were  
cowards, afraid for themselves, afraid  
of death; their funk had made them  
forget him. It was as if they didn't  
believe that he was there. And, after  
all, it was his funeral) (MO. p.196).

This provides another example of an inner conversation conveyed through narrated thought rather than verbalised thought. It highlights at once the isolation of Mary, in this sense a typical Modernist heroine, and at the same time the way in which, in spite of her isolation, her thoughts continue to be involved in a silent dialogue with those around her. However, the dialogic effect of this passage is not here conveyed entirely through the convention of character, but is more obviously a clash of discourses, Mary's unspoken thoughts being in a direct colloquial style which subverts the rhythmical, liturgical style of the prayers.

In Mary Olivier: A Life, the device of a private, inner conversation, in the context of an outer conversation, is confined to the central character. She is isolated from those around her and is more intelligent than most of those with whom she comes into contact. As a child, she is often observed trying to make sense of adult behaviour, experiencing an inability to articulate her feelings to people who cannot

understand them. The novel shows a tendency to modify direct verbal representations of thought and produce what elsewhere I refer to as narrated monologue, but in a form very close to verbal thought. In spite of its concentration on a single character the device of parallel inner and outer conversations is still essentially dialogic, for it represents a character's thoughts in response to the spoken words of others. Those spoken words are still present in the text. Although, for example in the conversation with Miss Frewin and Mrs Waugh, the central character interprets those words, they are still present as a separate voice.

### III

The foregoing examination of Sinclair's device of parallel outer and inner conversation, exhibits Sinclair's concern with consciousness in the form of dialogue with other consciousnesses. Catherine Hoyser discusses the function of inner dialogue in Mary Olivier's relationship with her mother, but does not place the device within the general context of Sinclair's experimental novels.<sup>9</sup> The whole thrust of the major narratives of the central period is directed towards the portrayal of consciousness, since for Sinclair, to present the workings of a character's

mind would appear to be the logical development of realism. However the paradox which lies at the heart of such an assumption has been clearly indicated by Dorrit Cohn in her valuable study Transparent Minds: 'the special life-likeness of narrative fiction depends on what writers and readers know least in life: how another mind thinks, another body feels. In depicting the inner life, the novelist is truly a fabricator.'<sup>10</sup> In fact, Cohn's conclusion can be further supported by the additional consideration that the novelist's invention of a character's mental processes, once it extends below the level of conscious thought, cannot be verified, even by reference to the novelist's own mind, the deeper workings of which must remain unknown to the novelist him/herself, nor can it be verified by reference to the reader's mind.

Sinclair's article on Dorothy Richardson in The Little Review makes it clear that she regards the portrayal of consciousness as fundamental to the portrayal of reality. Such a position, in effect, repostulates the problem of mimesis in a different form. Nevertheless, in certain novels, most notably Mary Olivier: A Life and Life and Death of Harriett Freen, Sinclair is clearly attempting to construct consciousnesses which approximate to that observable by her reader in the

non-fictional world. Consciousness, as opposed to external description, presents particular challenges to a writer, because its relationship to language is problematic.

All fictional portrayals of consciousness are necessarily distortions. Even the interior monologue, traditionally regarded as the purest method of portraying consciousness, is inadequate by reason of its very explicitness. Sinclair's increasing interest in the techniques of portraying consciousness leads her to move towards more experimental techniques in The Tree of Heaven, and to a fuller level of experimentation in Mary Olivier: A Life and Life and Death of Harriett Frean. She adopts three main techniques: the diffusion of a character's vocabulary into the narrative text; narrated monologue; and an amalgam of the narrated monologue and interior monologue, signalled by the pronoun 'you'.

The first of these devices, intrinsic to the novel form, is fairly widely used among novelists not regarded as being experimental, and is observable in Sinclair's early works. Nevertheless it is an important means by which the voice of an individual consciousness is absorbed into the text. It occurs several times in the transitional novel, The Tree of

Heaven, for example in the description of Anthony and Frances's attitude towards Vera's illicit relationship with Lawrence Stephen:

They had arrived late with Vera and Lawrence Stephen. It had come to that. Anthony and Frances found that they could not go on forever refusing the acquaintance of the man who had done so much for Michael (TH. p.234).

The colloquial sentence, 'It had come to that' occurring in the middle of a passage employing the more formal language of the narrator evokes the way in which the characters, Anthony and Frances, might express, to themselves or one another, the enormity of the situation in which they find themselves. The reader is thus exposed to their constructed consciousnesses, as well as to the narrating consciousness.

Later, an analysis of Michael's attitudes, shows a subtle shift in vocabulary:

But Anthony was mistaken when he thought that the pressure of these antagonisms would move Michael an inch from the way he meant to go. Rather, it drew out that resistance which Michael's mind had always offered to the loathsome violences of the collective soul (TH. p.286).

'Loathsome violences' is clearly attributable to Michael's consciousness, while the narrator, both in the surrounding context and elsewhere in the novel, uses the phrase 'collective soul'. In this way, as in the previous example, the narration becomes infected by the language of the character, so that the reader is exposed to two consciousnesses, that of the character which is expressed in extravagantly passionate language and that of the narrator which is expressed in more moderate terms.

A slightly more complex example is provided by an account of Antony's feelings about his potential contribution to the war effort:

Anthony was perfectly well aware of his own one talent, the talent which had made "Harrison and Harrison" the biggest timber importing firm in England. If there was one thing he understood it was organisation. If there was one thing he could not tolerate it was waste of good material, the folly of forcing men and women into places they were not fit for. He had let his eldest son slip out of the business without a pang, or with hardly any pang (TH. p.252).

The two sentences which begin with the phrase 'If there was...' suggest Anthony's vocabulary, the repetition being characteristic of a very slightly pompous business man expounding his theories. They are, however, framed by sentences which clearly convey

the analytical vocabulary and less declamatory style of the narrator. The effect of this is another example of the infection of language described above. It is worth noting that the preceding and following paragraphs both deal with Anthony's thought processes, for the most part explicitly introduced, ('Anthony said to himself', 'He understood') but in each case moving in the direction of narrated monologue, each final sentence being unattached to any mental verb.

However, the diffusion of figural language into the narration is not always easy to identify. Several doubtful cases illustrate its affinity with narrated monologue, such as the description of Veronica in Nicky's workshop, in The Tree of Heaven:

She was sitting now in the old hen-house that was Nicky's workshop, watching him as he turned square bars of brass into round bars with his lathe. She had plates of steel to polish, and pieces of wood to rub smooth with glass-paper. There were sheets of brass and copper, and bars and lumps of steel, and great poles and planks of timber reared up round the walls of the workshop. The metal filings fell from Nicky's lathe into sawdust that smelt deliciously. The workshop was nicer than the old apple-tree house, because there were always lots of things to do in it for Nicky (TH. p.92).

The first paragraph is a fusion of the language of the narrator and the language of the child Veronica, which



is suggested by the use of 'there were' followed by the repetition of 'and', and the word 'deliciously'. However the second paragraph reads much more like an example of narrated monologue, indicated by the ease with which it could be translated into direct thought or speech. There is not a great deal of difference between this sentence and the one beginning 'There were...' They both employ a past tense and a similar vocabulary but the later sentence suggests a spoken or unspoken thought; the earlier simply an awareness. One might use the phrase 'narrated perception' as it seems to evoke that area of consciousness which is somehow contained in words, and yet is not spoken. Cohn makes some useful comments on this phenomenon, citing the ideas of R.J.Lethcoe.<sup>11</sup> The effect is to merge the distant perspective of the narrator with the language of the childish wonder of Veronica.

In the more experimental novel, Mary Olivier: A Life it is possible to argue that virtually the entire novel is channelled through the imagined consciousness of Mary, and therefore it is not surprising to find that there are no clear cut examples of the use of figural language within the context of the narrator's language, since figural language permeates the entire text. Sometimes, however there is an oscillating between narrative perspectives, rather like that in

the last example from The Tree of Heaven, as can be seen from the following description of an event in Mary's infancy:

Something swelled up, hot and tight, in Mary's body and in her face. She had a big bursting face and a big bursting body. She struck the tower, and it fell down. Her violence made her feel light and small again and happy (MO. p.10).

The second sentence is clearly an example of narrated perception, expressed as Mary would have expressed it, if she had articulated it. The first sentence is only slightly less obviously of the same order, indicated by 'something' and the repetitive, 'and in her face'. While the third sentence might be attributable to character or narrator, the analytical final sentence clearly represents the voice of the narrator, and is beyond the range of the infant Mary's vocabulary. Once more two voices speak, the analytical voice of the narrator and the awareness of the young child. An interesting feature of this example is that the awareness being expressed is of a physical sensation. Although the cause of the sensation is the emotion occasioned by Mary's mother's lack of interest in her tower, what the infant Mary's consciousness records is the sensation.

Usually in this novel, the infiltration of figural

vocabulary into the text is more difficult to isolate. Sometimes a single word reminds the reader that the novel is being relayed through a fusion of Mary's consciousness with that of a more detached narrator, for example, 'She saw the queer white light for the first time and drew in her breath with a sharp check' (MO. p.48). The word 'queer' introduces a different element into what would otherwise be the narrator's objective description.

The difficulties inherent in any formal analysis of the narrative of Mary Olivier: A Life are clearly evident in the account of the visit to the City of London Cemetery. The narrative oscillates between second person (which will be discussed below) and third person. The third person narrative, like so much of the narrative of this novel, is a composite narration constructed from the supposed consciousness of Mary, and a more formal, neutral consciousness, presumably representing the author, a phenomenon which can be observed at several points:

When they got through the black door there were no tombstones. What showed through the hedge were the tops of high white pillars standing up among trees a long way off. They had come into a dreadful, bare, clay-coloured plain, furrowed into low mounds, as if a plough had gone criss-cross over it (MO. p.54).

Mary, a realistically constructed character, is at this point seven years old. Most of the vocabulary of this passage might be used either by such a character, or by a formal narrating figure, drawing on adult vocabulary. The exception in Mary's case is the use of the adjective, 'furrowed', while such phrases as 'got through', 'dreadful' and 'gone criss-cross' subvert the formal narrative tone. The syntax is little different from that of the following paragraph, more directly ascribed to Mary by the use of the second person, with the single exception of the inversion of the second sentence which suggests the more formal analysis of a narrator. It is impossible to disentangle the two voices into separate zones of narrative. What is present is a merged narrative in which separate voices can be observed. Later in the same description, the reader encounters:

They went on. The tight feeling under her waist had gone; her body felt loose and light as if it didn't belong to her; her knees were soft and sank under her. Suddenly she let go Roddy's hand. She stared at the funeral, paralysed with fright (MO. p.55).

Here there is a similar merging of narrative styles, 'tight feeling' suggesting the consciousness of the child, while the analytical final sentence is clearly a retreat into authorial analysis. Towards the end of

the description, a passage occurs which is almost completely conveyed through figural language:

The bare clay plain stretched on past the place where Mamma and Aunt Lavvy had turned.

The mounds here were big and high. They found Mamma and Aunt Lavvy standing by a very deep and narrow pit. A man was climbing up out of the pit on a ladder. You could see a pool of water shining far down at the bottom (MO. p.55).

The short sentences, the imprecision of 'the place where Mamma and Aunt Lavvy had turned', and 'a man', and the simplistic adjectives, particularly those intensified by 'very' all suggest the potential language of Mary. Interestingly, the last sentence slips into the second person mode. It is demonstrable in several places that narrative strongly infiltrated by figural language occurs in close proximity to other ways of portraying figural consciousness, such as narrated monologue or the use of the second person.

Life and Death of Harriett Frean, published in 1922, is another single consciousness novel, which traces the life story of its central figure, a passive character who never breaks away from her mother's domination, even after the latter's death. She ends her life a shrunken and diminished person who accepts absolutely the constraints and conventions of her

society. Although it is arguably less experimental than the earlier novel, there are examples of the diffusing of figural language into the narration but they are less clear cut than in The Tree of Heaven, with the exception of the description of Harriett's father's book:

After their return in the summer he began to write his book, The Social Order. There were things that had to be said; it did not much matter who said them provided they were said plainly. He dreamed of a new Social State, society governing itself without representatives.<sup>12</sup>

The central sentence, in contrast to the other two, clearly suggests Hilton Freaan's own rather pompous way of expressing himself, and its inclusion in the narration contributes to the reader's understanding, not only of Hilton Freaan's way of speaking, but of the way in which his ideas have totally infiltrated Harriett's conscious mind, thereby illustrating the way in which this particular novel, although it might be termed a single consciousness novel, is open to voices other than Harriett's.

The case of Life and Death of Harriett Freaan presents similar problems as the narrative is also less conventional than that of The Tree of Heaven. Most, though not all, of the novel is written from Harriett's

point of view and words suggestive of her consciousness pervade much of the narrative, to an extent which is difficult to convey by the use of short quotations. Near the opening of the novel, the following passage occurs:

When Nurse had gone she would lie still in her cot, waiting. The door would open, the big pointed shadow would move over the ceiling, the lattice shadow of the fireguard would fade and go away, and Mamma would come in carrying the lighted candle. Her face shone white between her long, hanging curls. She would stoop over the cot and lift Harriett up, and her face would be hidden in curls. That was the kiss-me-to-sleep kiss. And when she had gone Harriett lay still again, waiting. Presently Papa would come in, large and dark in the firelight. He stooped and she leapt up into his arms. That was the kiss-me-awake kiss; it was their secret (HF. pp.2-3).

Throughout the paragraph, the voice of the narrator expressed by the precision of phrases such as 'lattice', and the syntax of 'carrying' is infiltrated by the vocabulary of Harriett, 'Nurse', 'big, pointed shadow', 'go away', 'Mamma', 'Papa', 'large and dark'. However there are two occasions when the narrator's voice gives way to narrated monologue, 'That was the kiss-me-to-sleep kiss' and 'That was the kiss-me-awake kiss; it was their secret.' The difference can be demonstrated linguistically by the use of the 'would' form of the imperfect tense which indicates the

iterative nature of the experience, and, as with the previous example, suggests an area of consciousness contained within, but not explicitly rendered by, language. Thus once again two perspectives are available to the reader, the objective distance of the narrator's discourse, and the larger than life objects of Harriett's.

Elements of narrated perception are also evident in a passage describing Harriett's reaction to the school treat incident:

And now she was sitting up in the drawing-room at home. Her mother had brought her a piece of seed-cake and a cup of milk with the cream on it. Mamma's soft eyes kissed her as they watched her eating her cake with short crumbly bites, like a little cat. Mamma's eyes made her feel so good, so good (HF. p.14).

As in the example from The Tree of Heaven, the imperfect tense, in this case followed by a related pluperfect, suggests the idea of what I have called narrated perception, awareness structured by language but not consciously formulated in words. The vocabulary of Harriett is diffused into the narration, 'sitting up', 'at home', 'the cream', 'short crumbly bites' and above all, the repeated 'so good' are all suggestive of Harriett's language and Harriett's



perspective. However, something of the more formal narrative remains in 'her mother' and it is difficult to know where the comparison to the cat is situated. 'Little' suggests Harriett but the perspective is more likely to be the narrator's. The effect, as elsewhere of this diffusing of figurative language into the narrative, is that the character of Harriett is revealed both from within and without the figural consciousness, but Harriett's perspective is not the only one available to the reader.

Identifying the diffusion of figural language into the narrative text must remain a subjective exercise, since characters and any supposed formal 'narrator' are linguistic constructs. It is possible to argue that the assumption of a formal narrator, distinguishable from characters, although providing a useful tool for analysis, is actually false. The narrator of The Tree of Heaven is constructed from a variety of discourses which may be summarised as descriptive language and analytical language, representing the perspective of the author, as well as the language of numerous more subjective perspectives, for example the conventional and slightly pompous language of Anthony, the romantic and idealistic discourse of Dorothy, Michael's language of youthful rage, the childish awareness of Veronica resulting in a

text rich in voices, which is the strength of this particular novel. Likewise the narrator of Mary Olivier: A Life is constructed from the language of the partial perspective of the growing child, and a rather smaller input of descriptive and analytical language, representing the perspective of the author. The effect of this is that the reader is never swamped by the consciousness of Mary, since an alternative perspective is consistently made available. The narrator of Life and Death of Harriett Freen, constructed in a similar way to that of Mary Olivier: A Life combines the inadequate and limited language of Harriett with a narrative discourse rendered more authoritative by comparison. The result of these observations, for the discussion of the portrayal of consciousness, is to show the way in which a character or characters' constructed consciousness pervade the entire narration, particularly in Mary Olivier: A Life and Life and Death of Harriett Freen, and to argue that the result of experimentation is simply a more fluid combination of a variety of discourses. The problem, implicit in regarding the portrayal of consciousness as an expression of realism, which I referred to in the introduction, remains inevitably unanswered, but the multiplicity of consciousnesses which speak in the texts, even if they are no more than products of the

author's imagination, at least suggest an openness to a variety of voices in the non-fictional world.

This pervading of the narrative by language attributable to characters within the novel has the advantage that it avoids the mimetic problem intrinsic to any attempt to convey actual thoughts. The relationship between thought and language is problematic but while it can be argued that all thought is structured by language, it is an observable phenomenon of the non-fictional world that all thought is not experienced as language, that the mind apparently short-circuits the structures of language, presumably working extremely rapidly through a series of linguistic expressions, in a way not dissimilar to the working of a computer. This is why techniques for conveying consciousness, such as the interior monologue, and to a lesser extent the narrated monologue, remain unsatisfactory from a purely mimetic standpoint.

I have used Cohn's term narrated monologue where others have used terms such as free indirect, erlebte rede or indirect libre, mainly for the reasons Cohn suggests, that the alternative expressions are used to describe spoken words as well as thoughts.<sup>13</sup> The term also has the advantage that it connects the

technique to the interior monologue, to which it is fairly closely related. The term as I intend to use it, in analysing the novels under discussion, includes thoughts, memories, projections into the future and perceptions. Cohn includes the same range in her discussion of the narrated monologue.<sup>14</sup> It is characterised by the omission of any mental verb such as s/he thought, or at least a considerable separation from such a verb in the text, and yet by the use of a narrative past tense and the third person. Thus, its effects are not radically different from those of the narrative diffusion discussed above. The result is some kind of fusion of narrative and figural consciousness, although the balance is shifted away from the narrator and towards the character.

In The Tree of Heaven, its use is fairly straightforward but significantly frequent. In using the device in the way she does in The Tree of Heaven and to a lesser extent in Mary Olivier: A Life and Life and Death of Harriett Frean, Sinclair clearly places herself in the tradition of Austen and James, of novelists whose chief concern is the inner, rather than the outer self. An early instance from The Tree of Heaven serves as an example:

And he had yellow eyes. Mary-Nanna said they would turn green some day. But

Nicky didn't believe it. Mary-Nanna was only ragging. Jerry's eyes would always be yellow. (TH. p.44).

The two final sentences are separated from the introductory, 'Nicky didn't believe it' and actually convey the logical stages of the child Nicky's inner argument, making the supposed consciousness of Nicky much more present to the reader than would be the case if a narrative summary were offered. It is worth noting that Nicky's thoughts are prompted by someone else's assertion, almost taking the form of an inner reply.

A much more extended version is centred on the character of Dorothy, and her interpretation of her friend, Rosalind. It emerges in the following way:

She knew that her back was to the wall and that the Blackadder girl had been on the watch for the last half-hour to get her knife into her. (Odd, for she had admired the Blackadder girl and her fighting gestures.)

It was inconceivable that she should have to answer to that absurd committee for her honour. It was inconceivable that Rosalind, her friend, should not help her (TH. pp.108-9).

This begins as a fairly straightforward example of narrated monologue, preceded by, but separated from, the phrase, 'she knew'. However it raises the mimetic

problem referred to above, since the conscious mind is unlikely to articulate itself in this degree of detail. However the parenthetical phrase represents something approaching the shorthand articulation which the mind experiences. The paragraphs immediately following this raise some problems of analysis. I will quote what I have judged the most significant points for such an analysis:

Yet Rosalind had not changed. She was still the schoolgirl slacker.....Her power to go, and to let herself rip, and the weakness that made her depend on Dorothy to start her were the qualities that attracted Dorothy to Rosalind from the beginning..... Her air of casual command, half-swagger, half-slouch, her stoop and the thrusting forward of her face, were copied sedulously from an admired model.

Dorothy found her pitiable. She was hypnotised by the Blaithwaites, who worked her and would throw her away when she was of no more use..... She was foredoomed to the vortex (TH. p.109).

The opening of the paragraph could be read as a continuation of Dorothy's narrated monologue. However, the use of 'Dorothy' rather than 'she' suggests that the passage might be read as a piece of narration infected by Dorothy's manner of speech, the narrator's discourse, in the form of a character summary, combining with the discourse of upper class Edwardian slang which partly constructs the character

of Dorothy. This is further suggested by the opening of the second quoted paragraph which suggests that, only at this point, is a passage of narrated monologue being reintroduced, the passage following clearly readable as narrated monologue. The merging of the two narrative methods into one another indicates the fluidity of Sinclair's approach to narrative, and confirms the suggestion above that 'narrative voice' is really a composite construction. In fact the sort of formal analysis to which Cohn and others subject narrative while it has its uses has also its limitations. There is a point beyond which a polyphonic text such as the one under discussion resists this sort of formal categorisation. This is particularly significant in the case of Dorothy, who is one of a series of strong women such as Gwenda in *The Three Sisters* and Mary in *Mary Olivier: A Life*, who seem to have clear affinities with the author's own outlook, with the result that her relationship to the narrator is complex, one of strong affinity, but not of identity.

A further aspect of the last two quoted passages is worth consideration before I move on. In both passages, Dorothy is responding inwardly to the words of others, the 'Blackadder girl' and Rosalind, so that although the form is different, this episode provides

another example of the tendency to internal dialogue which runs through certain of Sinclair's novels.

Frances's brother Morrie, a very different kind of character, is much more clearly differentiated from the surrounding narrative in the following example:

It seemed to him that neither Frances nor Anthony was listening to him. They were not looking at him. They didn't want to listen;.....They had not been there.  
Dorothy and Michael and Nicky were listening. The three kids had imagination; they could take it in. They stared as if he had brought those horrors into the room. But even they missed the reality of it.....  
He glared at Frances and Anthony. What was the good of telling them, of trying to make them realise it? If they'd only given him some sign,..... But the stiff, averted faces of Frances and Anthony annoyed him (TH. p.70).

Here, although there is a mixture of narrative modes, with the inclusion of the introductory sentence, and the first sentence of the final paragraph, the narrative zones are much more clearly distinguishable, and the language of the final paragraph is clearly suggestive of inner speech, rather than inner thought. This seems an appropriate way to construct the character of Morrie who represents the sort of alienated disaffected character who might talk to himself in this way. It is worth noting that this



example too retains some of the characteristics of inner dialogue, since Morrie's concern is over the manner in which he is being listened to.

These are typical examples of the way narrated monologue works in this novel. Sometimes its form closely resembles speech, as in the imitation of the operation of the child's mind or of the disaffected character who addresses himself. In these examples, particularly, narrated monologue works to distinguish the narrative zones of the text much more clearly than they are distinguished by the mere diffusion of figural language into the text. Nevertheless there are still occasions when such arbitrary distinctions cannot be clearly made, particularly in the case of Dorothy. The narrative functions of Dorothy and the narrator to some extent overlap, but Dorothy's recognisable verbal style serves to separate her and render her language more limited by experience and social class than that of the narrator. Devices such as parentheses, nominals and infinitives are used to imitate the less speech-orientated patterns of thought. Most of these examples show clearly the ways in which Sinclair's use of narrated monologue has similarity to her use of inner speech, running parallel to outer speech, thereby focusing on the dialogic nature of her characterisation.

Narrated monologue is used extensively in Mary Olivier: A Life, always to convey Mary's thought, and often modified either in the direction of diffusion of figural language into the text or in the contrary direction of interior monologue. However in this novel, the narrative context in which the device is embedded is largely woven of Mary's thoughts and observations with the result that it can be argued that narrated monologue functions in a different way from the way in which it functions in the Tree of Heaven, at least in relation to Dorothy, drawing attention to a narrative position interposed between Mary and the reader, rather than, as in the case of The Tree of Heaven, making the interposing narrative position less obvious.

This can be seen from an examination of some of the fairly straightforward uses of narrated monologue in the novel, for example Mary's thoughts on discovering the delights of free thinking:

Mary saw that she was likely to be alone in her adventure. It appeared to her more than ever as a journey into a beautiful, quiet yet exciting country where you could go on and on. The mere pleasure of being able to move enchanted her. But nobody would go with her. Nobody knew. Nobody cared. There was Spinoza; but Spinoza had been dead for ages. Now she came to think of it she had never heard anybody, not even Mr Propart, speak of Spinoza. It would

be worse for her than it had ever been for Aunt Lavvy who had actually known Dr Martineau. Dr Martineau was not dead; and if he had been there were still lots of Unitarian ministers alive all over England. And in the end Aunt Lavvy had broken loose and gone to her Unitarian Chapel (MO. p.109).

The first three sentences, analysing Mary's experience, indicate a narrating subject other than Mary. The sentence, 'But nobody would go with her.' marks the beginning of a fairly extensive passage of conventional narrated monologue in which Mary's conclusions about her theological position are expressed in the language of her thoughts. The third person pronoun, an identifying feature of narrated monologue serves to remind the reader that the text constructs Mary as a separate subject, not entirely co-extensive with the narrating consciousness. Mary's thoughts are in fact distinguished by a pseudo-logic which assumes that because she has never heard anyone speak of Spinoza he is a less significant figure than Dr Martineau and culminates in the final, rather inconsequential statement.

Several examples of narrated monologue in Mary Olivier: A Life are strongly suggestive of inner speech, reflecting the degree of self-dialogue to which the isolated character of Mary is subject. The following examples are fairly typical:

They had promised and vowed all that.  
In her name. What right had they? What  
right had they? (MO. p.112).

Why hadn't she loved him all the time?  
Why hadn't she liked his beard? His  
nice, brown, silky beard. His poor  
beard (MO. p.136).

If only he had let her alone. If only  
she could go back to her real life. But  
she couldn't. She couldn't feel any more  
her sudden secret happiness. Maurice  
Jourdain had driven it away (MO. p.226).

In all these examples the language of articulated thought, self-questioning, and wishful thinking is apparent. It places Mary in a tradition of isolated female heroines such as Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe whose exchange of thoughts is with themselves rather than others. It may also be considered in the light of Bakhtin's comments on Dostoevsky's use of the fully self-conscious isolated hero.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the use of the third person pronoun continues to emphasise the construction of Mary as a separate character within the text, all three examples coming from specific situations within the novel, to which the character as distinct from the narrator responds. The first example in particular emphasises the dialogic nature of the character's musings.

The fluidity of Sinclair's narrative is nowhere better illustrated than in the City of London Cemetery incident mentioned above. There are passages of third

person narrative, heavily coloured by Mary's language, as well as of second person narrative. Then, towards the middle of the passage, the following paragraph occurs:

They could see Mamma and Aunt Lavvy a long way on in front picking their way gingerly among the furrows. If only Mark had been there instead of Roddy. Roddy would keep on saying: "The great plague of London. The great plague of London," to frighten himself. He pointed to a heap of earth and said it was the first plague pit (MO. p.54).

The sentences, 'If only Mark...', and 'Roddy would keep...' provide a classic example of narrated monologue, carrying strong overtones of the spoken word, which develops easily out of third person narrative and slides just as easily back into the more conventional narrative mode.

These comparatively straightforward examples of the use of narrated monologue in this novel show something of the versatility and fluidity of Sinclair's method, as well as serving to emphasise Mary as an isolated figure in silent dialogue with those around her, nevertheless differentiated by her own language from the narrative voice which is distanced from, for example, her thoughts on Spinoza.

Narrated monologue is conventionally regarded as dealing with the sort of active thinking which the above examples illustrate, for example Mary's challenge to those around her, 'They had promised and vowed all that...What right had they?' or the child Nicky's logical thought processes. However, the thinking process is significantly more complex, embracing memory, fantasising and a general state of awareness or perception which are explored in the novels under discussion, particularly Mary Olivier: A Life. Sinclair shows a concern with the variety of forms of consciousness in her philosophical writing, for example in the following passage from A Defence of Idealism:

That is to say, so far as consciousness includes states which are not states of willing but states of feeling, perceiving, remembering, conceiving, judging, reasoning, imagining, the unity of consciousness cannot be found in will.<sup>16</sup>

The relationship of past events to the mind is intricate. The following complex of memories occurs when Mary reflects on the recent past while Roddy is on his way to Canada:

If she could only remember how he had looked and what he had said. He had talked about the big Atlantic liner, and the Canadian forests.

With luck the voyage might last eleven or twelve clear days. You could shoot moose and wapiti. Wapiti and elk. Elk. With his eyes shining. He was not quite sure about the elk. He wished he had written to the High Commissioner for Canada about the elk. That was what the Commissioner was there for, to answer questions, to encourage you to go to his beastly country (MO. p.206).

A double reporting operates here. The first two sentences provide straightforward examples of narrated monologue, but then, Mary's mind is represented as registering Roddy's words as free indirect discourse within her own mind. The change from the pluperfect to the conditional tense emphasises their foregrounding in Mary's present mind rather than the fact that they occurred in the past. However the fifth and sixth sentences revert to Mary's own thoughts, expressed by nominal sentences to represent the lack of full articulation. The final sentence might be attributable to Mary or Roddy, its ambivalence providing a further example of the fluidity which characterises the novel's narration. What the whole succeeds very well in doing is representing the range of awareness of Mary's mind. Immediately after this paragraph, Mary's thoughts are further extended:

She could hear Roddy's voice saying these things as they walked over Karva.

He was turning it all into an adventure, his imagination playing round and round it. And on Saturday morning he had been sick and couldn't eat his breakfast. Mamma had been sorry, and at the same time vexed and irritable as if she were afraid that the arrangements might, after all, be upset. But in the end he had gone off, pleased and excited, with Jem Alderson in the train (MO. p.206).

The introductory sentence signals a clarifying break before a return to narrated monologue. The following sentence, however, seems to employ the actual past tense of Mary's thoughts, rather than the pluperfect, more appropriate to narrated monologue, and which is employed for the succession of memories over a period of time which now crowd into Mary's mind. The unorthodox tense serves to highlight Mary's reflection, so that it is represented as much more vivid to her than the series of recollections which follow.

A very different form of narrated memory is used for Mary's memories and reflections of her old home, inextricably bound up with the fate of Aunt Charlotte:

The old, beautiful drawing-room. The piano by the door. Dan staggering down the room at Mark's party. Mark holding her there, in his arms. Dawn, and Dr. Draper's carriage waiting in the road beside the mangold fields. And Aunt Charlotte carried out, her feet brushing the flagstones. She mustn't tell them. Mamma couldn't



bear it. Roddy couldn't bear it. Aunt Charlotte was Papa's sister. He must never know (MO. pp.159-160).

The third person pronoun indicates that this a version of narrated monologue, rather than interior monologue, although the nominal sentences and the arbitrary transition from one memory to another are a feature of the latter technique, and approach more closely the representation of thought. There is a greater sense of active recollection in this example than the previous one, of the mind consciously sifting through a more or less sequential range of memories. The example serves to illustrate Sinclair's versatility in the use of narrated monologue, or 'narrated memory', which term might serve as a description of the last few examples. It is a description, as the above examples indicate, which encompasses both active recollection, and the presence in the mind of past events of consciousness.

Projections into the future also come within the range of Sinclair's use of narrated monologue, as instanced by the following nightmare vision from Life and Death of Harriett Freat:

Her mother's frightened voice tore at her, broke her down. Supposing she really died under the operation? Supposing - It was cruel to excite and

upset her just for that; it made the pain worse.  
Either the operation or the pain, going on and on, stabbing with sharper and sharper knives; cutting in deeper; all their care, the antiseptics, the restoratives, dragging it out, giving it more time to torture her  
(HF. pp.102-103).

The introductory sentence places this as an example of narrated monologue, beginning with Harriett's reflections, expressed through the short sentences and questions, reminiscent of speech, and moving on, in the second paragraph, to a reflection, not this time on the past, but on a possible future. As with so many of Sinclair's more complex and adventurous narrated monologues, the syntax, in this case the use of participles, suggests the incomplete articulation characteristic of so much conscious thought, as well as removing the tense element from the verb which detaches it from a clear time framework. The language is characteristic of Harriett's sentimentality represented by phrases like, 'it was cruel to excite and upset her' which, at moments of stress, becomes the melodrama of 'stabbing with sharper and sharper knives; cutting in deeper;'

A similar example from Mary Olivier: A Life expresses Mary's dread of the future:

To-morrow no lingering and no words.  
Mark's feet quick in the passage. A  
door shut to, a short, crushing embrace  
before he turned from her to her mother.  
Her mother and she alone together in the  
emptied room, turning from each other,  
without a word (MO. p.123).

As in the previous example, the perception of the future is expressed through unorthodox syntax, in this case the use of nominal and participial sentences, again distancing the thoughts from a coherent time framework. Since the events have not yet occurred, they have no place in time. The brief sentences and phrases of the first paragraph contrast with the longer final sentence culminating in the alliterative cadence, 'without a word'. The effect of this is to convey the dwelling and the brooding of the mind, rather than the exact words, which is often what constitutes the individual's experience of thinking, as opposed to the process of thought.

How to convey the experience of thinking, through the inadequate medium of words constitutes the mimetic problem I mentioned earlier. The aspect of Sinclair's use of narrated monologue which most nearly addresses this problem is her use of what I will term 'narrated perception', used fairly extensively in Mary Olivier: A Life, as for example in the very early description of the room in which the infant Mary finds herself:

At first, when she came into the room, carried high in Jenny's arms, she could see nothing but the hanging, shining globes. Each had a light inside it that made it shine.

Mamma was sitting at the far end of the table. Her face and neck shone white above the pile of oranges on the dark blue dish. She was dipping her fingers in a dark blue glass bowl (MO. p.4)

This cannot, of course, be called narrated monologue, within the traditional use of the term, since the mind does not formulate in language what it sees.

Nevertheless the mind does 'see', in the sense of interpreting visual images, which are, in turn, at some level, constructed by language. It might be argued that I am simply dealing in a rather cumbersome manner, with what critics have traditionally termed point of view. However I think the phenomenon I am discussing goes beyond this. In the above example, the description is couched in the extremely simple syntax which the infant Mary might use and the vocabulary does not go beyond an infant's range. It therefore represents more than point of view. It represents the language the character of Mary might use if she was asked to describe the room, and therefore must represent the language which, unknown to her, structures her perception of the room.

A much later description, placed in the mind of the adult Mary, will serve as further justification for

this idea:

She knew the house: the flagged passage from the front door. The dining-room on the right. The drawing-room on the left. In there the chairs and tables drew together to complain of Morfe. View of the blacksmith's house and yard from the front window. From the side window Mamma's garden. Green grass-plot. Trees at the far end (MO. p.162).

The description continues in the same style for a further two paragraphs, and represents an extension of the device I have just considered. In the earlier example, the child might be thought of as consciously observing what she sees. In this example, the mind is represented as seeing a scene not for the first time, and yet not seeing a totally familiar scene. The series of staccato, nominal sentences convey a mind running through a set of external images with which it is gradually familiarising itself. It is not to be imagined as consciously using the quoted language, but again its observations must be seen as structured by this characteristic language.

Much later, Mary's mind records her impressions of Richard's rooms:

She got up and looked about. That long dark thing was her coat and fur stretched out on the flat couch in the

corner where Richard had laid them;  
stretched out in an absolute peace and  
rest.  
She picked them up and went into the  
inner room that showed through the wide  
square opening.  
The small brown oak-panelled room. No  
furniture but Richard's writing table  
and his chair. A tall narrow French  
window looking to the backs of houses,  
and opening on a leaded balcony  
(MO. p.354).

The description continues, using staccato and nominal sentences, in a style reminiscent of the previous example, for several more lines. This time, however, the mind is to be imagined as paying more careful attention, while still not explicitly using language. The initial paragraph of the quoted passage suggests a mind surveying evidence and attempting to reach a conclusion. Mary might conceivably have articulated her conclusion to herself, in which case it might read, in narrated monologue form, 'that was her coat'. The inclusion of the descriptive 'long dark thing' suggests the activity of the mind in perceiving something long and dark and interpreting it as a coat, without consciously using the words. As always, it must be remembered that without the presence of the words, even though unspoken, the interpretation cannot be made. The same, of course, is true of the remainder of the sentence, as far as the semi-colon. The final eight words suggest a reflection rather than an interpretation, again probably unarticulated.

Sometimes narrated perception involves feelings and sensations rather than description, as in the following example, after the child Mary has injured her head:

She lay on the big bed. Her head rested on Mamma's arm. Mamma's face was close to her.

Water trickled into her eyes out of the wet pad of pocket-handkerchief. Under the cold pad a hot, grinding pain came from the hole in her forehead.

Jenny stood beside the bed. Her face had waked up and she was busy squeezing something out of a red sponge into a basin of pink water.

When Mamma pressed the pocket-handkerchief tight the pain ground harder, when she loosened it blood ran out of the hole and the pocket-handkerchief was warm again.

Then Jenny put on the sponge  
(MO. p.15)

The use of simplistic language, 'big bed', 'waked up', 'something', and of short sentences, suggests the perceptions of the child-character rather than a distanced narrator's analysis and justifies the inclusion of this passage as an example of narrated perception. As with other examples of this device, the text presents as fully articulated the sort of thoughts which, in the world outside the text, are usually only partly articulated. The phrase 'hot, grinding pain' is an interesting example of where full articulation might occur, as the infant mind struggles to describe a new sensation to itself.

In relation to this idea it is worth considering a very brief example of narrated perception, which occurs in the final two sentences of the following: 'Through the dining-room window she could see Roddy as he crouched over the hearth, holding out his hands to the fire. He was hers, not Mamma's, to take care of. Sharp delicious pain!' (MO. p.264). This represents a very conscious articulation of feeling on the character's part, a more sophisticated example of the kind of exploration of sensation indicated by 'hot, grinding pain'. As a final example of Sinclair's use of what might generally be termed narrated monologue, the following example illustrates the range and versatility of her use of the method:

'She must have been sitting there twenty minutes.

She was afraid to look up at the clock, afraid to move an eyelid lest she should disturb him.

The library had the same nice, leathery, tobaccoey smell. Rough under her fingers the same little sharp tongue of leather scratched up from the arm of her chair. The hanging, half-open fans of the ash-tree would be making the same Japanese pattern in the top left hand pane of the third window. She wanted to see it again to make sure of the pattern, but she was afraid to look up. If she looked up she would see him. She mustn't. It would disturb him horribly.

He couldn't write if he thought you were looking at him.

It was wonderful that he could go on like that, with somebody in the room, that he let you sit in it when he was writing. The big man.



She had asked him whether she hadn't better go away and come back again, and he had said No, he didn't want her to go away. He wouldn't keep her waiting more than five minutes.

It was unbelievable that she should be sitting there, in that room, as if nothing had happened; as if they were there; as if they might come in any minute; as if they had never gone. A week ago she would have said it was impossible, she couldn't do it, for anybody, no matter how big or how celebrated he was.

Why, after ten years - it must be ten years - she couldn't even bear to go past the house while other people were in it. She hated them, the people who took Greffington Hall for the summer holidays and the autumn shooting. She would go round to Renton by Jackson's yard and the fields so as not to see it (MO. pp.331-332).

This single example moves about easily between all the modes of narrated monologue which I have been discussing. It opens with three paragraphs of narrated perception, the first two concentrating on feeling and sensation, and most of the third on description. The final sentence of the third paragraph may be read as Mary's expression of feeling rather than a distanced narrator's analysis. The three following paragraphs represent the kind of conventional narrated monologue in which the words are likely to have been present, at least in elliptical form, in a character's mind; the second one particularly being reminiscent of the language of speech. The seventh paragraph, 'She had asked him...'

then moves into narrated memory, expressing the sort of awareness of the past which the mind does not usually articulate. The following paragraph reverts to narrated thoughts while the final quoted paragraph moves easily from Mary's awareness of her present thoughts to iterative memories of her feelings about Greffington Hall's previous tenants. Such fluidity of technique is typical, not just of Sinclair's use of the narrated monologue in Mary Olivier: A Life, but her use of a variety of narrative modes.

Thus, it can be seen that Sinclair extends the use of the narrated monologue into areas where it had not traditionally been used, areas such as memory, projection into the future, awareness, perception and sensation, all of which are commonly experienced activities of the mind in the non-fictional world. Sinclair's intentions, considering her comments on Dorothy Richardson may be judged to be, in some sense, mimetic. Thus she employs devices such as the use of nominal sentences, and sentences based on participles, in an attempt to convey the computer-like process of the mind as it is experienced by individuals in the real world. The problem she encounters is created by the gap between the process of thinking and the experience of thought, which in turn is symptomatic of the limitations of the whole mimetic enterprise, and

yet Sinclair is writing within a strongly mimetic tradition. It is interesting to speculate on whether her later abandonment of experimentation was, at least in part, caused by her recognition of its inevitable failure, if judged by the standards of strict realism. Nevertheless, the narrated monologue does enable her to expose her characters' minds more fully within the text, and most obviously in Mary Olivier: A Life. Mary's imagined thoughts and sensations, the influence of the past experiences of her consciousness, and her self-dialogue, are strongly present in the text, and yet the grammatical construction of the narrated monologue distinguishes Mary's thoughts from the other significant construction of the text, the narrator's words, which means that the text remains always open to more than one voice.

Nevertheless, the prospect of completely eliminating the language of the narrator, 'the wise, all-knowing author' clearly held some interest for Sinclair, as for several of her contemporaries. I have elsewhere described The Tree of Heaven as a transitional novel because there is a degree of experimentation with narrative position, mainly through the diffusion of figural language within the narrative text, and the extended use of narrated monologue. However there are some signs within The Tree of Heaven of a move towards elimination of a separate narrative position, particularly the extended description of Michael's experiences at school in Cheltenham (TH. pp73-75).

However, in order to analyse in detail the process by which a single consciousness is conveyed it is most fruitful to examine Mary Olivier: A Life in some detail. The most significant narrative technique is the conveying of Mary's consciousness through the second person. Richardi explains the narrative shift from third person to second person as the protagonist's shift from telling 'just the facts' to investigating 'the emotional core of her experience'. Kaplan explains it thus, 'when the omniscient narrator [the writer Mary] gets closer and closer to identification

with the character Mary, the pronouns change.'<sup>17</sup> I find these explanations reductive and I do not think it is possible to impose any such patterns on the text or to be precise about the identity of the narrator. The character of Mary, because she is a highly self aware consciousness who tends to narrate to herself her own story, often approaches the narrative position of the more distanced narrator, but it is important to note that she never quite merges with it. Nevertheless for much of the novel, it is difficult to distinguish zones of narrative and to allot them to the two dominant voices of the text, all of which contributes to the richness of Mary Olivier: A Life as a narrative text.

At times the story appears to be directly told through the consciousness of Mary, as can be seen from the opening of the novel:

The curtain of the big bed hung down beside the cot. When old Jenny shook it the wooden rings rattled on the pole and grey men with pointed heads and squat, bulging bodies came out of the folds onto the flat green ground. If you looked at them they turned into squab faces smeared with green. Every night, when Jenny had gone away with the doll and the donkey, you hunched up the blanket and the stiff white counterpane to hide the curtain and you played with the knob in the green painted iron railing of the cot (MO. p.3).

Two points become immediately apparent, that the interpretation of the world is clearly an expression of the imaginative consciousness of Mary, and that the narrative is iterative. Both points are related to the genre of the novel as a Bildungsroman, the child's perspective strongly reminiscent of the opening of Joyce's Portrait, and the iterative style of much of the narration being appropriate to narrative built out of the unexceptional events of daily life. Richardi also compares the passage to the opening of Portrait, but argues that it contrasts with Joyce's narrative because it reads as 'an adult's reflection'.<sup>18</sup>

However, it does appear to me to reflect the language and sentence structure of a small child.

Mary is constructed as a self-conscious character given to internal debate by the use of the term 'you'. The passage continues to describe the infant Mary's fantasies built out of playing with the ironwork of the cot, and concludes:

Tip-fingering backwards that way you got into the grey lane where the prickly stones were and the hedge of little biting trees. When the door in the hedge opened you saw the man in the night-shirt. He had only half a face.

From his nose and his cheek-bones downwards his beard hung straight like a dark cloth. You opened your mouth, but before you could scream you were back in the cot; the room was light; the green knob winked and grinned at you from the railing, and behind the curtain Papa and Mamma were lying in the big bed (MO.pp3-4).

The following sentence, 'one night she came out of the lane...' makes it clear that up to this point this passage also describes an iterative memory. The effect of the 'you' combined with the past tense is to convey Mary's familiarity with the fantasy, as a recurring phenomenon which she has learned to anticipate. There is an interesting echo in this passage of the disturbing effect of Black's Lane on Harriett Freen. 'The man in the night-shirt', revealed in the next paragraph as Mary's father, clearly represents some repressed fear, possibly of a similar nature to the fear which lurks beneath Harriett's consciousness in the later novel. The paragraph which follows the above extract, recounts an occasion when the nightmare ends differently, the man in the night-shirt appearing in the bedroom. When the single incident is recounted the narrative reverts to the third person. Because, hitherto the second person has been used the reader now has a sense of a more distanced speaker entering the narrative, viewing the child from without rather than within, so that even at this stage the narrative has two voices.

Another example from the very early chapters of the novel expresses the infant's experiences of those around her, and provides another good example of the narrative style of the early chapters. Section III

opens with three paragraphs describing old Jenny. It becomes apparent from the pronoun of the third sentence, that the narrative position is solely Mary's. The third paragraph continues:

No use trying to talk to Jenny. She was too tired to listen. You climbed on to her lap and stroked her face, and said "Poor Jenny. Dear Jenny. Poor Jenny-Wee so tired," and her face shut up and went to sleep. Her broad flat nose drooped; her eyelids dropped; her long, grey bands of hair drooped; she was like the white donkey that lived in the back lane and slept standing on three legs with his ears lying down (MO. p.7).

The simple vocabulary, the elliptical syntax of the opening sentence, and the original simile of the donkey, drawn from the child's own experience, all indicate that the prevailing, indeed the only consciousness, is Mary's. Any distinguishable narrating consciousness is eliminated by the exclusive use of the second person pronoun. Once more the experience is clearly iterative and the quoted words represented as being used on several occasions. The effect of the second person is to suggest a conscious reviewing of the events of her daily life and the beginnings of reflection on Mary's part, as she draws the unobtrusive conclusion that conversation with Jenny is fruitless.



The following paragraph, for no very obvious reason, reverts to the third person, although retaining vocabulary appropriate to the character of Mary, and changing again to the second person, several paragraphs later. In many parts of the novel the narrative shifts between the second and third person, thus creating a composite narrator and the sense of a central character seen both from the inside and the outside.

The early chapters do not have a clear chronological relationship to the central character's life. Although towards the end of the second chapter Mary's fifth birthday is described, it is not clear whether all the preceding events are to be assigned to her fifth year or whether the events of the first chapter, from which the above examples are taken, take place at an even earlier period of the character's imagined life.

The use of the second person in the volume entitled 'Childhood' shows, as might be expected, certain shifts. It is still used frequently to describe personal everyday experiences. Section II of the opening chapter of the volume is an extended account of the child's experiences when going to bed, which parallels the account which begins the first volume. It includes the following paragraph which highlights

the difference between the child's consciousness, and the infant's:

Now it was all different. You went to bed half an hour later, while Mamma was dressing for dinner, and when she came to tuck you up the bell rang and she had to run downstairs, quick, so as not to keep Papa waiting. You hung on to her neck and untucked yourself, and she always got away before you could kiss her seven times. And there was no night-light. You had to read the Bible in the morning, and it always had to be the bits Mamma wanted, out of Genesis and the Gospel of St John (MO. p.45).

As with the earlier example, there is a strong sense of consciousness reflecting on its own activities, intensified here by the greater awareness of time shown by the more mature consciousness, indicated by the adverbs, 'now' and the repeated 'always'. The child shows an awareness of motivation, both her own and her mother's, lacking in the infant's account. The remainder of the section, apart from the three short final paragraphs which revert to the pronoun 'she' are concerned with the child's speculations about birth, death, God and mathematics, and might be more properly considered below where the use of second person to portray the speculating aspect of Mary's consciousness is considered.

More typical of Mary's reflections on her own experiences are her meditations on the love shown her by Catty and Mamma, which parallel her reflections on Jenny in the earlier volume:

You knew that Catty loved you. There was never the smallest uncertainty about it. Her big black eyes shone when she saw you coming. You kissed her smooth cool cheeks, and she hugged you tight and kissed you back again at once; her big lips made a noise like a pop-gun. When she tucked you up at night she said, "I love you so much I could eat you" (MO. p.67).

The chief difference between this passage and the passage from 'Infancy' which has Jenny as its subject, is that the the child draws conclusions about cause and effect, 'You knew that Catty loved you' while the infant can only draw conclusions about empirical facts, observing Jenny's tiredness and her unwillingness to talk. However the reader is left to conclude that in both cases the motive springs are the same, the little girl's urgent need for love. A second difference between the passages is that the earlier passage focuses more exclusively on the concrete physical appearance of the servant, while the later passage dwells on the emotional reactions of Mary.

The continuation of the passage recounts a conversation between Mary and Catty, beginning 'Catty - how much do you love me?' The conversation is placed in the narrative without introduction, thereby implying its connection with Mary's speculations on Catty's love, and representing the free ranging of Mary's mind over a series of associated topics, without the formal connections required by speech, typical of 'stream of consciousness' writing.

Although the narrative at this point might be termed stream of consciousness, it represents a mind thinking actively, rather than idly, as is often the case in stream of consciousness writing, and therefore the connections are clear, if not always expressed. The turning of Mary's mind to Mamma is clearly indicated:

Mamma was different.

You knew when she loved you. You could almost count the times: the time when Papa frightened you; the time when you cut your forehead; the time the lamb died; all the whooping cough and chicken-pox times, and when Meta, the wax doll, fell off the schoolroom table and broke her head; and when Mark went away to school.

Or when you were good and said every word of your lessons right; when you watched Mamma working in the garden planting and transplanting the flowers with her clever hands; and when you were quiet and sat beside her on the footstool, learning to knit and sew. On Sunday afternoons when she played the hymns and you sang:

"There's a Friend for little children

Above the bright blue sky,"  
quite horribly out of tune, and when you  
listened while she sang herself, "Lead,  
kindly light," or "Abide with me," and  
her voice was so sweet and gentle that  
it made you cry.  
Then you knew (MO. p.68)

Here there is a strong sense of self-conscious reflection, taken to the point where the character might be seen to debate within herself. The list of times when she is loved begins with what might be termed accidental occasions, or at least events beyond Mary's control. A new sentence begins a more ominous list of occasions, which are within Mary's control, underlining the conditionality of Mamma's love. The character is represented as making the distinction between the two types of occasion, although whether she is to be understood as consciously aware of the distinction is not ascertainable. This again brings in the interesting question of the existence of unverbaised thoughts. If all thoughts are not put into words, which is not to say that they are beyond words, then Mary might be thought of as being aware of the distinction, in which case, the example is a clear indication of one limitation of the enterprise of removing the objective narrator, namely the sheer impossibility of relaying total consciousness on the written page, especially within a realistic mode of writing. However, whether or not she is aware of it, the problem for Mary of the conditionality of her

mother's love, is clear to the reader. The child is represented as surveying the evidence, and at least moving towards understanding its significance. In addition, the use of 'you' suggests the mind addressing itself with the voice of authority, thereby internalising external authority. The child's mind is represented as moving towards some kind of analysis of its situation, while simultaneously a self-censoring ego is emerging.

There follows, as in the case of Jenny, a conversation, in which it becomes difficult to disentangle the iterative elements from those which seem to suggest a single incident. Mamma's piano playing is formally introduced into Mary's thoughts, by a time reference, 'Sometimes, when it was not Sunday, she played the Hungarian March...'

The catechism about love, in which Mamma cruelly withholds the precious confession from Mary, is juxtaposed to the piano playing incidents, so that it is not clear whether such conversations are confined to the piano playing or whether they occur at other times. At first Mary seems to be recounting a particular conversation, ambiguously introduced by 'wouldn't', which might refer to one or several incidents. It nevertheless develops to reveal that Mamma has been making doll's clothes for Mary, 'Well,

then, look in the basket." The basket was full of tiny garments...'. However, as the conversation develops, the reader's certainty that a particular incident is being described, is subverted by: 'She sat there with a sort of triumph on her beautiful face, as if she were pleased with herself because she hadn't said it. And Mary would bring the long sheet that dragged on her wrist...' (p.70) The verb form, suggests a repeated action, which is to some extent irreconcilable with the previous suggestion of a single incident, and yet it is a realistic portrayal of the experience of consciousness, rather than consciousness itself. Always recollected, except for the split second of the event, consciousness is therefore always mediated in time, and in its mediated form encompasses a confused web of single and simply repeated incidents, and incidents repeated in subtly varied forms. The reversion to the third person continues to the end of the section. Although the viewpoint is predominantly Mary's, the reader has some sense of moving out of Mary's consciousness, seeing the little girl from another, and explicitly adult perspective.

In 'Childhood' the second person is used to reveal, not only Mary's experiences, but her developing thoughts and speculations. Part way through the extended

passage on going to bed, referred to above, Mary describes, not the fantasies which occupied her in the first volume, but the speculations with which she sends herself to sleep:

At night when you lay on your back in the dark you thought about being born and about arithmetic and God. The sacred number three went into eighteen sixty-nine and didn't come out again; so did seven. She liked numbers that fitted like that with no loose ends left over. Mr Sippett said there were things you could do with the loose ends of numbers to make them fit. That was fractions. Supposing there was somewhere in the world a number that simply wouldn't fit? Mr Sippett said there was no such number. But queer things happened. You were seven years old, yet you had had eight birthdays. There was the day you were born, January the twenty-fourth, eighteen sixty-three, at five o'clock in the morning. When you were born you weren't any age at all, not a minute old, not a second, not half a second. But there was eighteen sixty-two and there was January the twenty-third and the minute just before you were born. You couldn't really tell when the twenty-third ended and the twenty-fourth began; because when you counted sixty minutes for the hour and sixty seconds for the minute, there was still the half second and the half of that, and so on for ever and ever (MO. pp.45-46).

The sudden reversion to the third person, in the third sentence, may shed some light on Sinclair's use of second person narrative, if the justification of the use of the second person is its approximation to the way in which the mind sometimes addresses itself. The



third sentence is clearly of a different order of thought. Mary, addressing herself in her recall of mental events, is aware of herself as liking 'numbers that fitted' as a condition of her mind, not related to any particular series of mental events. In addition, the reversion, like many such shifts in the novel, serves to remind the reader of the separate presence of the narrator. In the sentences which follow there is a sense that Mary's thoughts are no longer mediated through her memory of falling asleep, but are occurring almost simultaneously with their narration. This is suggested by the staccato sentences, 'That was fractions', and 'But queer things happened' as well as by the question, 'Supposing there was somewhere in the world a number that simply wouldn't fit?'. Nevertheless the past tense remains, suggesting that the simultaneity of consciousness must always be modified by 'almost'. This paragraph represents an early example of a range of speculations, mainly on philosophical and literary topics which are an important element in the fabric of the novel. In her introduction to the Virago edition of the novel, Jean Radford argues that there is 'too much detail about her philosophical reading', in which criticism she would presumably also include such early speculations as the one under discussion.<sup>19</sup> However I would argue they are one of the novel's strengths,

written as it is in the tradition of the realistic Bildungsroman, and yet reflecting contemporary interest in the operations of the conscious and unconscious mind. The attempt at realism is suggested by the childish vocabulary and phrasing such as, 'The sacred number', 'didn't come out again', 'the loose ends of numbers', 'queer things'. The passage also hints at crucial elements in Mary's psychological life, her desire for order, and her Romantic urge to penetrate the unknown, at this stage the number that wouldn't fit, later nothing less than the secret of the universe, the 'Thing-in-itself'.

The volume entitled 'Adolescence' includes two very important theological speculations which develop from Mary's worries in the previous volume, and at the same time express her developing consciousness. Mary's previous speculations have been based on reluctant belief, but at the beginning of the third volume, disturbed by the contradiction between her discoveries about sex and the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, she abandons belief and embarks on a study of Pantheism. The subject is embarked on without warning, illustrating Sinclair's commitment to refraining from scene-setting, at the beginning of Section II of Chapter 13:

Nobody seemed to know what Pantheism was.

Mr Propart smiled when you asked him and said it was something you had better not meddle with.

Mr Farmer said it was only another word for atheism' (MO. p.98).

Through Mary's reflections here, the reader gains insight into the limited minds and condescending attitudes of the adults by whom the young girl is surrounded. Mary's reflections often work in this way, building up a realistic portrayal of the small town community in which she lives. This contributes to the novel's tendency towards polyphony and increases the reader's sense of Mary as an isolated heroine in silent dialogue with the society in which she finds herself. Her reflections continue:

Perhaps it would be in the Encyclopaedia Britannica. The Encyclopaedia told you all about Australia. There was even a good long bit about Byron, too. Panceput - Panegyric - Pantheism! There you were. Pantheism is 'that speculative system...' (MO. p.98)

It has to be said that this passage reads rather clumsily. The past tense suggests the secondary nature of all Mary's reflections, which I have emphasised above, while the reading of the names from the Encyclopaedia suggests the immediate present. The use of the past tense in 'There you were' consequently

seems false, as though it were selected simply for grammatical consistency, its artificiality being further exacerbated by the fact that it is a colloquial expression normally confined to the present tense. This suggests possible limits to the narrative mode which works so well elsewhere.

The description of Mary's reaction to what she reads works more successfully:

You might have known it would be like that.  
The universe, going on inside God, as your thoughts go on inside you; the universe, so close to God that nothing could be closer. The meaning got plainer and plainer (MO. p.99).

Interestingly, the reason why it works is because the use of tenses is less rigid. A strict following of the formula as it is used generally in the novel would produce a past tense in place of 'go on', while the participle 'going' and the verb 'might' are ambivalent. The flexibility which serves the novelist so well in many parts of the novel clearly offers a way out of her difficulties. The paragraph combines an echo of Mary's adolescent enthusiasm. 'You might have known it would be like that' which conveys a strong sense of a self-debating consciousness, with her clear but individual summary of one of the crucial

ideas of pantheism. Throughout this section, anticipating the sort of criticism offered by Radford, Sinclair varies her method of presenting Britannica's account of pantheism. The following paragraph, employing Mary's indirect representation, 'The Encyclopaedia man said that...', is succeeded by two paragraphs of direct quotation, broken by a short summary on Mary's part. Mary's reflections on what she reads are personal and distinctive:

God was not three incomprehensible  
Persons rolled into one, not Jesus, not  
Jehovah, not the Father creating the  
world in six days out of nothing, and  
muddling it, and coming down from heaven  
into it as his own son to make the best  
of a bad job. He was what you had felt  
and thought him to be as soon as you  
could think about him at all  
(MO. pp.99-100).

The phrases, 'muddling it' and 'best of a bad job' recall Mary's previous difficulties, while her immaturity of language serves to remind the reader of her youth. Throughout the section on pantheism, the reader is constantly made aware of Mary's consciousness, through her distinctive language as well as the use of the second person, so that the philosophical material does not appear didactic, or divorced from the other elements in the novel. There is a strong sense of a consciousness in dialogue, not, on this occasion with other people, but with what she

is reading. Mary's concluding comments, before the narrative reverts to the third person, return to a sense of dialogue with those around her:

You had been told one lie on the top of another. And all the time the truth was there, in the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Who would have thought that the Encyclopaedia could have been so exciting' (MO. p.100).

Mary's self-address here has strong verbal overtones, her indignation recalling, for example, Morrie's indignation against Frances and Anthony in The Tree of Heaven, expressed through narrated monologue. Once more she is in silent dialogue with those around her as well as with herself, although the latter dialogue is a constructive debate in which, at least for the moment, she reaches a conclusion. The whole incident marks a further stage in Mary's isolation, which makes the second person narrative with its strong suggestion of introspection particularly appropriate.

A variety of techniques in the use of second person narrative, reflect the development of Mary's personal life in 'Adolescence', and unlike previous examples, usually record single incidents rather than repeated experiences. Surprisingly, in view of her comments on Richardson, Sinclair rarely approaches consciousness in an unmediated manner. The account of Mary's

journey to school illustrates her hesitancy in this respect:

Grey streets, trying to cut across the stream, getting nowhere, carried past sideways on.

Don't look at the houses. Shut your eyes and remember.

Her father's hand on her shoulder. His face, at the carriage window, looking for her. A girl moving back, pushing her to it.

"Papa!"

...

Mamma's face, in the hall, breaking up suddenly. Her tears in your mouth. Her arms, crushing you. Mamma's face at the dining-room window. Tears, pricking, cutting your eyelids.

Blink them back before the girls see them.

Don't think of Mamma. (MO. pp135-136).

Sydney Kaplan uses the same passage in her analysis of Sinclair's narrative technique, commenting briefly on its comparatively unmediated character.<sup>20</sup> The opening three sentences carry less sense of mediation in time than characterises most of Sinclair's portrayals of consciousness. The nominal sentence, with participles as substitutes for verbs, suggests the mimetic representation of incompletely verbalised thought, while the following imperatives produce the effect of immediacy. In addition, assisted by the schizophrenic effect of the use of 'your', they reinforce the impression of a powerful character, constantly at odds with itself. Finally, they allow

a shift to the more familiar field of remembered consciousness. In this instance, the shift is clearly signalled by the use of the third person pronoun. The return to the second person in the final quoted paragraph, like the opening of the passage, employs nominal sentences to express thought, but the context makes clear that it is reflected consciousness. The final imperatives revert to almost immediate consciousness without reflection. The two paragraphs which follow the quoted extract are constructed in a very similar way, ending with the imperative, 'Better not think of Dan.'

During Mary's brief sojourn at school, the second person is used to convey iterative memories, in the manner of the iterative memories of the opening two volumes:

The queer she-things had a wonderful, mysterious life you couldn't touch. Clara, when she walked with you, smiling with her black-treacle eyes and bad teeth, glad to be talked to. Clara in bed. You bathed her forehead with eau-de-cologne, and she lay there, happy, glad of her headache that made them sorry for her. Clara, waiting for you at the foot of the stairs, looking with dog's eyes, imploring. "Will you walk with me?" "I can't. I'm going with Lucy." She turned her wounded dog's eyes and slunk away, beaten, humble, to walk with the little ones. Lucy Elliott in the bathing machine, slipping from the cloak of the towel, slender and straight; sea water gluing



red weeds of hair to her white skin  
(MO. pp138-139).

The passage is indicated as Mary's thought by the frequent absence of main verbs, although the introductory sentence suggests it is a very deliberate and organised speculation. It differs from the iterative memories of the first two volumes, by its very organisation. Disparate memories, not all of them iterative, ('she turned...') are linked together by the girl's active mind, and in this respect, it differs markedly from the 'stream of consciousness' writing of some of Sinclair's contemporaries, most notably, Joyce, Woolf and Faulkner, who avail themselves much more readily of the device of free association. The choice of the name 'Clara' suggests a comparison with Richardson's extended account of Miriam Henderson's schooling in Pointed Roofs. Although the choice of a short extract is inevitably arbitrary, the following passage from Pointed Roofs may serve to illustrate a difference between the two novelists:

It was here, somehow, somewhere in this roomful of girls, centring in the Germans at her end of the table, reflected on to the English group something of that influence that had made her play [the piano]. It was in the sheen on Minna's hair, in Emma's long-plaited schoolgirlishness, somehow in Clara's anger. It was here, here, and she was in it .... She must pretend to be writing letters or someone might

speak to her. She would hate anyone who challenged her at this moment. Jimmie might. It was just the kind of thing Jimmie would do. Her eyes were always roving round.<sup>21</sup>

It is true that Sinclair is using Mary's thoughts as a convenient way of summarising one short experience in a novel which deals with many, while Richardson's whole first novel in the Pilgrimage sequence is devoted to Miriam's experience of school.

Nevertheless, the passages highlight more fundamental differences between the two novels. Mary's thoughts very often exist in a kind of vacuum, devoid of time and space, while Miriam's are placed in a narrative context. This is clearly related to the fact that Mary's thoughts are always more tightly organised and less subject to the drift of free association.

Miriam's observations of her school fellows take her further out of herself, so that she contemplates them, focusing on their emotions and their physical appearance, feeling their influence. In Mary's case the sense of self is not submerged in the other characters. Their 'wonderful, mysterious life' is something 'you couldn't touch'. Clara is represented in terms of her interaction with Mary. Elsewhere of course, Miriam is portrayed as a strong, mentally active character, but Mary is never represented in the sort of passive relation to others which Miriam

experiences in this passage. Her reactions to others tend to be cerebral, reflected in the more organised form of her impressions. The passage describing Mary's experiences at school is clearly derivative, reflecting Sinclair's admiration for Pilgrimage, but it nevertheless remains of a piece with the orientation of Sinclair's representation of her heroine, which is more tightly controlled than Richardson's.

The same impression of self-conscious, as opposed to simply conscious thought, is conveyed in the accounts of Mary's thoughts and experiences in the volume entitled 'Maturity'. A complex passage describes Mary lying awake shortly after the ending of her engagement to Maurice Jourdain. She experiences a yearning for someone to replace Maurice and conjures up a fantasy about such a person:

He wrote all Shelley's poems except the bad ones. He wrote Swinburne's Atalanta in Calydon. He could understand your wanting to know what the Thing-in-itself was. If by dying to-morrow, to-night, this minute, you could know what it was, you would be glad to die. Wouldn't you? (MO. p.227).

The last two sentences, with their present tense adverbs, clearly suggest Mary's almost immediate thoughts on New Year's night. The same oscillation between awareness of iterative memory and

consciousness of a single occasion recurs in reverse as the passage progresses:

The world was built up in Space and Time. Time and Space were forms of thought - ways of thinking. If there was thinking there would be a thinker. Supposing - supposing the Transcendental Ego was the Thing-in-itself? That was his idea. She was content to let him have the best ones. You could keep him going for quite a long time that way before you got tired (MO. p.227).

The single shift to the third person reinforces the sense of diminished immediacy, which comes with the reversion to iterative memory and again provides a fleeting reminder of the possibility of a perspective outside Mary. The two following paragraphs however represent the most interesting shift, both from the point of view of the technique of second person narrative, and the intriguing suggestions they throw up, as Mary slips into a dream state:

The nicest way of all, though, was not to be yourself, but to be him; to live his exciting, adventurous, dangerous life. Then you could raise an army... You could go away to beautiful golden cities... You could sail in the China sea; you could get into Central Africa among savage people with queer, bloody gods. You could find out all sorts of things. You were he, and at the same time you were yourself, going about with him. You loved him with a passionate, self-immolating love. There wasn't room

for both of you on the raft, you sat cramped up, huddled together. Not enough hard tack. While he was sleeping you slipped off. A shark got you. It had a face like Dr Charles. The lunatic was running after him like mad, with a revolver. You ran like mad. Morfe Bridge. When he raised his arm you jerked it up and the revolver went off into the air. The fire was between his bed and the door. It curled and broke along the floor like surf. You waded through it. You picked him up and carried him out as Sister Dora carried the corpses with the small-pox. A screw loose somewhere. A tap turned on. Your mind dribbled imbecilities (MO. p.227).

The shift from Mary's self-aware, iterative memories of her previous fantasies occurs abruptly and without warning at the suggestively symbolic, 'There wasn't room for both of you on the raft...' It is suggestive because her previous more self-conscious reflections echo the central dilemma of so many of Sinclair's nineteenth century female predecessors, the paradoxical desire to be like men and to serve them, emphasised here by the use of the verb 'could' used no less than five times. From the point where Mary's consciousness reverts to the experience of a single incident, the narrative gains pace, marked by the succession of short sentences, including four without verbs. However it remains a consciousness mediated, however slightly in time, indicated by the succession of self-conscious verbs, 'you sat cramped up', 'you slipped off', 'you ran', 'you jerked', 'you waded',

'you picked'. The transition from general awareness to particular fantasy, to inconsequential dream, where the scene shifts unpredictably is a strongly realistic portrayal of the experience of consciousness. With its clear echoes of Jane Eyre, it suggests the area of wish-fulfilment fantasy where Mary's dilemma is in danger of leading her.<sup>22</sup> Her awareness of the danger is expressed by the final three sentences of the dream sequence, which in spite of their formal resemblance to the sentences of the dream, do not belong to it, but reflect rather Mary's consciousness of her weakness. That the section should end with Mary getting herself to sleep by thinking about ice on her bath is amusing, if not strictly relevant to the present point. While this section of the narrative may not have satisfied what may have been Sinclair's ambition of conveying the 'intense reality' of what happens in her character's mind, it is, nevertheless a masterpiece of complex narrative representing complexities of Mary's state of mind at this point, as well as hinting at its wider significance.

In 'Maturity' Mary's personal life is more closely bound up with her philosophical speculations and the period following her separation from Jourdain is marked by pessimism in both areas, as illustrated by her reflections on the passing of time:

To you nothing happened. Nothing ever would happen... You had given up expecting things to happen... You measured time by the poems you wrote and by the books you read and by the Sutcliffes' going abroad in January and coming back in March.

You had advanced from the Critique of Pure Reason to the Critique of Practical Reason, and the Critique of Judgment and the Prolegomena. And in the end you were cheated. You would never know the only thing worth knowing. Reality. For all you knew there was no Reality, no God, no freedom, no immortality. Only doing your duty. "You can because you ought." Kant, when you got to the bottom of him, was no more exciting than Mamma. "Du kannst, weil du sollst."

...  
There was Schopenhauer, though. He didn't cheat you. There was "reine Anschauung," pure perception; it happened when you looked at beautiful things. Beautiful things were crystal; you looked through them and saw Reality... And there was Mamma's disapproving, reproachful face. Sometimes you felt that you couldn't stand it for another minute. You wanted to get away from it, to the other end of the world, out of the world, to die (MO. p.254).

In contrast to the passage on Pantheism discussed above, this passage is summary, suggesting Mary's awareness of herself over a period of time, and therefore strongly suggesting reflective consciousness, considerably distanced from immediate experience. The two pluperfect tenses, 'You had given up' and 'You had advanced from', and the adverbial phrase, 'in the end' contribute to the effect of a mind reviewing its activities, particularly in the

first two paragraphs. The paragraph on Schopenhauer achieves an effect of greater urgency and immediacy, because it depends much less than the paragraph on Kant, on verbs of mental activity with a second person subject. Nevertheless a long time scale and iterative meaning are suggested by the conjunctions, 'when' and 'while'. The adverb 'sometimes' in the final paragraph has the same effect. The imagined consciousness of the central character in this volume is expressed in language which reflects her development from the 'Infancy' volume. The idiosyncratic language of the child has been transformed into adult language, made slightly informal by the use of occasional overtones of slang which Sinclair's robust heroines are inclined to use, 'when you got to the bottom of him' 'you were cheated' and 'you couldn't stand it'. The effect of this is to characterise Mary's language as a recognisable discourse, which maintains the separation between the narrative context, occasionally given explicit voice, and Mary as a character with her own voice. At the same time the sense of active dialogue with voices as varied as Kant, Schopenhauer and her mother is maintained.

This passage, as well as the dream sequence passage discussed above, evokes the tension between the



imprisoned lives of females and their active minds and both passages recall Charlotte Bronte. 'To you nothing happened' recalling Bronte's: 'What have I done these last thirty years? Precious little...'<sup>23</sup>

Sinclair, herself comments on this aspect of Charlotte's experience in her study of the Brontes.<sup>24</sup> A few pages later, the experiences of Charlotte and Emily Bronte are very obviously evoked, when Mary combines string French beans with reading Spinoza.<sup>25</sup> The evocation is reinforced at the end of the section by Mary's thought, 'I've lived half my life and done nothing':

The book stood open before her on the kitchen table, propped against the scales. As long as you were only stripping the strings from the French beans you could read.

The mind can bring it about. The mind can bring it about. "He who clearly and distinctly understands himself and his emotions loves God and so much the more in proportion as he more understands himself and his emotions."

Fine slices of French beans fell from the knife one by one, into the bowl of clear water. Spinoza's thought beat its way out through the smell of steel, the clean green smell of the cut beans, the crusty, spicy smell of the apple pie you had made. "He who loves God cannot endeavour that God should love him in return."

...

Mamma looked in at the door.

"Put that book away," she said. She hated the two brown volumes of Elwes's Spinoza you had bought for your birthday. "The dinner will be ruined if you read."

"It'll be ruined if I don't read."

For then your mind raged over the  
saucepans and the fragrant, floury  
pasteboard, hungry and unfed  
(MO. pp266-267).

The passage begins by suggesting the narrator's awareness of Mary, while the second sentence suggests her own self-consciousness but this very quickly disappears with the repeated sentence, 'The mind can bring it about.' which exceptionally uses the present tense and might be read as interior monologue, anticipating its use in the final volume. Combined with the quotation it conveys an impression of nearly instantaneous consciousness comparable to that expressed in certain parts of the Pantheism passage. A note of reflection re-emerges in the following passage where Mary is once more aware of herself in time, 'you had made' and her consciousness records her perception of her surroundings. However the stress on the sense of smell serves to retain some immediacy. The material at the end of the quotation, which is in fact the beginning of a lengthy paragraph describing the conditions of Mary's life, is clearly iterative, habitual occurrence being suggested by, 'For then'.

The use of second person narrative is the most important single element in the construction of Mary Olivier: A Life, although it should be seen in the context of other methods. Through such narrative

method a distinctive figural voice emerges, which grows gradually from the infant's simplistic terminology, through the adolescent slang to the informally vigorous language of the adult, expressing an energy and vitality which manifests itself in forms such as enthusiasm and indignation. At the same time, the combination of the method with narrated monologue means that through a single sentence of narrated monologue in the middle of a passage of second person narrative, or a shift to narrated monologue before or after such a passage, a separate narrative voice is retained which, although partaking of Mary's view, reminds the reader of the possibility of viewing Mary from without, a possibility which is partially fulfilled by the element of irony in the novel. Other voices are also present in the novel as Mary's consciousness is often engaged in active dialogue with them, whether those of Mary's mother, and Mr Propart and Mr Farmer, representing the orthodoxy of the neighbourhood, or of Kant and Schopenhauer. Bakhtin, writing on Dostoevsky, comments that: 'What is important to Dostoevsky is not how his hero appears in the world but first and foremost how the world appears to his hero, and how the hero appears to himself.'<sup>26</sup> Sinclair achieves something of this in her portrayal of Mary, conveying a considerable degree of realism, allowing for the limitations of that concept.

There is a sense of the growth of a mind. The infant uses curiously imaginative similes, and observes the physicality of people; the child learns to speculate on cause and effect; the speculations of the adolescent and the adult therefore come as no surprise. The flexible use of the method, shifting to other methods and to direct conversation, in spite of occasional clumsiness, as in the pantheism section, achieve an approximation to the experience of consciousness, exemplified by for example the confusion of single and iterative memory. It is here however, that one problem posed by the concept of realism asserts itself, since what is achieved is not a portrayal of consciousness but a portrayal of the experience of consciousness, since once consciousness is experienced through the symbolic order of language it is no longer primary consciousness. It follows that it cannot be portrayed without such mediation through language. Occasionally Sinclair uses more direct methods to convey consciousness, which is nevertheless only apparently unmediated, as for instance in the description of Mary's journey to school. Her usual method actually emphasises the mediated nature of consciousness, by the self-address implied in the second person, as well as by the fact that Mary's thoughts are often syntactically orthodox, and organised around a topic, often not set in any

particular scene. The consciousness portrayed is therefore particularly active and self-conscious, a consciousness which almost narrates its own story to itself, thereby bringing it into close relation to the novel's scarcely visible narrator.

V

Theories of the entry of consciousness into the symbolic order were not, of course, current at the time of Sinclair's writing and her declared interest in the realistic portrayal of consciousness might have been supposed to lead her to attempt the impossible and seek a more direct representation of consciousness. It is interesting to speculate on why a novelist, with Sinclair's declared intentions makes so little use of direct interior monologue. Mary Olivier: A Life is the only novel in which it is used to any significant extent. It makes its first appearance, in adversarial form, towards the end of 'Maturity':

That night the monstrous thought came to her in bed: Supposing I published those poems - I always meant to do it some day. Why haven't I? Because I don't care? Or because I care too much? Because I'm afraid? Afraid that if somebody reads them the illusion they've

created would be gone?  
How do I know my writing isn't like my  
playing?  
This is different. There's nothing  
else. If it's taken from me I shan't  
want to go on living.  
You didn't want to go on living when  
Mark died. Yet you went on. As if Mark  
had never died....And if Mamma died  
you'd go on - in your illusion.  
If it is an illusion I'd rather know it.  
How can I know? There isn't anybody  
here who can tell me. Nobody you could  
believe if they told you - I can  
believe myself. I've burnt everything  
I've written that was bad.  
You believe yourself today. You  
believed yesterday. How do you know  
you'll believe tomorrow?  
To-morrow - (MO. p.313).

The purist might argue that this is not true interior monologue, since it is quite conventionally introduced in the third person: 'the monstrous thought came to her'. Nevertheless the lack of quotation marks and the extended nature of the passage are sufficient justification for regarding it as interior monologue. The adversarial division between I and you, suggests, even more emphatically than some of the instances of the use of 'you' in isolation discussed above, the internalisation of external authority. The form of interior monologue used here seems to have developed from the second person passages discussed above. The use of 'supposing' for example recalls Mary's frequent internal debates confined to the second person. The effect of using the first person is best evaluated by transposing into

the second person and the past tense: 'Why hadn't you? Because you didn't care?' This second person/past tense usage does not interpose any trace of a separate narrative voice between Mary and the reader but what it does do is make the reader aware of Mary as a character in a novel, and therefore aware of her constructed consciousness as a reflecting consciousness. Where second person is actually used in this passage, in opposition to first person, it achieves quite a different effect from its use in pure second person narration, both because of its combination with the present tense, and more importantly its alternation with the first person. It therefore goes beyond the quiet voice of reflection and becomes the self-doubting self-critical voice of the super-ego.<sup>27</sup>

A rather different example of an adversarial usage of first and second person occurs towards the end of the final volume, 'Middle-Age'. To illustrate its effect it is necessary to quote it in context:

She wondered whether he had heard it. The crunching on the gravel walk under the windows...They had come to see whether the light would go out again behind the yellow blinds as it had gone out last night. If you were a coward; if you had wanted to get off scot-free, it was too late. Richard knows I'm not a coward. Funk couldn't keep me from him. It isn't

that. (MO. p.365).

The whole is placed within an external conversation between Mary and Richard, and thus belongs to those inner and outer conversations discussed above with reference to The Tree of Heaven and The Three Sisters. The second person, coming first, and accompanied by the past tense, is read initially as simple reflection on Mary's part, and therefore robbed of any authoritarian or accusatory power. The effect of the subsequent first person does little to add any tone of authority to the preceding second person, but the first person gains authority of its own by its position in relation to that second person. Thus, the effect of the whole is to produce an impression of Mary's consciousness as confident, assertive and much less divided than in the previous example, which is the whole tenor of the final chapters of the novel. However there are, of course, many earlier occasions when second person narrative, for example in her philosophical conclusions, has portrayed Mary's consciousness as self-confident and assertive. The use of first person cannot really be said to have produced a different effect.



A further example of the use of the interior monologue within a specific narrative context, this time avoids the shift to the second person:

They were talking to-night about Richard and his wife. They said he wasn't happy; he wasn't in love with her. He never had been; she knew it; yet she took him, and tied him to her, an old woman, older than Richard, with grey hair.

Oh well - she had had to wait for him longer than he waited for me, and she's in love with him still. She's making it impossible for him to see me.

Then I shan't see him. I don't want him to see me if it hurts her. I don't want her to be hurt. I wonder if she knows? They know. I can hear them talking about me when I've gone (MO. p.375).

The first part of the quotation, in the past tense, suggests a mind reflecting on material familiar to it with the same self-consciousness and self-reflectiveness which characterises much of the second person narrative examined previously. The sentences beginning 'Then I shan't see him...' suggests a more immediate, although still reflective train of thought. In this example the narrative context is much less precise, the nature of the social gathering not explained and its relationship in time to Mary's thoughts not made clear, which is of course often also a feature of second person narrative. This vagueness of context gives way in the final pages of the novel to the total elimination of narrative

context, leaving Mary's thoughts to float free within the text. Nevertheless there is a tendency throughout the narrative, including the parts where second person predominates, to minimise context and foreground the organised conscious reflections of the central character. The resulting disembodied sections apparently represent the character's final, or present view of her personal life and philosophical beliefs:

Mr.Sutcliffe is dead. He died two weeks ago at Agaye.

I can see now how beautiful they were; how beautiful he was, going away like that, letting her take him away so that the sight of me shouldn't hurt her (MO. p.376).

There remain here some elements of a narrative context, the passage being set at least loosely in time. One result of the comparative lack of context, combined with the direct narrative statement with which the passage opens, is that the passage exists in something of a vacuum and seems to require an addressee, the only possible candidate being the reader who seems to be called on rather late in the day to fulfil this role. This need for an addressee is reinforced by the fact that the thoughts here are by their very nature not immediately occurring, but conclusions implying the ordering of previous thoughts. A later, self-questioning passage overcomes

the problem of the need for an addressee:

I used to think there was nothing I  
couldn't give up for Richard.  
Could I give up this? If I had to  
choose between losing Richard and losing  
this? (I suppose it would be generally  
considered that I had lost Richard.) If  
I'd have had to choose seven years  
ago... (MO. p.379)

This is the beginning of a short section, written wholly as an interior monologue, without any indication of narrative context. The element of self-debate removes the need for any external listener. The qualification enclosed in parentheses retains a strong sense of a self-debating consciousness, which has in fact been the predominant thrust of the presentation of Mary's consciousness in the novel, whether through first or third person.

I will conclude this discussion of Sinclair's method of revealing consciousness in Mary Olivier: A Life by quoting the two final sections of the novel in their entirety:

Supposing there isn't anything in it?  
Supposing- Supposing- Last night I  
began thinking about it again. I  
stripped my soul;  
I opened all the windows and let my  
ice-cold thoughts in on the poor thing;  
it stood shivering between certainty

and uncertainty.

I tried to doubt away this ultimate passion, and it turned my doubt into its own exquisite sting, the very thrill of the adventure.

Supposing there's nothing in it, nothing at all?

That's the risk you take.

xiii

There isn't any risk. This time it was clear, clear as the black pattern the sycamore makes on the sky.

If it never came again I should remember.' (MO. pp.379-380)

The two questions and the final statement of each paragraph convey a mind almost in the act of consciousness, its questions and answers occurring as the passage progresses. However, much of the passage is in the form of narrative, summing up previous thoughts and experiences, again requiring an unfamiliar role of the reader, and inevitably, in spite of the first person, losing immediacy by conveying conclusions previously reached, rather than as they happen.

The frequent use of the first person, out of any specific context, towards the end of the novel results in a more fragmented text which reads differently from earlier parts of the narrative. Nevertheless, the effect is often similar to that of second person narration, revealing a consciousness which is predominantly self-conscious, one might almost say

self-narrating. Occasionally the first person method makes vivid the element of self-debating within Mary's character. On the whole, however, the switch to first person has the effect of diminishing the reader's awareness of Mary as a separate character. Catherine Hoyser, arguing from a different perspective, that of Mary's struggle to establish her identity, sees the switch to first person as positive, arguing that Mary 'regains the I and defines herself'.<sup>28</sup> However, when her characteristic self-debating is resolved in the final quoted example, there is a sense in which the character, in aesthetic terms, 'dies'. In this connection it is relevant to consider Bakhtin's comments on soliloquy, 'At the heart of the genre lies the discovery of the inner man - "one's own self", accessible not to passive self-observation but only through an active dialogic approach to one's own self, destroying that naive wholeness of one's notions about the self that lie at the heart of the lyric, epic and tragic image of man.'<sup>29</sup> In this sense, the resolution of Mary's self-debating into a single view seems a retreat into providing an epic resolution to the bildungsroman.

Sinclair's major techniques of representing consciousness in the novels under discussion, the silent dialogues, the diffusion of figurative language

within the text, the use of narrated monologue and the use of second person, result in texts of particular fluidity and richness. Within the novels the discourses of characters and narrator constantly mingle, which, particularly in the case of The Tree of Heaven, where attention is divided between several characters, results in the reader's exposure to a variety of voices. In this novel, the voice of the narrator is present, sometimes subtly ironic but rarely overtly judgmental. Nevertheless the challenge thrown out by Pilgrimage seems to have inspired Sinclair to abandon the multi-faceted novel form in an attempt to achieve novels which show, as she believed Pilgrimage showed, 'an art and method and form carried to punctilious perfection'.<sup>30</sup> She continues to use the narrated monologue, although in the two later novels limiting its application to the central characters. Its very fluidity frequently makes it difficult to distinguish in texts woven of more than one voice. In Sinclair's hands, it is a flexible device, encompassing, thoughts, memories, projections into the future, and simple awareness of one's surroundings. At one end of the spectrum it is close to speech, as in some of Dorothy's mental utterances, while at the other end it employs parentheses and nominal sentences as an approach to the shorthand of the mind, which raises the question of realistic representation, which becomes

a problem as soon as the novelist goes beyond the mere diffusion of figural vocabulary into the text. This problem becomes particularly pressing in the case of narrated awareness or perception, where Sinclair's solution is to convey characters' impressions in the language they might have used, if they were to decode their shorthand, as in the case of Veronica's impression of Nicky's workshop. Where narrated monologue is used in The Tree of Heaven it serves to bring the reader into a closer contact with the character's imagined consciousness, therefore according to Sinclair's theories, as expounded in the Richardson article, closer to reality, and to make her/him less aware of the narrator. In Mary Olivier: A Life, where a considerable part of the novel is ascribed to Mary's consciousness, the effect is the opposite; the reader is reminded more forcibly that Mary is a character, distinguishable from the narrating consciousness. The attempt to enter more fully into figural consciousness, although used in The Tree of Heaven and Life and Death of Harriett Frean is, in its extensive use, confined to Mary Olivier: A Life. In this novel, Sinclair develops a distinctive use of second person narration as a means of portrayal of the direct consciousness of her character. Since 'talking to oneself' is a common experience in the non-fictional world, it works as a realistic method of conveying

mental processes. By eliminating the third person, it totally eliminates the voice of the narrator at the points where it is used, while it retains the reader's experience of Mary as a character. Sinclair uses the device with extraordinary versatility: as a means of telling the story or describing characters in Mary's world such as Papa or Mr Propart; as a means of conveying the experience of being, built up of iterative memories, a sense of habituation as in the description of Morfe, and the blurring of single incidents with iterative memories; and, most importantly of all, as a means of conveying the vitality of Mary's inner intellectual life, her self-awareness, self-questioning, self-censoring and, until the last moment her self-questing. The flexibility of the method remains unaffected by, or is perhaps connected with, occasional signs of carelessness in its application, where unexplained shifts of person occur. The unimportance or even possible merit of such carelessness is indicated by the particularly infelicitous phrase 'There you were' in the Pantheism passage discussed above, which stems from over-rigidity in applying the technique.

The limitation which the technique comes up against is the limitation which all portrayals of consciousness must ultimately encounter, the sheer impossibility of



conveying the vast range of thoughts, half-thoughts, after-thoughts and qualifications that articulated, semi-articulated or unarticulated, fill the only consciousness the reader knows, her/his own. What Sinclair encounters in Mary Olivier: A life is a limitation endemic in the whole enterprise of realism. This is, of course, no less true of her sudden shift to interior monologue towards the end of the novel. It serves to highlight something which is also true of Sinclair's use of second person narrative. It is almost always highly logical and limited in scope, rarely creating the impression of disorder and loose association which is often used in the representation of consciousness in Joyce, Richardson and Woolf. This perhaps accounts for Kaplan's comment: 'Her stream is merely the imitation of a stream, not a stream at all' which seems to overlook the point that this must inevitably be true of all attempts to convey consciousness in the novel.<sup>31</sup> Sinclair's organisation of her narrative is therefore not a failing, since while more fluid representations of consciousness may approximate more closely to the surface experience of consciousness, they still encounter the limitations outlined above. Far from the novel being, as Kaplan argues, a 'closed form', in fact what the more ordered and selective method sacrifices in surface realism, it gains in conveying the vital questioning

mind of the heroine, in constant dialogue with herself and others.<sup>32</sup>

In her prescription for novel writing in her article in The Little Review, Sinclair lists four rules: the avoidance of scene-setting, refraining from comment, explanation or analysis, the surrender from omniscience, and identification with the central character. In judging her own two novels which appear to have been written in the light of this comment, she might have felt that she had succeeded in obeying the two central rules. The narrator's voice is present but it does not analyse and it does not reveal events beyond the character's knowledge. She may have been less satisfied that she had achieved identification with her central character. The very order and organisation referred to above militate against this, although I wish to argue that this is in many ways an advantage, since it preserves the reader's awareness of Mary as a separate character, and by ordering the portrayal of her consciousness, asserts its presence in the novel. Nor do the novels always exemplify 'punctilious perfection'.<sup>33</sup> There are the unexplained shifts of person (although they may be regarded as signs of flexibility by the reader not so committed to a particular technical approach) as well as the occasional summary sentence from outside the character

such as: 'Mary saw that she was likely to be alone in her adventure' (P.109). In Life and Death of Harriett Freen, the author adopts a summary function in order to advance the plot: 'Towards spring Harriett showed signs of depression' (HF. p.64), 'A year later, Harriett, run down, was ordered to the seaside' (HF. p.120), and 'By summer she was up and (tremulously) about again' (HF. p.165). As for setting scenes, the author never quite abandons her undoubted skill in this respect, ingeniously using Mary's consciousness to achieve particular scenes. In Life and Death of Harriett Freen, this proscription against scene-setting is far from absolute, and it is not unusual to encounter phrases such as, 'Harriett and Robin Lethbridge were walking up Black's Lane' (HF. p.58) and 'The school-treat was held in Mr Hancock's field' (HF. p.11). It might here, however, be added that, in spite of Sinclair's comment, Richardson herself is very far from the avoidance of scene-setting.

To suggest that Sinclair was dissatisfied with her achievement, in relation to her aims, is of course ~~highly speculative~~. In fact her publicly expressed opinions suggest the contrary. Theophilus Boll recounts an interview with Willis Steell, in New York, in which she reportedly said that 'her best book was Mary Olivier'.<sup>34</sup> What is undoubtedly true is that

she rapidly abandoned experimental writing. Even Life and Death of Harriett Frean, published in serial form between December 1920 and March 1921, shows some signs of this, including the tendency towards summary narrative mentioned above. For example second person narration is abandoned altogether before the novel reaches its half way point. Although it is used to describe Harriett's observations, most notably of her father and Mr Hancock, and her limited religious ideas derived from her mother, its use is much more sparing than in Mary Olivier: A Life. Between the two novels Sinclair wrote The Romantic with a strong emphasis on the central character's consciousness, but on the whole a more traditional narrative framework than either its successor or predecessor. After Life and Death of Harriett Frean, Sinclair pays comparatively little attention to experimental narrative, even in Arnold Waterlow: A Life, often regarded as a companion novel to Mary Olivier: A Life. That she does not abandon experimentation without a struggle is clear from her comment on Anne Severn and The Fieldings, the novel which immediately precedes Arnold Waterlow: A Life: 'It's the last I shall do of this sort of thing. I must keep to the method of 'Mary Olivier,' even if I must pass from mind to mind.'<sup>35</sup> The last clause suggests a leaning towards the novel which is open to more than one voice, which I have

argued is one of the merits of the novel genre. The controlled use of single person consciousness in Mary Olivier: A Life enables it to remain to some extent open to the voices of other characters. The comparative failure of Arnold Waterlow: A Life as an experimental novel confirms the idea that Sinclair found the writing of closely crafted, experimental fiction, confined to the voice of a single consciousness uncongenial.

Few readers would disagree with Sinclair's own estimation of the place of Mary Olivier: A Life and Life and Death of Harriett Freen in her achievements. It may therefore be more accurate to suggest dissatisfaction with, or loss of interest in what one might term 'the Richardson method' than dissatisfaction with the novels. The achievement of Mary Olivier: A Life is not its adherence to such a method, but the richness of its discourse and the force and clarity with which it conveys the mind of the central character. The merits of Pilgrimage are different.

The view that Sinclair finally lost interest in the method can of course, be justified by the conversation in Far End referred to in my introduction. Kit's declaration that 'he appears to my imagination as he is. He's real' is an unconvincing reply to the

accusation of subjectivity. Sinclair's own view that the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity should be collapsed is in fact an acknowledgement of the inevitability of subjectivity.<sup>36</sup> What she achieves in Mary Olivier: A Life must therefore be circumscribed by such a limitation, but the separateness, although limited, of her central character from the narrative voice, and that character's own internal dialogue with herself and others, serves at least to present a text which is relatively open if only to the subjectivities of others.

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## CHAPTER TWO

In spite of the technical skill of some of Sinclair's representations of consciousness surveyed in the previous chapter, they can only ever be representations. Consciousness itself, in order at least to be experienced and therefore the subject of consciousness, is always constructed by language. Its immediacy is consequently irrecoverable.

The previous chapter was concerned among other things with the linguistic representation of consciousness. There are of course, as Sinclair was demonstrably aware, levels of consciousness which defy such representation.<sup>1</sup>

As suggested above, by its very nature, the unconscious mind can most easily be portrayed, ironically enough, by the very traditional means of omniscient narration. This approach is allowed fullest reign in The Three Sisters, a novel which marks the point at which the the novelist's interest in the psychology of her characters begins to extend below the level of conscious thought, while the narrative approach, in spite of some stylistic innovations, remains fairly traditional.

In this novel, the narrator offers some indication of the unconscious minds of a whole range of her characters. Almost always the approach to the unconscious is made in some form of negative, which draws attention to lack of awareness on the conscious level. Sometimes the negative is direct and simple. In a chapter devoted to the psychology of Mr Carteret, the following observations are made: 'He was unaware that he was trying to control at one and the same time his temper and his temperament'<sup>2</sup> and, even more directly: 'But there Mr Carteret was wrong' (TS. p.20). The latter observation refers to his conviction that he would be able, if necessary, to repeat his sacrifice of his prospects to save his daughter's reputation. Neither of these examples refer to what would normally be called the unconscious, in the Freudian sense of the word, but they certainly refer to levels of motivation which are beneath the surface level of Mr Carteret's mind, although such levels might be accessible to minds more given to introspection. This is suggested by some of the language used in other parts of the chapter. His thoughts on his second marriage, for example, are ~~described in the~~ following way:

And all the time he was aware, without admitting it, that, if the thing came into court, Robina's evidence might be a little damaging to the appearances of

wisdom and patience, of austerity and dignity, which he had preserved so well. He had had an unacknowledged vision of Robina standing in the witness box (TS. pp.20-21).

Here the paradoxical language of 'aware, without admitting it' and 'unacknowledged vision' suggests something akin to the lay person's notion of 'self-deception' as well as the psychoanalytical concept of repression. It is intensified by the suggestion, implicit in the paragraph, that Carteret has in fact subjected his ex-wife to physical cruelty. The narrator, by never directly stating this, enacts the character's repression in her own narrative. The motive for Carteret's repression is clearly guilt, suggested by the word 'admitted'. The vocabulary in which Sinclair's descriptions of unconscious activity are couched is in itself often highly significant.

Self-deception is strongly suggested by the language which describes Mr Carteret's second marriage: '(The Vicar had made himself believe that he had married her solely on their account)' (TS. p.20). This phrasing can be regarded as negative, since it carries the implication of denying the true state of affairs.

There are several similar forms of words in the novel, in most cases applied to Mary, who like the

Vicar, is regarded unfavourably by the narrator, and portrayed as someone not given to introspection. On the occasion when she goes to fetch the doctor for Alice, her mental processes are described in the following terms: 'She had done her shopping in Morfe to such good purpose that she had concealed even from herself the fact that she had gone into Morfe, surreptitiously, to fetch the doctor' (TS. p.68).

Deceit is suggested very strongly here by 'surreptitiously' and 'concealed'. Later Mary protects herself from feeling too much sympathy for the departed Gwenda, who has taken a salaried post in Tunbridge Wells:

It couldn't be all Tunbridge Wells for a girl like Gwenda... And Mary refused to contemplate it either. She persuaded herself that what had happened to her sister was simply a piece of the most amazing luck' (TS. p.212).

This time the stubbornness and wilfulness of Mary's mind are suggested by 'refused' and 'persuaded'. The latter word is used later in a similar context, this time with an overtone of irony: 'For it never could have happened if she had not persuaded the Vicar (and herself as well) that she was asking Rowcliffe on Alice's account' (TS. p.243).

A passage which describes Greatorex waiting for the arrival of Alice Carteret at the concert, 'knowing and not daring to own to himself what it was he waited for' (TS. pp.121-122) is a related form of words reminiscent, with its suggestions of guilt and fear of Carteret's 'without admitting it'.

Direct negatives are sometimes used to describe the mental processes of Gwenda and Rowcliffe, neither of whom are characters particularly given to self-deception. The following comment occurs after Rowcliffe, now married to Mary, has discovered that he can no longer understand the books which Gwenda reads:

Rowcliffe did not know, neither did she,  
how his egoism hung upon her passion,  
how it drew from it food and fire.  
He raised his head and squared his  
shoulders with the unconscious gesture  
of his male pride (TS. p.354).

Here, in a less didactic passage, the unconscious demands of Rowcliffe's mind are merely hinted at, and no attempt is made to elaborate on its processes in any detail.

The gap between surface and unconscious levels of thought is indicated in a passage commenting on Gwenda's intention of leaving Morfe:

Then her heart dragged and tore at her,  
as if it fought against her will to die.  
But it never occurred to her that this  
dying of hers was willed by her. It  
seemed foredoomed, inevitable  
(TS. p.185).

Deception is indicated here, but deception at a deeper level than is suggested by the lay term 'self-deception'. Gwenda's heart is represented as only pretending to fight and her surface mind is taken in by what 'seemed', a word redolent with suggestions of pretence.

Towards the end of the novel, Gwenda's inward mental processes are examined in a detail which merits some attention:

Her woman's passion, forced inward,  
sustained her with an inward peace, an  
inward exaltation. And in this peace,  
this exaltation, it became one with her  
passion for the place.  
She was unaware of what was happening to  
her. She did not know that her soul had  
joined the two beyond its own power to  
put asunder (TS. p.339).

This passage may be compared to the one describing Rowcliffe's association of the red-haired nurse with Mary. The controlled repetitions give the passage a rhetorical character, though more restrained than that of the earlier passage. What is being described will easily be recognised by modern readers as sublimation,

a force which Sinclair regarded as very valuable in the development of the individual, although very few of Sinclair's readers of 1914 would have recognised the phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> It is to some extent disguised by the use of the word soul, which clearly here suggests the unconscious, rather than any spiritual entity, while at the same time making the passage more accessible to the early contemporary reader. It may be remarked here that Gwenda's sublimation of her sexual desire into a passion for nature would have made the novel a far more suitable subject for Annis Pratt's discussion of the relationship of women and nature than Mary Olivier: A Life, which does not really fit Pratt's argument.

Some of the negative language which is used carries interesting suggestions of unfulfilled possibilities. For example, of Alice, waiting for Rowcliffe to return from Upthorne, the narrator comments, 'If she had looked a little deeper she would have found herself hoping that Mr Greatorrex was already dead' (TS. p.11). The word 'deep' is itself drawn from the metaphorical language in which the unconscious mind is most usually described, but there remains the possibility that this particular layer of motivation would not have been beyond the penetration of a more astute and introspective character, such as Gwenda.

A qualified negative describes Essy's reaction to Alice's piano playing. She perceives the effect of Alice's piano playing, but the negative suggests that she cannot understand its cause:

She couldn't have told you what the Polonaise was like or what it did to her; all that she could have said was that it went through and through her... It was in the last three weeks that the Polonaise had found her out and had begun to go through and through her, till it was more than she could bear (TS. pp.15-16).

What is being strongly suggested here is three levels of thought: conscious articulated thought, represented by the conditional, 'could have said'; pre-verbal thought which is not articulated, represented by the fact that Essy does not speak, presumably because she is not asked, and therefore implicitly does not verbalise her thoughts even to herself; and finally the deepest of the three levels, the one which is incapable of articulation because it is below the level of Essy's awareness, presumably associated with Essy's pregnancy, suggesting that the playing of the Polonaise connects with a repressed emotion.

Two further examples of negatives suggesting unfulfilled possibility concern Mr Carteret. The narrator makes the following comment on Carteret's



attitude to his daughter, Gwenda:

And now, if he could have seen things as they really were, Mr Carteret would have perceived that he was afraid of Gwenda. As it was, he thought he was only afraid of what Gwenda might do (TS. p.136).

As with the comment on Alice, quoted above, a certain limitation of vision is being suggested here, since Carteret is not sufficiently introspective to discern his own motives. The phrase, 'as they really were' is problematic, open to the question of whose reality is being asserted. It may be regarded as a slightly careless attempt to translate the idea of unconscious motivation into lay person's language but it serves also as a reminder of the problems associated with the portrayal of the unconscious. If reality is defined as no more than what is perceived, and Sinclair's collapsing of the distinction between the subjective and the objective would suggest this, then the undiscovered unconscious motivation has no reality, except under the specially constituted conventions of fictional reality.

The consequence of Mr Carteret's unrecognised fear is his decision to welcome the possibility of marriage between Gwenda and Rowcliffe, once more expressed in negative terms, 'The outcome of his brooding (it would

have shocked the Vicar if he could have traced its genesis) was an extraordinary revulsion in Rowcliffe's favor.' (TS. p.168).

The word 'genesis' very strongly suggests a close link of cause and effect, which the narrator has just traced between Carteret's fear of Gwenda and the decision he has just come to, ostensibly for other reasons. Furthermore, its physical connotations suggest the realm of the id as opposed to that of the ego. The possibility of shock implies that what lies beneath the surface of the mind is unpleasant, and this is to be associated with the narrator's use of words suggesting deceit and concealment.

This slightly sinister language is often used in relation to Mary's unconscious mind, as in the following description, from the early part of the novel, of Mary's pity for Gwenda on account of the latter's 'inscrutability and unlikeness':

The smile began in pity for her sister and ended in a nameless, secret satisfaction. Not for a moment did Mary suspect its source.

It seemed to her one with her sense of her own goodness (TS. p.71).

Here the language is highly significant. The word 'source' suggests the unconscious and taps a second

vein of imagery, often used of both conscious and unconscious thought. 'Nameless' and 'secret' both belong to the group of semantically connected words, suggesting concealment which Sinclair draws on in several of her novels, and which often carry a sinister overtone. 'Nameless' is particularly rich in its connotations. It suggests that whatever is there cannot be articulated and lies beneath the level of language; it also suggests its power, for it cannot be subjected to Mary's conscious control because she cannot name it; in Lacanian terms, it cannot be subjected to the symbolic order. 'Satisfaction' is often linked with secret (see the discussion of Tree below) and therefore they colour one another and carry overtones of something slightly shameful. This is intensified in the context of Sinclair's use of the word 'satisfaction' which is associated with unedifying characters such as Harriett Freen and Canon Chamberlain in A Cure of Souls

The sinister becomes more explicit in a lengthy account of how Mary rationalises her desire to see Rowcliffe, but not too soon after Gwenda's departure, by telling herself that she is acting 'on Ally's account'. It is worth noting that a variation on the form of words suggesting self-deception, and referred to above, 'she said to herself' occurs three times in

this account. It begins with the following sentence:

She thought and thought it over; and under all her thinking there lurked the desire to know whether Rowcliffe knew and how he was taking it, and under her desire the longing, imperious and irresistible, to see him (TS. p.213).

The metaphor of depth is used here to distinguish different levels of unconscious thought, and the determining influence of the very deepest levels is indicated by the words 'imperious and irresistible'. The sinister quality is conveyed by 'lurked' which together with 'imperious' constitutes a personification of the unconscious mind, which serves to emphasise its threatening power and its independent existence, free of the control of the conscious mind.

This sense of the unconscious mind as a creature apart is given even greater emphasis in an analysis of Ally's reaction to her pregnancy and her father's illness., which is worth quoting at some length:

Her mind, like a thing pursued and in deadly peril, took instantaneously a line. It doubled and dodged; it hid itself; its instinct was expert in disguises, in subterfuges and shifts. In her soul she knew that she was done for if she once admitted and gave in to her fear of Upthorne.. or if she were ever to feel again her fear of Greatorex, which was the most intolerable of all her fears. It was as

if Nature itself were aware that, if Ally were not dispossessed of that terror before Greatorex's child was born her own purpose would be insecure; as if the unborn child, the flesh and blood of the Greatorex that had entered into her, protested against her disastrous cowardice.

So, without Ally being in the least aware of it, Ally's mind, struggling toward sanity, fabricated one enormous fear, the fear of her father's death, a fear that she could own and face, and set it up in place of that secret and dangerous thing which was the fear of life itself.

Ally... was completely taken in by this play of her surreptitiously self-preserving soul (TS. pp.293-294).

Once again the psychoanalytical concept involved, in this case the defence-mechanism of displacement, is familiar to the modern reader, but it is described in non-clinical terms for the benefit of a contemporary reader. For example the unconscious mind is again referred to as 'soul'. The passage carries stylistic echoes of almost every other passage quoted in this section. The rhetorical, parallel phrasing and repetitions indicate a didactic approach, with overtones of self-mockery by phrases such as 'took instantaneously a line', but the most interesting feature of the passage is the personification of Alice's unconscious as a creature of cunning. This recalls the similar personification in the case of Mary and the whole range of defensive language mentioned above, such as, 'persuaded herself', 'made

himself believe'. The suggestion of the hunted creature, which evokes the need for defence, is one of the fundamental images of the novel, To be discussed insee Chapter 4. The language of deception is again very noticeable: 'doubled and dodged', 'hid', 'disguises', 'subterfuges and shifts', 'fabricated', 'surreptitiously'. Combined with the animal imagery, the diction here renders the whole tone of the passage sinister, a tone which predominates in Sinclair's treatment of the unconscious mind. The motivation for such subterfuge is provided by the word 'fear', which occurs no less than five times, as well as by 'terror' and 'cowardice'. Towards the end of the second quoted paragraph, the narrator provides two similes, presumably in order to elucidate the mysterious power to which she refers. To render Nature or the unborn child as consciously motivated participants in the drama, is to use a similar device to the personifying of the unconscious, and to draw on a range of literary devices which scientists are forced to use themselves in describing both psychological and biological processes which the limitations of language prevent them from describing in any other terms. The particular similes reinforce the positive overtones of the passage. For all the negative diction, with which unconscious processes are described, what Alice's mind is engaged in is the ultimately healthy process of

survival, 'self-preserving':

The operation of association in Greatorex's mind is described in similarly positive terms:

He [Rowcliffe] had no conception of what the smell of that lighted and decorated room meant for this man who lived so simply and profoundly by his senses and his soul. It was interfused and tangled with Greatorex's sublimest feelings. It was the draw-net of submerged memories, of secret, unsuspected passions...He would forget... until, in the schoolroom at concert time, at the first caress of the magical smell, those delicate and divine, those secret, submerged, and forgotten things arose, and with the undying poignancy and subtlety of odors they entered into him again. And besides these qualities which were indefinable, the smell was vividly symbolic. It was entwined with and it stood for his experience of art and ambition and the power to move men and women; for song and for the sensuous thrill and spiritual ecstasy of singing and for the subsequent applause (TS. p.121).

Once more there is the familiar imagery of depth, and the recurring word 'secret', but this time the context, provided by words such as 'unsuspected' and 'forgotten' is much less sinister, while words such as 'delicate' and 'divine' have entirely positive connotations. The reason is not hard to find. Although the psychoanalytical concepts of association and symbolisation are being described, they are operating at a largely conscious level. Greatorex is

sometimes, but not always unconscious of a particular range of thoughts and feelings, some of which are 'indefinable,' and therefore beyond the range of language, and some of which enter his consciousness at certain times, and come finally to be symbolised by the smell of the concert-room.

One final example of the treatment of the unconscious in The Three Sisters suggests the only conceivable alternative to omniscient narration. It is the description of Alice's piano playing which succeeds in suggesting a powerful sexual frustration as the unconscious motive force behind her action:

Her excitement had missed by a hairsbreadth the spiritual climax. It had held itself in for one unspeakable moment, then surged, crowding the courses of her nerves. Beaten back by the frenzy of the Polonaise, it made a violent return; it rose, quivering, at her eyelids and her mouth; it broke, and, with a shudder of all her body, split itself and fell (TS. p.22).

The imagery of Alice's piano playing so obviously suggests sexual orgasm, that Alice's unconscious motivation is revealed to the point of overstatement. Such a device has the advantage that it comes close to dramatising unconscious motivation, which is in itself impossible - a fact which must have been frustrating to a novelist so concerned with portraying the reality



of consciousness. However it is possible to represent the intrusions of the unconscious into consciousness, which happens occasionally in The Three Sisters, for example when Gwenda's conscious mind finally admits that she is in love with Rowcliffe:

For she knew now what it was that had happened to her. She could no longer humbug herself into insisting that it hadn't happened. The thing had been secret and treacherous with her, and she had been secret and treacherous with it. She had refused to acknowledge it... Where it should have held its head up defiantly and beautifully, it had been beaten back; it cowered and skulked in the dark places and waited it for its hour. And now that it showed itself naked, unveiled, unarmed, superbly defenseless, her terror of it ceased (TS. p.146).

The imagery of the hunted animal and the language of secrecy that have been observed above, are present once more, as is the suggestion of self-deception, for Gwenda 'could no longer humbug herself', and 'had refused to acknowledge'. What is new here is the language of openness. Gwenda's previously hidden motive is described as, 'naked, unveiled, unarmed, superbly defenseless'. The overall effect of the cluster of adjectives is not to suggest vulnerability, which might be suggested by the first term, considered in isolation, but something admirable, open and serene, a double negative constituted by the denial of

the negative of hiding and concealment. Thus Gwenda's recognition of her motive is treated as admirable, and desirable. Gwenda is, of course, uniquely strong in the novel and the treatment of her psychological processes contrasts with the treatment of Ally's. Ally survives because of the operation of her defence mechanisms. For Gwenda, a more heroic destiny is reserved. She un.masks some of them, though not all of them, suffers, and survives in a more painful, though more clear-sighted condition.

The author's preference for the heroic Gwenda is consistent with the predominant tone of the descriptions of unconscious processes. With one or two notable exceptions, the language in which the unconscious mind is described is sinister in tone, suggesting deceit and shame, while the recurring animal imagery suggests the existence of something outside conscious control characterised by cunning. The narrative voice of The Three Sisters sees the unconscious mind as limiting and circumscribing the freedom of the conscious self. A variety of psychoanalytical concepts are alluded to in The Three Sisters: repression, sublimation, association, symbolisation, and displacement, without these terms being used directly, and Sinclair faces the problem of the novelist in possession of information, in this case

of a scientific character, not possessed by her readers. The tone of many of the passages discussed above is rhetorical, sometimes excessively so, but succeeds in being comprehensible to a non-specialist reader, who, encountering characters in dramatic situations, whose mental processes are described in terms of words such as 'soul' and metaphors derived from familiar areas of life, such as the spatial metaphor of depth, or the metaphor of streams, is likely to be convinced by the narrator's account. Sinclair is a novelist interested in the dramatic portrayal of characters through their own consciousness, and consequently, in her treatment of the unconscious mind, often focuses on the conscious mind, and the awareness which it lacks, by using a variety of negative phrasing, suggesting total lack of awareness, self-deception, partial awareness or unfulfilled potential. These negatives sometimes draw attention to the disparity between consciousness and the power of language to express it, and to the impossibility of representing the reality of something which remains unexpressed in language.

The Tree of Heaven marks the beginning of Sinclair's experimental writing, merely hinted at earlier.

The narrator is far less intrusive, and there is less suggestion of her awareness being privileged over that

of characters. Explicit references to the unconscious are therefore inevitably much less frequent, although some of the same techniques are still observable, particularly the use of a negative formulation. For example Dorothy's repelling of Frank Drayton's early overture is analysed in the following terms: 'She did not know that that instinctive renunciation was her answer to the question. Her honour would come first'<sup>3</sup>. The most striking feature of this representation of the limitations of Dorothy's conscious thought is its restraint. The narrator has intervened to point out that Dorothy is not fully aware of all her motives, but the intervention is not signalled by the sort of rhetorical language which frequently marks such interventions in The Three Sisters, nor is Dorothy's less than fully conscious thought marked by the use of figurative language. Earlier in the novel a more emphatic reference is made to Frances's unconscious mind:

At the bottom of her mind were the conviction (profound because unconscious) that the affairs of the nation were not to be compared for interest with her own affairs, and an attitude of condescension, as if she honoured the Times by reading it...also the very distinct impression that evening papers were more attractive than morning papers. She would have admitted that they owed their attraction to the circumstance that Anthony brought them home with him in his pocket, and that in the evening she was not obliged to

inform herself of what might be happening. Anthony was certain to inform her (TH. pp 11-12).

Here, in contrast to the previously quoted passage, the very length of the analysis foregrounds the importance of the unconscious. Two levels of unconscious thought are implied. The narrative implies that the motive for her preference for the evening papers is fairly near the surface. Like Essy's feelings about the Polonaise, it is thought so far unformulated, but capable of articulation, all of which is indicated by the use of the conditional. The narrator's intervention, at the beginning of the quoted passage, emphatically asserts, by the use of the metaphor of depth, that Frances is unaware of, and cannot articulate her preoccupation with, her own private affairs. Here, however lack of awareness is not expressed by the lay person's language of negative forms of verbs of perception, but by the shorter semi-technical term 'unconscious'. The use of 'bottom' with its suggestion of limits seems a careless term for a reader of Freud to use, especially placed alongside the parenthesis which succeeds in causally relating the two metaphorical uses of 'profound', its Freudian use and its common use to express notions of each. Its use highlights the limitations of language in conveying such concepts

at all, restricting them for the most part to metaphorical interpretation.

Frances, the most psychologically suspect character in this novel, is together with Anthony, the subject of another negative formulation, in the second volume of the novel, 'for still in secret they refused to think of their children as grown up' (TH. p.155). 'Refusal' recalls the obstinacy ascribed to the mental processes of Mary and the Vicar. As I have pointed out above, 'secret' and 'secrecy' always carry derogatory and often sinister overtones in Sinclair's novels, and frequently refer to the activities of the unconscious mind. The extent to which Anthony and Frances are aware of their 'secret', and, it has to be added, not uncommon perversity, is open to interpretation. The term 'secret' is essentially ambiguous in the writings of a novelist concerned with unconscious processes. Thus in the context of a different novel, the following comment, from the first volume, might pass without comment, '"He's top dog again, you see," said Frances, not without a secret satisfaction.' The possibility remains, in this novel, that the satisfaction is secret from herself, and consequently repressed.

Another formulation used in The Three Sisters to

suggest unconscious thought is that of unfulfilled possibility. I have already shown its use in The Tree of Heaven, in the extended passage analysing Frances. Another example occurs late in the novel after Michael has made his decision to enlist:

As he signed himself, "Your loving Michael," he thought: "That settles it." Yet, if he had considered what he meant by settling it he would have told himself that he meant nothing; that last night had settled it... (TH. pp 334-335).

The difference between the treatment of unconscious thought in the two novels under consideration is made clear by this example. It does not concern a crucial piece of self-deception on Michael's part, and it is insignificant, both as a function of plot and an index of character. Nevertheless it shows a continuing narrative sensibility to characters' psychological processes.

As Sinclair moves from The Three Sisters, through The Tree of Heaven towards Mary Olivier: A Life she increasingly turns towards the dramatic representation of consciousness. One way in which dramatic representation can be combined with an emphasis on unconscious motivation is by the portrayal of contradictory action, which indicates repressed

motivation. Early in the novel, the reader is introduced to Frances's mother, Mrs Fleming in the following words: 'though she said, and thought, that she was wrapped up in Frances and her children, she was still absorbed, fascinated by her sacred sense of bereavement' (TH. p.21). In this example the portrayal of contradiction still requires narrative intervention, but the neatness of the contradiction tends to underplay the intervention and focus attention on the character rather than the narrator. It also, of course requires a reader with at least sufficient understanding of unconscious motivation to enable her/him to resolve the contradiction. The increasing implication of this kind of reader is one reason why this novel is less didactic than its predecessor.

A similar assumption of unconscious motivation occurs a little later in relation to the same character: 'And because she knew that the burden of Morrie would fall again on Frances's husband she was disagreeable with Frances' (TH. p.52). This comment also highlights contradiction, in a less rhetorical, and therefore less-obvious manner. The implication, which is again left for the reader to work out, is that the connection between Mrs Fleming's feelings and behaviour is an unconscious one.



Later, the narrator describes the contradictory behaviour of Vera:

She told herself that she would rather he were killed soon than that she should be tortured any longer with suspense. "If I saw his name in the lists this morning I shouldn't mind. That would end it."  
And she sent her servant to the stationer's to stop the papers for fear lest she should see his name in the lists (TH. p.303).

This extract well illustrates the transitional nature of the novel. The language of the opening sentence is strongly reminiscent of the narrative tone of The Three Sisters, and is in fact unnecessary as the remainder of the quotation might stand as an entirely dramatic portrayal of contradiction, through the medium of a third person narrator, leaving the reader to assign self-deception as its cause.

Figurative language, such as spatial metaphor, is rarely used in this novel to denote the unconscious mind. One example is the detailed analysis of Frances's behaviour referred to above, another occurs in relation to Dorothy:

She was not feeling anything now except the shame of her immunity.  
She thought: "I can't look at a Belgian woman without wishing I were dead. I shall have no peace till I've gone."  
'Her surface self was purely practical.

· She thought: "If I were in Belgium I could get them out of it quicker than they could walk" (TH. p.263).

This portrayal of Dorothy's mind contains little in the way of narrative intervention, other than the judgement, 'her surface self was purely practical'. The other significant point is that Dorothy is portrayed as being aware of what one might otherwise call her unconscious thoughts. However the metaphorical use of 'surface' implies the ability to move her thoughts in and out of consciousness.

As might be expected in this novel with its tendency towards dramatic representation of character, the examples of characters becoming aware of unconscious motivation are more numerous than in The Three Sisters. Several examples concern Michael, portrayed as a highly intelligent case of self-deception who sublimates his true motives for refusing to enlist. Michael's reaction, on hearing from Lawrence Stephen of the death of the French poet, Reveillaud, is described in these terms:

Michael stared at the first three lines; something in his mind prevented him from going on to the rest, as if he did not care to read about Reveillaud and know how he died (TH. p.295).

The imprecise phrase, 'something' suggests that the narrative consciousness is Michael's. He is aware that his mind is not altogether within his conscious control, and yet the second half of the sentence, with its use of the word, 'care', suggesting choice, suggests that his unconscious motivation is being consciously suppressed, and that very little effort on Michael's part would bring it into his conscious awareness.

Later, when he makes the crucial decision to enlist, Michael is shocked by the revelation of more deeply buried sources of motivation. The first moment of revelation alerts him to the possible explanations that lie beneath his conduct:

It was the sliding of this light thing and its fall into the letter-box that shook him into realisation of what he had done and of what was before him. He knew now why he was in such a hurry to write that letter and to post it. By those two slight acts, not dreadful nor difficult in themselves, he had put it out of his power to withdraw from the one supremely difficult and dreadful act (TH. p.335).

'Realisation' and 'knew' suggest an emphasis on Michael's awareness, but, in this example, in contrast to the previous one, the suggestion is that his motives had previously been completely hidden from

him, indicated by the word, 'shook'. There is also an interesting emphasis on sensory rather than intellectual perception, conveyed by the 'sliding' and 'fall' of 'this slight thing'. The activity of the mind, Sinclair seems to suggest, goes far beyond language.

The second moment of revelation is even more striking:

What shocked Michael was his discovering, not that he funk'd it now, which was natural, almost permissible, but that he had funk'd it all the time. He could see now that, since the War began, he had been struggling to keep out of it. His mind had fought every suggestion that he should go in. It had run to cover, like a mad, frightened animal, before the thoughts that hunted it down. Funk, pure funk, had been at the bottom of all he had said and thought and done since August, nineteen-fourteen; (TH. pp.336-7).

There is the familiar imagery of depth, but beyond this, the reader is immediately struck by the similarity of this language to that which describes Alice's unconscious mind when she displaces one fear by another. However, unlike Alice, but like Gwenda, when she becomes aware of her love for Rowcliffe, Michael recognises, and is shocked by what has happened to him. Like Gwenda he finds the activities of his unconscious, which they both represent by the simile of the hunted animal, sinister and threatening,

and like Gwenda; he becomes the narrator of his own unconscious processes, reducing the novelist's dependence on narrative intrusion. There is of course another possible view of Michael's motivation open to the reader, which will be explored in Chapter 3.

One of the most significant of Sinclair's accounts of the unconscious occurs in relation to Dorothy, the most self-aware character in the novel, on the occasion of a crucial meeting with Frank Drayton:

With her knowledge of his nervousness her exaltation ceased as if it had not been. At the sight of him it was as if the sentence hidden somewhere in her mind - "You'll have to choose. You know you'll have to"- escaping thought and language, had expressed itself in one suffocating pang (TH. p.126).

Here Sinclair directly expresses the problematic relationship of consciousness and language, implying by the use of 'sentence' that at some level even Dorothy's unconscious is structured by language, and yet the sentence, at one level of meaning suggestive of a linguistic system, is paradoxically described as escaping thought and language, implying that while it might be structured by language, it is not directly translatable into the language of consciousness. Nevertheless Sinclair, trapped like all novelists in the symbolic order, attempts to articulate it,

although she qualifies her translation into language by the phrase, 'it was as if'. The 'sentence' might of course also be read as meaning 'punishment' and, interestingly, it manifests itself to Dorothy as a 'pang'.

This use of physical sensation to portray a character becoming aware of previously unconscious thought occurs also in relation to Frances, in the opening scene of the novel, when she thinks about her mother and sisters: 'Frances was afraid of her thoughts. They came to her, not like thoughts, but like quick rushes of her blood, partly confusing her. She did not like that' (TH. p.25).

There are significant differences between this example and the preceding one. This is clearly the narrator's summary of Frances's thoughts, and is accompanied by narrative judgements, 'Frances was afraid' and 'she did not like that'. Moreover Frances is portrayed as resisting the insight she has been given, whereas although Dorothy suffers from her awareness, she is not portrayed as resisting it. It might be argued that Frances's insight into her mother's behaviour is not properly an unconscious thought, previously suppressed. However the passage does suggest, by its emphasis on Frances's resistance, thoughts outside her conscious

control. Thought is described as physical sensation, and it is important to note that 'like quick rushes of her blood' is not a simile but an approach to describing what lies beyond language.

The unconscious mind, while remaining important, is much less crucial in The Tree of Heaven than it is in The Three Sisters. In the earlier novel the plot depends on the central characters' lack of awareness of their true motivation. In The Tree of Heaven, with the exception of Dorothy's relationship with Drayton, and Michael's refusal to enlist, the plot remains unaffected by characters' lack of awareness of their unconscious processes, although it gains a resonance and poignancy from the fact that such lack of awareness is foregrounded. Nor does the novel deal with the wide range of psychoanalytical concepts which form part of the action of The Three Sisters. Apart from the possible sublimation of cowardice into conscientious objection on Michael's part, most of the unconscious thought referred to in The Tree of Heaven is simply repressed. Although negative formulations, expressions suggesting potential for self-revelation, and self-deception are still fairly common, the novel does not include the wide range of figurative language which is used to describe the presence of the unconscious in The Three Sisters. There is a single reference to the

unconscious mind as a hunted animal, and the commonplace metaphor of depth is used fairly frequently, but on the whole the absence of figurative language means that the sense of the unconscious as a powerful and sinister force is absent from the novel. What the novel does begin to explore is the relationship between thought and language, and by its use of physical sensation as a vehicle for thought, suggests the possibility of thought which, although at some level structured by language, cannot be expressed in conventional language forms. It is perhaps partly because of a dissatisfaction with language as a vehicle for the unconscious mind that the novel, by such devices as the emphasis on contradictory behaviour, moves away from a central emphasis on the unconscious and towards the dramatic portrayal of consciousness.

Such a portrayal of active consciousness is, as I have shown, the direction in which Sinclair's interests take her in Mary Olivier: A Life. In Life and Death of Harriett Freen, because of the nature of her heroine, characterised by lack of awareness, she must try a different approach. Many of Sinclair's novels, particularly in her central period, show an awareness of symbolic manifestations of unconscious motivation, but only in Life and Death of Harriett Freen is



this fully developed.

The novel portrays Harriett's sexuality as repressed. Zegger discusses briefly the sexual symbolism of the red campion flowers and relates them to the symbols of the blue egg and the dead baby.<sup>4</sup> The symbolism of the novel is quite complex. Its most powerful symbol is Harriett's childhood excursion into Black's Lane which becomes one of the central motifs of the novel:

It had come all of a sudden, the thought that she must do it, that she must go out into the lane; and when she found the door unlatched, something seemed to take hold of her and push her out.<sup>5</sup>

At this stage she is presumably driven by an urge to rebel against her parents and establish a separate identity. The focus is on Harriett's consciousness which is portrayed as becoming aware of some inexplicable compulsion and is described in terms reminiscent of some of the language which describes Mary's consciousness in The Three Sisters. The scene is, however, given clear sexual implication in two ways. It is linked in Harriett's memory, with the red campion and the cow-parsley which are presented as sexual symbols: 'At the turn the cow-parsley and rose campion began: on each side a long trail of white

froth with the red tops of the campion pricking through' (HF. p.18).

It is also linked with something darker and more mysterious which haunts Harriett throughout her life:

The little dirty brown house stood there behind the rickety blue palings;... there was something queer, some secret frightening thing about it. The man came out and went to the gate and stood there. He was the frightening thing (HF. p.18).

The word 'secret' recalls some of Sinclair's earlier, more explicit treatment of the unconscious. The implication is that what Harriett struggles with, is not just her child's desire to rebel, but her own latent sexuality, 'something queer, some frightening secret thing.' The obvious similarity between Harriett's adventure and the dream sequence at the beginning of Mary Olivier: A Life may suggest some autobiographical source for the story, which is not however relevant to the present discussion. Harriett's consciousness is represented as experiencing something which disturbs her and which she cannot understand, being totally unaware of her own unconscious feelings, which become clearer to her three years later when her friend Connie Hancock tells her the cause of the notoriety of Black's Lane.

Connie is described in the novel as 'coarse' and frequently linked with her father. Immediately after Connie tells Harriett of 'A secret behind the dirty blue palings', there is an account of Harriett's friendship with Connie. Her father is linked closely with her:

Mr Hancock had red whiskers, and his face squatted down in his collar, instead of rising nobly up out of it like Papa's... When you talked about Mr Hancock, Papa gave a funny laugh, as if he was something improper (HF. Pp.27-8).

Later, it is in connection with one of Connie's 'coarse' stories, that an indignant Harriett learns the truth about her father's responsibility for the losses of Mr Hancock, 'the little man he used to laugh at' (HF. p.156). The Hancocks give dances, and they have a daughter who marries. They represent a sensuality and an enjoyment of life which Harriett and her family lack, and which Harriett, at least on her conscious level despises, but which Harriett's unconscious apparently registers. Thus a pattern is established in the text, linking Harriett's repressed sexuality with the dirty house behind the blue palings and with Connie and her 'dirty stories' and her father Mr Hancock, rather in the way that links are formed in the unconscious, according to Freudian theory. However while it is a link which the alert reader can

readily make it does not form part of Harriett's surface consciousness.

The full meaning of the connection that has formed in Harriett's unconscious mind between the Black's Lane episode and Connie and Mr Hancock becomes clear only in the final scene. Harriett has gone to the operating theatre with her lips firmly closed lest, under the anaesthetic, she should reveal 'Connie's stories. And Black's Lane.' In her post-operative confusion she knew 'the little man they called the doctor was really Mr Hancock...He oughtn't to do it to any woman. If it was known he would be punished' (HF. p.182). It is the final piece of a complex pattern established through the novel, indicative of the complexity of an apparently simple story and makes clear Harriett's lifelong repression of her sexuality. However it makes it clear only to the reader for, while Harriett's unconscious drives have at last surfaced, it is at the expense of her conscious mind which has now effectively disappeared.

Repression of sexuality is also observable in Harriett's mother who enacts a cultural repression. Her reaction to Harriett's offering of the forbidden flowers, which growing amongst the cow-parsley in Black's Lane, suggesting sexual passion, is to say,

'Look, Hatty, how beautiful they are. Run away and put the poor things in water'(HF. p.20). Their power has been taken away and substituted with mere praise of their decorative beauty. Her words enact in microcosm, the Victorian woman's unconscious repression of sexuality and acceptance of her own idealisation. A few paragraphs earlier this repressive and repressed woman is described thus:

Her mother was coming down the garden walk, tall and beautiful in her silver-gray gown with the bands of black velvet on the flounces and the sleeves; her wide, hooped skirts swung, brushing the flower borders (HF. p.19).

There is a curious echo in this image of repression, of Amy Lowell's 'Patterns', a poem which sees patterns as restrictive and sexuality as a means of escape and which begins:

I walk down the garden paths,  
And all the daffodils  
Are blowing, and the bright blue squills.  
I walk down the patterned garden-paths  
In my stiff, brocaded gown.<sup>6</sup>

The novelist does not seek to portray the consciousness of Harriett's mother and the reader may only surmise that her repression is unconscious and culturally learnt. Significantly it is these two elements in the event which recur to Harriett as an

antidote to Connie's story, 'Her mother stood on the garden walk in her wide, swinging gown; she was holding the red and white flowers up to her face and saying, "Look, how beautiful they are' (HF. p25).

Thus the reader observes, in Harriett's mind, the repressing of the sexual element in the incident, and the substitution of a sentimental preoccupation with the outwardly 'beautiful' but not any conscious awareness on Harriett's part of such repression.

Harriett's repression of her sexuality is symptomatic of the fact that she never grows out of dependence on her mother. Her behaviour thus expresses a desire to return to the condition of a dependent infant, which manifests itself initially as a desire for comfort. This provides a variation on Sinclair's use of the desire for external comfort as a symptom of inadequacy, in characters such as Steven Rowcliffe and Mary Carteret. The condition of the infant and the character who has allowed his or her mind to atrophy is not dissimilar, both being dependent on mere sensual satisfaction and protection against the outside. One of Harriett's earliest memories is of how 'Papa said "No more!" and tucked the blankets tight in' (HF. p.3). The small action is a paradigm for Harriett's entire life. Another childhood memory

forms the sequel to the fiasco of the school-treat, where Harriett foregoes any food in order to avoid appearing greedy:

Being good was being beautiful like  
Mamma.  
She wanted to be like her mother.  
Sitting up there and being good felt  
delicious. And the smooth cream with  
the milk running under it, thin and  
cold, was delicious too (HF. p.15).

The unconscious association links the internal satisfaction of doing good with the external satisfaction provided by the milk which clearly suggests babyhood. Although the link is made at the level of the unconscious, Harriett's conscious mind is represented as being aware of the connection. The most suggestive of the series of descriptions occurs when the even tenor of Harriett's life with her parents before the sacrifice of Robin, is described. It is introduced by the comment:

Sometimes they would sit like that, not exchanging ideas, exchanging only the sense of each other's presence, a secure profound satisfaction that belonged as much to their bodies as their minds.  
(HF. p.39).

This time the reader is offered only the narrator's analysis, rather than a conscious experience of Harriett. However, later, her conscious mind reviews

her relationship with her mother in the following suggestive terms: 'Her mother had some secret: some happy sense of God that she gave to you and you took from her as you took food and clothing' (HF. pp.40-41).

This passage draws together the images of comfort and of babyhood which are scattered throughout the novel. It suggests the intimate relationship of a mother suckling her baby, and in turn suggests the Freudian analysis of Harriett as a character trapped in the mother-baby relationship. It links sensual and emotional satisfaction and indicates an entirely passive role for Harriett in both. While Harriett is aware of how she feels, any analysis of her feelings is beyond her, and is left to the author.

After her mother's death, the adult Harriett's progress is a slow regression to babyhood. At sixty, she suffers an attack of influenza:

When the pain was over she enjoyed her illness, the peace and rest of lying there, supported by the bed, holding out her lean arms to be washed by Maggie; closing her eyes in bliss while Maggie combed and brushed and plaited her fine gray hair (HF. p.162)

Once again Harriett is represented as a mind experiencing without understanding. During this



period, the servant Maggie emerges as a mother figure for Harriett, which carries its own irony, because Harriett, by forcing Maggie to have her illegitimate baby nursed by someone else, may be judged to have robbed Maggie of her function as a mother. Harriett's dependence on Maggie is described thus:

Above all, she loved the comfort and protection of Maggie, the sight of Maggie's broad, tender face as it bent over her...she found shelter in Maggie as she had found it in her mother.'  
(HF. p.163).

Harriett's predilection for invalid's food reminds the reader of her childhood enjoyment of milk, and reinforces the idea of Harriett's regression to babyhood: 'She wanted it to be always Bengers food at bed-time' (HF. p.162).

Harriett's regression to babyhood reaches its climax in the final scene of the novel: 'The white curtain walls of the cubicle contracted, closed in on her. She was lying at the bottom of her white-curtained nursery cot. She felt weak and diminished, small like a very little child' (HF. p.184).

This completes a progressive decline, during which Harriett is aware of her feelings, but totally lacking in the ability to analyse them. Such analysis is left

to the reader.

The foregoing account does not entirely do justice to the subtlety of the way in which symbolism is used to suggest Harriett's unconscious mind, since once such symbolism is divorced from its narrative context it inevitably appears obvious. The treatment of Harriett Fream's unconscious mind depends on a mixture of the portrayal of her consciousness, the use of recognisable symbols, and occasional narrative intervention. Harriett's conscious mind is aware of the strange feelings aroused in her by Black's Lane, and of its disgust at Mr Hancock, as it is aware of the satisfaction she feels at drinking milk and being in the presence of her mother; and, later in life, of being ill, and being looked after by Maggie, as well as her final sensation of littleness. Harriett, however can never narrate her own consciousness as Mary Olivier does. Occasionally a narrative intervention points out, for example, the physical nature of the Fream family's comfort in one another, but more crucially an understanding of Harriett's unconscious mind depends on a shared understanding between narrator and reader, of the significance of symbols such as the red campion or the milk.

Considered in the light of Sinclair's prescription for novel writing, discussed in the Introduction, the novel would not be termed a success. The use of symbolism, particularly, means that the reader is not restricted to knowing only what Harriett knows. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the novel accords with Sinclair's aim of portraying a reality that is 'thick and deep', since it is concerned with portraying Harriett's mind in its entirety, not just that part of it which exists in her consciousness. This of course presents a problem which occurs in relation to the portrayal of the unconscious in The Tree of Heaven and The Three Sisters, exemplified by the narrator's comment on Mr Carteret: 'if he could have seen things as they really were'. If the novelist's approach to the portrayal of reality is a kind of immersion in the mind of the central character, which seemed to be Sinclair's preference at the time of the Richardson article, then she must forego knowledge of the unconscious along with other kinds of knowledge. However, my argument is that, despite Sinclair's declared interest in such a method, she never exclusively uses it; that the merits of most of her best novels lie in a portrayal of her characters' consciousnesses that sees them reacting actively with themselves and those around them; and that the portrayal of reality is ultimately an impossible goal which can be approached, but never

achieved, in a variety of ways. There is a sense in which the unconscious mind is not real because it does not, except under analysis appear, and any phenomenological approach to the portrayal of reality that depends on perception must exclude it. However such an approach is only partial; and is only partially adopted in the three novels under discussion here, particularly Life and Death of Harriett Freat.

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2. May Sinclair, The Three Sisters: Virago edn (London, 1982; first published London, 1914) p.17.  
Further references to this book are to the Virago edition, and are given after quotations in the text, using the abbreviation, TS
3. May Sinclair The Tree of Heaven (London, 1917), p.129. Further references to this book are to this edition, and are given after quotations in the text, using the abbreviation, TH.
4. Hrisey Zegger, May Sinclair, Twayne's English authors series 192 (Boston, 1976), pp123-124.
5. May Sinclair, Life and Death of Harriett Freat Virago edn (London, 1980; first published London, 1922) p.16. Further references to this book are to the Virago edition, and are given after quotations in the text, using the abbreviation, HF.
6. Amy Lowell, 'Patterns', The Oxford Book of American Verse, Edited by F. O. Matthiessen (Oxford, 1950), p.254.

## CHAPTER THREE

### I

One criterion by which it is reasonable to judge a novel's claim to represent reality, is its resistance to closure, which enables the reader to enter the text, although the reader's voice will of course be circumscribed by his/her own view of reality. The presence of readily discernible ironic signals within texts provides a means by which the reader's voice may be added to the voices of the text. The concept of irony has received much recent critical attention. The problems associated with the recognition of, and interpretation of irony are bound up with the problem of meaning. Thus Wayne Booth's famous example of a student's lack of awareness of Austen's irony, illustrates not the obtuseness of the student but the problem of meaning.<sup>1</sup> In spite of Booth's assertion: 'I know that Jane Austen intended Mr Bennet's statement as meaning something radically different from what he seems to say', this is precisely what he does not know. Such uncertainty is recognised by writers on irony such as Graham Dunstan Martin who quotes Valery: 'What has been thought by everyone, everywhere, and on every occasion has every chance of being mistaken' The confident assertion of ironic intention on the

author's part, as Martin points out, is to assume knowledge of her/his meaning, an untenable assumption since, 'If A does not realise that B does not mean what A takes him to mean, then he does not understand what he means'<sup>2</sup>

In my consideration of the function of irony in certain of Sinclair's novels, I accept that both my recognition of signals of the presence of irony within a given passage, and my ironic reading of that passage are subjective, since I can have no certainty about intended meaning. It can be argued that, since irony has traditionally been regarded as centering on the gap between apparent and intended meaning, the acceptance that intended meaning cannot be verified, precludes a discussion of irony. I propose, however, to discuss areas of text which I judge to be ironic because they show a divergence, not between apparent and intended meaning, but between apparent meaning and alternative meaning or meanings, available to readers who choose to read ironically. Stanley Fish provides a useful justification for such an approach based on the concept of the interpretive community:

When a community of readers agrees that a work or part of a work, is ironic, that agreement will have come about because the community has been persuaded to a set of assumptions, to a way of

reading, that produces the ironic meanings that all of its members "see"; and when and if that community is persuaded to another way, those meanings will disappear and be replaced by others that will seem equally obvious and inescapable.<sup>3</sup>

I do not speak for other possible readers of Sinclair with whom I might share membership of an interpretive community, but my own membership is constituted by the fact that I recognise particular signals of irony within the text and I read as a feminist reader, who seeks to challenge the cultural assumptions about women and the family which prevailed among many of Sinclair's contemporary readers. Nevertheless my own readings are capable of being subverted in turn by other readers, since if intended meaning is unknowable, then irony is not stable. Booth asserts that irony is stable and precludes any attempt by the reader to undermine its reconstructed meaning. Fish, however, points out that the marks of stable irony are in turn the products of interpretation.<sup>4</sup>

According to this analysis, irony is a method of reading which allows the reader to speak, and therefore provides another voice in the text to challenge that of the authorial narrator. A more traditional view of irony might regard it as a device by which an author guides and directs a reader's

interpretation, thereby suppressing the reader's voice in the text. The first view raises the problem that all texts may be read ironically, a conclusion which renders critical debate impossible. It therefore seems more productive to suggest as a *modus vivendi* that one can identify signals within a text which a number of readers are likely to agree upon as opening up the possibility of more than one reading.

Sometimes ironic signals are very marked, as in the case, for example, of a foregrounded antithesis, for example in the following quotation from The Helpmate: 'He had occasionally been known to provide for the tables of the poor, but he dearly loved to sit at the tables of the rich.'<sup>5</sup> In such cases the reader would appear to have less freedom in choosing whether to recognise irony and how to read it, assuming of course, as Fish points out elsewhere, that the reader recognises the device of antithesis.<sup>6</sup> The functioning of irony in this instance approximates more obviously to the traditional idea of irony. A limitation on the ironic reading which takes place once ironic signals are recognised, is the presence of an intrusive narrator who makes explicit judgements, since the reader is likely to choose a reading which is consistent with the narrator's expressed viewpoint, although of course the possibility of reading even the most intrusive and didactic of narrative voices



ironically remains. However, certain novels accommodate themselves more easily than others to the voice of the reader, novels where the ironic signals do not circumscribe the voice of the reader, and the narrative voice itself is not overtly didactic, and I would include Sinclair's novels in this category.

If, as I have argued, the closeness of a text to reality is assisted by the multiplicity of voices within the text, and their dialogic relationship with one another, and/or with the narrator, then the openness of Sinclair's texts to the voice of the reader is an important consideration in evaluating her search to apprehend reality. I wish to consider four novels of Sinclair's central period and one earlier text The Helpmate, all of which deal with important social and, or public issues, and explore the way in which, through ironic signals, these texts are opened up to the reader.

## II

I have chosen to include The Helpmate, because it anticipates the issues of family relationships dealt with in three of the other novels under discussion. Theophilus Boll states unequivocally that 'The Helpmate represents the marital relationship of May Sinclair's parents' but offers no supporting evidence.<sup>7</sup> I hope that what follows will be sufficient to counter Zegger's remark that 'the novel can only be considered a historical curiosity today'.<sup>8</sup> The plot centres on the marriage of Walter and Anne Majendie, which is blighted by Anne's early discovery of an affair in her husband's previous life. Anne's spirituality, which sets far greater store by chastity than charity, all but wrecks the marriage, although she is finally brought to forgive her husband after his near-fatal illness. The issues which the reader is invited to debate centre on Christianity and sexuality.

Irony within the novel is mainly, but not only, created by the clash of two perspectives, or two languages. The first, accepting the novelistic convention of character, is that of Anne whose version of Christianity is outraged by Majendie, the second that of the narrator.

The narrator of The Helpmate is not intrusive and is defined primarily by the convention of omniscience, the effect of which is that the narrative voice is open to more than one discourse within the novel, with the result that the narrator, although often reflecting the limited viewpoint and language of various characters, is likely to be experienced as rational, sympathetic and tolerant. Anne's perspective is constructed by a nexus of highly emotive discourses, primarily literary and religious, to which her character gives explicit expression in the novel. This disparity of voice between narrator and Anne, ultimately a disparity of language, creates opportunities for ironic reading.

In The Helpmate, Sinclair uses comparatively conventional narrative strategies, signalling in the text, that the narrator is about to summarise a character's thoughts. Such summaries are often couched in the language the character might have used, had she verbalised her state of mind, thus sharpening possibilities of ironic reading, creating a distance between the narrative voice, rational and measured in its judgements, and the thoughts of Anne. In the scene in which Anne prays on the morning after her discovery about her husband's past life, her perception of her situation is described in the

following terms: 'Her eyes wandered round the room. Its alien aspect was becoming transformed for her, like a scene on a tragic stage' (H. p.5). The simile focuses the reader's attention on Anne's unconscious dramatising of the situation, which by implication, the narrator does not share, although paradoxically the simile is the narrator's own. Anne's judgement of her situation as tragic is the overt meaning of the sentence. The narrator's dissent from such a judgement signalled by the use of a simile represents a further recuperable meaning.

The same self-dramatisation is evident when the couple return from their ill-fated honeymoon. Anne sees her homecoming as a funeral, and the narrator describes her feelings on experiencing fine weather for her return:

Like some mourner for whom superb weather had been provided on the funeral day of his beloved, she felt in this young, wantoning, unsympathetic Spring the immortal cruelty of and irony of Nature (H. p.15).

Here the voice of the narrator reflects, if not Anne's language, a narrative approximation to that language. Its literary quality is indicated by words such as 'wantoning' and 'beloved', as well as by the elegiac commonplace about Spring and nature. The use of the

male figure in the mourning simile serves to emphasise that, while the sentence may be taken to echo Anne's thoughts, those thoughts are themselves constructed by her reading. The very literariness of the passage suggests the possibility of an alternative reading in which Anne's situation might be reconstructed in terms of the rational and objective discourse of the narrator, as that of a young woman needing to adjust to the discovery of her husband's fallibility.

Anne's progressive alienation from her husband continues to be marked by a similar inflated use of language and imagery, as on the occasion when she passes Lady Cayley, Majendie's former lover, riding in a four-in-hand:

Mounted high, heralded by the tootling horn, her hair blown, her cheeks bright with speed, her head and throat wrapped in a rosy veil that flung two broad streamers to the wind (as it were the banners of the red dawn flying and fluttering over her) she passed, the supreme figure in the pageant of triumphal vice (H. pp.117-118).

Once more, although the description may be seen as the narrator's, the perception is clearly Anne's, introduced by: 'Not that Anne wasted thought on them...they were mere attendants...in the vision of sin presented by Lady Cayley' (H. p.117). Again the language is clearly literary, as shown by terms such

as 'heralded' and 'banners' and the personification of vice, but on this occasion, the discourse is that of exhortatory religious writing. The description of Lady Cayley recalls, for example, the following description of the whore of Babylon:

and there I saw a woman riding a scarlet beast which had seven head and ten horns and had blasphemous titles written all over it. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and glittered with gold and jewel and pearls.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly she observes her husband's friend, and an associate of Lady Cayley:

The instinct that had wakened in her knew them, the lights and colours, the heralding banners and vivid signs, all the paraphernalia of triumphant sin (H. p.124).

The imagery is again extravagant. What is being referred to, in such exaggerated terms, is elsewhere described as the man's 'charm and the flush and brilliance that were part of it' (H. p.124). Both the description of Lady Cayley, and that of her companion suggest the influence of a militant form of Christianity as a factor in Anne's distorting of the situation. The extravagant language again suggests, by implied contrast, the possibility of a more restrained, tolerant and objective view of the couple in question,

comparatively free of such literary and religious influences.

Opportunities for ironic reading of Anne are provided by the tension between the figural and narrative discourses. The judgement as to how Anne is to be interpreted must be made by the reader, and does to some extent depend on the reader making a choice between the discourses in the novel. To this extent the choice is circumscribed; the reader's voice is likely to be added to one of the voices present in the text. What choice the reader makes will depend on his/her own relationship to the discourses represented. Some readers may themselves be constructed by a similar nexus of literary and religious discourses, and therefore have no difficulty in sympathising with Anne's predicament. An illustration of this is provided by the comments about Majendie made by Frederic Cooper, writing in 1912:

The man is hopeless. That is the book's chief and pervading weakness. The author wants us to espouse her hero's cause and instead, with almost everything he says or does, he alienates our sympathy.

He then goes on to cite as evidence, Majendie's rather amusing response to Anne's solemnity over his gift of a crucifix, 'I didn't think you'd want to wear it in

your hair dear.'10

However, the representation of the character of Anne within the text is opened up to possibilities of ironic reading in other ways, apart from the discourse by which she is represented. Often the nuances of vocabulary are sufficient to offer a subversive reading of the heroine which focuses on her religious attitudes, reading them as repressed and intolerant. For example, her inability to realise what she is doing to her husband's reputation is commented upon by the use of the word 'contrived' in:

Thus poor Anne, whose ideal was an indestructible loyalty, contrived to build up the most undesirable reputation for her husband in Thurston Square (H. p.144).

The word allows the reader to re-interpret the sentence as a condemnation of Anne. There is here, of course, an explicit paradox. Furthermore 'Poor Anne' has the effect of stabilising the irony by closing the possibilities of interpretation.

A subversive reading of Anne's version of Christianity is offered by, 'She sat waiting for him to finish, hardly looking at him, detached, saint-like and still' (H. p.111), and, 'she lifted to him the set face



of a saint surrendered to the torture' (H. p.140). Ironic interpretation of these sentences, taking account of words such as 'detached' and 'set' which imply an unsympathetic attitude, depends on the values ascribed to sanctity. The reader who perceives a saint as an essentially human figure, and Christianity as a religion which privileges charity, will read ironically at these points. It may be supposed that many of Sinclair's readers, inheriting a Victorian view of Christianity as a religion of self-denial and repression, would not do so. Nevertheless, the opportunity for the reader to add his/her voice to the voices of the text remains, in the absence of explicit direction by the narrator.

There are other means, apart from significant vocabulary, by which the narrator exposes the heroine to ironic reading. Parenthesis, which is used by Sinclair in a variety of ways, works ironically in the following description of Anne: 'when it came to choosing, he had chosen a spiritual woman! (Anne had no doubt that she was what she aspired to be)' (H. p.34)

In this case it is not so much Anne's spirituality which is in question, but her attitude of absolute certainty. Here the reading of the irony possesses a

greater degree of stability, partly because of the signalling by the parenthesis, and partly because, at least within modern cultural paradigms certainty is not regarded as a virtue.

The spirituality of which Anne is so certain, with its lack of regard for the purely human, is exposed by the paradox in the description of Anne praying in church:

having annihilated her husband, she was disagreeably astonished to find that he was there, that he had been there for some time, in the seat beside her (H. p.38).

'Disagreeably' provides a possible, though not inevitable, ironic signal which leads the reader to observe the paradox of a spirituality which seeks annihilation of others. Nevertheless there will be readers, including some of Sinclair's contemporaries, whose voice will assent both to Anne's certainty of her own spirituality, and her intolerance of others' lack of spirituality.

One of the most interesting examples of ironic possibilities in reading Anne, concerns Anne's reception of a man of less than perfect reputation at her husband's dinner table: 'But Mrs. Majendie had no

illusions concerning sinners with engaging smiles and beautiful manners' (H. p.124). The irony here is double-edged; 'illusions' suggests that perhaps Anne suffers from a great many other illusions, although she may be free from this particular one. 'Sinners with engaging smiles', with its suggestion of incongruity, suggests criticism of the other character under discussion, although in this instance too, the irony is very much dependent, not only on the reader's moral values, but on the connotations which the particular reader attaches to the signifier 'sinner'. The word may be taken to imply a mischievous but delightful character; a person to be pitied and forgiven; or the ultimate threat to all that is good. Furthermore its connection with 'engaging smiles' may confirm the first alternative suggested or may, for example, be greeted with distrust by the feminist reader, who sees it as a manifestation of male arrogance. The text at this point is thus open to a multiplicity of reader voices.

While Anne's character is particularly open to an ironic reading which might suggest that she is sanctimonious, complacent and unforgiving, it remains possible for the reader to interpret her as a good woman, pious, devout and dutiful. Two views of Christianity are therefore suggested in the text. The

first is directly stated by Anne. The second is nowhere directly stated, although it is represented by a telling Biblical quotation: 'though I speak ...with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or as a tinkling cymbal!' (H. p146).

The quotation can be seen as an ironic comment on Anne's behaviour, ironic because the connection is not stated but left for the reader to work out. A further irony is that the quotation is the subject of a sermon by, of all people Canon Wharton, an acquaintance of Anne's who, along with her socialite friends in Thurston Square, supports her unforgiving attitude. Canon Wharton, by no means deaf to his own eloquence, is deaf to the meaning of his words. The narrator describes his reaction thus: 'The canon was shaken by it [his incomparable pleading] himself, his voice trembled in the benediction that followed' (H. p.147). The subtle exaggeration suggests the superficiality of the man's response.

The episode is completed, when Anne, for the first time questioning her own conduct, asks the Canon for advice. Sinclair's use of parenthesis is versatile, and not always ironic. Here however is a good example of the use of parentheses to signal ironic comment.

The Canon is in the middle of his final words to Anne:

But -" (the Canon stood up, both for the better emphasis of his point, and as a gentle reminder to Mrs. Majendie that his dinner-hour was now approaching) "but let him repent; let him give up his most objectionable companions; let him lead a pure life - and then accept him - welcome him -" (the Canon opened his arms, as if he were that moment receiving a repentant sinner) "rejoice over him -" (the Canon's face became fairly illuminated) "as - as much as you like" (H. p150).

The issue under discussion is the admittance to Anne's house of her husband's friend (the smiling sinner of the earlier quotation) who is also a dear friend of Anne's crippled sister-in-law. Thus, the issue at stake is one of charity. In the first parenthesis the narrator suggests two equivalent motives for the Canon's standing up, offering no comment on either of them, leaving it to the reader either to ignore the gap or to connect them by substituting the neutral conjunction 'and' in a variety of possible ways. However the use of the successive parentheses, which, by pointing to external gesture suggest self-dramatisation on the Canon's part, more clearly signals the possibility of reading ironically, and assuming a lack of sincerity in the Canon. The effect of the parentheses is, in fact, to concretise the 'second voice' of irony, and therefore

to close the possibilities opened by the omission in the opening parenthesis.

The chief function of the opening of both these characters to more than one interpretation is to expose their religious values as repressive, and Anne as the victim of spiritual pride. To read in this way depends on membership of an interpretive community with a particular set of values, particularly religious values, and consequently the text remains open to other interpretations by other readers. Often difference in reading depends on the significance attached by the reader to terms such as 'saint', 'sinner', or 'nature'. Only when the narrator uses direct comments, interpolating words such as 'poor', or devices such as antithesis or parenthesis does the irony become less escapable. However on none of these occasions is a direct opinion offered by the narrator, thus preserving the openness of the text, while at times offering explicit signals. Signals however depend for their recognition on the reader's way of reading. Certain readers, for example, may be predisposed by their own critical habits to discover ambiguity of language.

A further signal to which some readers may become alerted is the repeated use of the phrase 'spiritual

ramparts'. The first reference to the idea behind it occurs very early on, during Anne's attempt to resolve the dilemma with which the novel opens. She resolves to stay technically loyal to her marriage vows, and at the same time to preserve what she sees as her spiritual integrity: 'And she would remain in her place of peace, building up between them the ramparts of the spiritual life' (H. p.14). The words are presumably Anne's own and the sentence immediately opens up ironic possibilities. The whole notion of spiritual ramparts is itself paradoxical and the association of ramparts with peace underlines the irony still further.

The phrase 'ramparts of the spiritual life' is taken up in more condensed form, later in the narrative when Anne and her husband achieve a temporary reconciliation:

And as her soul had called to him across the spiritual ramparts, so her eyes said to him: "Come"; and he knew that with all her body and her soul she yearned to him and consented (H. p.82).

The recurrence of the phrase creates an echo of the different mood of the earlier context, thereby exposing the tension between Anne's present mood and her previous resolve, perhaps suggesting to most

readers that the resolve which built the ramparts will prevail. A form of the phrase recurs, at a much more critical point in the Majendies' marriage, after the birth of Anne's child when she has withdrawn herself further from her husband:

There was no reason why she should close her door to him, since the material bond was torture to her, and the ramparts of the spiritual life rose high (H. p167).

There is an element of irony here which is quite distinct from the repeated phrase, created by the sheer perversity of offering the 'torture' of 'the material bond' as a reason not to close her door against Majendie. This is reinforced by use of the repeated phrase. It is its third occurrence in the novel, and the alert reader will recognise it. Its use implies, I think, that Anne's motivation is not to be taken completely seriously, that having armed herself in such a way against her husband at the beginning of the novel, she will adhere blindly and rigidly to such a position. By repeating the phrase the narrator distances herself from Anne and ironically undercuts the solemnity of Anne's position. The irony here encompasses not only Anne's religious attitudes but her view of sexual relations as something to be endured rather than enjoyed, which in turn accounts for her lack of forgiveness towards her husband's



'sin'. A little later the narrative gains an amusing twist, in spite of the seriousness of the matter under discussion. Majendie discovers that Anne's repugnance is not merely sexual, but encompasses a profound lack of respect for him at every level. This is described by a development of the military metaphor: 'Majendie had caught his first clear sight of the spiritual ramparts' (H. p.189). The effect of this ironic repetition is to further ridicule Anne's spiritual pretensions. These pretensions are questioned again a little later when, under the softening influence of her love for her daughter, Peggy, 'The ramparts of the spiritual life were shaken' (H. p.199). The repetition of variations on the figurative phrase introduces a comic element into the text and makes it less likely that the reader will take Anne's spiritual pretensions seriously. The final variation on the phrase occurs at the end of the novel when Anne has realised what she has done: 'She had failed in spirituality. She had fixed the spiritual life away from earth beyond the ramparts' (H. p.312). This time there is no irony as Anne has realised her errors, but the example serves to confirm an ironic reading of the earlier examples. Read ironically the use of variations on the phrase, 'spiritual ramparts' exposes Anne's pretensions to ridicule, thereby pointing to failures and contradictions in Anne's refusal to forgive her

husband, which is the central theme of the novel.

There is no explicit narrative voice in The Helpmate, directing the reader to condemn Anne as self-dramatising, intolerant and sanctimonious, nor is the particular brand of Christianity subscribed to by Anne, the Canon and others of Scale society, openly and directly attacked. There are some fairly clear signals in the text, such as parentheses, explicit contradictions and the repetition of the phrase 'spiritual ramparts'. However the highly charged religious and literary discourses within which Anne speaks can be judged as such only by the reader, and likewise the polyvalency of certain signifiers depends for its activation on the reader. Ultimately the text invites the reader to debate the central issues of Christianity and sexuality and to add his/her voice to the voices within the text.

However it has to be said that this openness of the text is marred to some degree by the penultimate chapter of the novel, which contains an extended account of Anne's repentant thoughts, prompted by the melodramatic device of her husband's illness. The account which includes the last reference to spiritual ramparts quoted above, begins with the words: 'She knew what she had done to him. She had ruined him as

surely as if she had been a bad woman' (H. p.310). The effect of intrusive authorial authority is mitigated by the fact that the thoughts are Anne's but nevertheless it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Anne speaks for the author at this point. This didactic impulse is suppressed in the novels of Sinclair's central period, only to reappear in the later novels in the form of figures such as Donald McClane in The Romantic and Eliot Fielding in Anne Severn and The Fieldings, whose wisdom is in both cases conveyed authoritatively and explicitly to the heroine.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of this closure at the end of the novel, the openness of the text to ironic reading is not invalidated. For reading, as several critics have observed, is a temporal process and for much of the text the reader has been free to formulate and assert his/her own voice, which may or may not be in conflict with what appears to be the text's final voice.<sup>12</sup>

### III

The Text of The Three Sisters, the plot of which is briefly outlined in Chapter One, has no such explicit possibilities of closure. The issues which the reader is invited to consider are related to those under discussion in The Helpmate. Sexuality, particularly female sexuality, is of more central significance in this novel, and relationships between men and women, and within the family, are opened up for the reader's consideration, mainly through the use of the convention of character. The text offers a portrait of the conventional hero, Steven Rowcliffe, the conventional heroine, the virtuous Mary, and the Edwardian paterfamilias, her father, the Vicar. All these characters are however open to ironic interpretation by readers who do not accept the paradigms within which they are constructed.

The most susceptible to clearly signalled, ironic reading is The Vicar, Mr Carteret. On the occasion of his first appearance in the novel, he is described thus:

Sitting there in an arm-chair, and with his legs in the fender, he looked as if

he had taken flight before the awful invasion of his furniture. His book-cases hemmed him in on three sides. His roll-top desk, advancing on him from the window, had driven and squeezed him into the arm-chair. His bureau, armed to the teeth, leaning from its ambush in the recess of the fireplace, threatened both the retreat and the left flank movement of the chair. The Vicar was neither tall nor powerful, but his study made him look like a giant imprisoned in a cell.<sup>13</sup>

The effect of the whole passage is comic. The narrator's surface description of the imprisoned Vicar, as a man to be pitied, is undermined by the sheer incongruity of the description of furniture in terms of military metaphors. Thus the opportunity is opened up for the reader to create a second view of the Vicar as a man engaged, like Anne, in a drama of his own making, and cutting a rather ridiculous figure in the process. The final simile of the 'giant imprisoned in his cell', while superficially suggesting pity for the Vicar, suggests also that he might best be described in terms of littleness since it is only his self-imposed exile which gives him his stature. However, other meanings are recoverable beyond this apparently stable irony, which might reassert the possibility of pity for the Vicar, but pity for very different reasons than his own self-pity. At this point in the novel, he is also a man desperately trying to contain his anger, hence in

this sense a giant imprisoned in a cell. In the wider context of the novel, his repressed sexuality is also indicated by the simile. The layers of irony are thus more susceptible to complexity of interpretation than those employed anywhere in The Helpmate. In addition there appears to be a self-ironising element. In the earlier novel, the hyperbolic descriptions used of Anne's state of mind clearly derive from the same discourse as Anne's spoken words or directly relayed thoughts. This is not true of the present example. The words are true to the Vicar's state of mind, but the comic and self-indulgent language may be seen as self-ironising, foregrounding the presence of the narrative voice and reminding the reader of the linguistic medium, and the problematic voice of 'the wise all-knowing author', while at the same time undercutting the authority of such a voice.

Whether the reader interprets the irony as being directed against the Vicar, or the narrator, or both, the highly comic language is unlikely to be ignored. Attention is further directed to the Vicar and to his self-image by a comic playing on a repeated phrase, not dissimilar to that found in The Helpmate. It is first introduced when the Vicar is listening to Alice's massacre of Chopin's Polonaise:

"Wisdom and patience, wisdom and patience -" The vicar kept on muttering as he scowled. Those were his watchwords in his dealings with his womenkind (TS. p.17).

The phrase 'undoubtedly' comes from the Vicar himself. Its irony lies in the fact that it is increasingly apparent that these are the last qualities he possesses, that although they may be his watchwords, he very rarely puts them into practice. The phrase occurs at the beginning of the chapter which describes the Vicar's thoughts as he attempts to ignore Alice's piano playing. His thoughts turn to his second wife, Frances, who 'had turned into a nervous invalid on his hands before she died of that obscure internal trouble which he had so wisely and patiently ignored.'

(H. p.20) The self deception is patent and laughable. Irony is rarely subtle when the Vicar is the object. What is interesting here is the variation on the phrase used at the beginning of the chapter, which helps to further undermine the Vicar's claim to those particular virtues. At the end of the chapter, the Vicar loses his struggle and goes to ask Alice to play more quietly. He recoils from her state of exaltation:

He opened his mouth to say something, and said nothing; finally he went out, muttering.

"Wisdom and patience. Wisdom and patience."

It was a prayer (TS. p.22)

Thus by the end of the chapter the Vicar's 'watchword' has become a 'prayer', exposing the Vicar's need. The absence of further comment helps to make the point more firmly. The phrase is used again a few chapters later, once more in relation to Alice. The Vicar is confronting Gwenda, because she has summoned Rowcliffe to see Alice: 'He drew her into the study and closed the door. He was not angry. He had more than ever his air of wisdom and patience' (TS. p.82). The words 'wisdom and patience', although the narrator's, have originated with the Vicar and are patently untrue. If the irony needs reinforcement it comes from the reader's familiarity with the Vicar's previous use of the phrase. The point is made still more obvious by Gwenda's reaction: 'She knew what it meant - that air of wisdom and of patience' (TS. p.82). One of the effects of the repetition of the phrase is that by now it has become a warning sign to the reader, working almost like a shorthand phrase to suggest the sort of reaction the reader is to expect from the Vicar. Thus the occurrence of the phrase in the opening two paragraphs sets the tone for the Vicar's interview with Essy:

It was Wednesday, the day after the concert.  
Mr. Carteret was standing before the fire in his study. He had just rung the bell and now he waited in an attitude of wisdom and patience. It was only ten



o'clock in the morning and wisdom and patience should not be required of any man at such an hour. But the vicar had a disagreeable duty to perform (TS. p.127).

The reader is alerted by the use of the familiar phrase to observe several points which may be ironically suggested about the Vicar's attitude towards Essy. There is the transparent one of his lack of the necessary virtues, but the reader also becomes aware that the false claim to them suggests self-righteousness on the Vicar's part, which is a crucial aspect of his character. There are also subtle hints of the man who places his own comfort before his Christian vocation, suggested by his concern at the earliness of the hour. The crucial phrase is taken up again, and developed, two paragraphs later:

He waited a little longer: And as he waited his patience began to suffer imperceptibly, though his wisdom remained intact (TS. p.127).

The interpretation offered is the Vicar's, and is likely to be read ironically, the phrase 'imperceptibly', being particularly rich in irony, since the reader suspects that his lack of patience is all too perceptible. The scene is made more humorous by the variation on the phrase, almost like musical

variations on a melody. Yet another variation occurs early in the interview with Essy:

Up till now, in his wisdom and his patience, he had borne with Essy, the Essy who had come before him one evening in September, dejected and afraid. He hated Essy and he hated her sin, but he had borne with her then because of her sorrow and her shame (TS. p.128).

Again, the phrase acts as an alerting signal to the reader, who is likely to observe yet another layer of meaning to the phrase. This passage indicates, not just that the Vicar has neither wisdom nor patience, but that he attempts to 'wear' them on particular occasions. The clothing image is suggested by the ambiguous phrase, 'in his wisdom and patience'. The reader who reads the novel with an awareness of the importance of sexuality will judge that what he hopes to hide by the assumption of such 'garments' is his deeply felt hatred for the sexually fulfilled Essy. The Vicar's moral defeat over the incident of Essy, suffered at the hands of Gwenda, who challenges his decision, is signalled by yet another variation on the phrase, 'The Vicar closed his eyes. His patience was exhausted. So was his wisdom' (TS. p.132). Since the Vicar has built his 'watchwords' into a defensive facade, the fragmentary sentence aptly suggest the breakdown of that facade. After the tour de force of

the use of the phrase in the Essy incident, it occurs only once more. The occasion is a confrontation between the Vicar and Gwenda. He has always been afraid of Gwenda, and his fear is expressed thus, 'There was no dealing with Gwenda; there never had been. Patience failed before her will and wisdom before the deadly thrust of her intelligence' (TS. p.168). The notion of wisdom and patience as a defensive facade is made explicit for the first time, while a wisdom which can be defeated by intelligence is clearly questionable. Thus, an analysis of the use of variations on the phrase 'wisdom and patience' reveals that its repetition alerts the reader to the possibility of an ironic reading of the Vicar's character, and that, what begins as a simple ironic comment on the Vicar's lack of wisdom and patience, develops into a much more subtle and extensive exploration of his lack of charity and his repressed sexuality. Nevertheless the Vicar's faults and the narrator's view of them are made obvious in other ways. The repetition of the the phrase merely intensifies the contempt, rather than creates it.

It is difficult to escape the irony directed against the Vicar, whatever the individual reader's regard for patriarchal authority. The novel's hero-figure, Rowcliffe, presents a more interesting possibility of

ironic reading. A device typical of Sinclair is the ironic use of parentheses, as in the case of Canon Wharton, in The Helpmate, mentioned above. As Wharton's conversation with Anne is undercut by parentheses commenting occasionally on his motivation and consistently on his mannerisms, so Rowcliffe's conversation with Gwenda, while out walking with her, is similarly undercut by parentheses:

He talked about his work and (with considerable reservations and omissions) about his life in Leeds, and about his ambition... Presently he would want to get to the center of things. (He forgot to mention that this was the first time he had thought of it) ...

For a solid three-quarters of an hour, walking over the moor by Karva, he had ceased to be one of the obscurest of obscure little country doctors. He was Sir Steven Rowcliffe, the great gynaecologist, or the great neurologist (as the case might be) with a row of letters after his name and a whole column under it in the medical directory (TS. p.152).

It is interesting to compare this passage with the Canon Wharton passage, because it indicates an important difference between the two novels. The emphasis here is much more strongly on Rowcliffe's concealed thoughts, whereas in the earlier passage the emphasis is more on external behaviour. Although The Three Sisters is not technically innovative, its subject matter is innovative, and indicates a much

greater concern with the inner working of the mind. The use of parenthesis remains a strongly signalled form of irony, which few readers will fail to read, but nevertheless readers are left to draw their own conclusions about Rowcliffe. The ironic comments discussed here are fairly strongly signalled, and while one might expect intelligent readers to be alert to ironic signals, their interpretation along the lines I have suggested, does seem to depend on a reader who does not share conventional beliefs about relations between the sexes, particularly the stereotypical image of heroic male and adoring female. Even Zegger, who concedes in relation to Rowcliffe that 'Almost unconsciously, both before and after his marriage, he uses her to boost his ego', a conclusion based presumably on at least some ironic reading, nevertheless describes Rowcliffe as 'humane and relatively enlightened' and reads the novel, not as a victory for Gwenda but claims that she 'has brought upon herself tragic fate by acting too much on the basis of her ideals and too little on the basis of her feelings.'<sup>14</sup> Although the parentheses are objectively present in the text, they will not be given full weight by a reader who accepts the cultural paradigm within which a hero outlines his future career to an adoring female, rather as a mediaeval knight describes his quest. It seems to me that even a reader such as

Zegger, who recognises and presumably assents to the feminist implications of Sinclair's novels is still partially influenced by such a powerful paradigm.

Rowcliffe's heroic status is also opened to the reader's questioning by the use of what I term a final comment, a comment occurring at the end of a chapter, or a section of a chapter, followed by a gap in the text, a device used widely in The Three Sisters and The Tree of Heaven. Usually this comment forms a separate paragraph and is thus distinguished from the rest of the narrative. It is a development of the more traditional ironic strategy of the juxtaposition of two statements without explicit connection, and is associated with Sinclair's unconventional use of chapters and subdivisions of chapters, which first emerges in The Three Sisters, and is the only feature of the novel which is technically innovative. The innovation is linked to the radical nature of the subject matter, with its concentration on states of mind, which becomes the decisive factor in chapter divisions and subdivisions. This is particularly marked, for example, in the opening part of the novel, in which the events of one evening spent at the vicarage are described for 34 pages in the Virago edition. The narrative is divided into no less than eleven chapters, although the only variation in the

external action is between the rooms of the Vicarage.

A multiplicity of divisions within the text, which focus on internal states rather than external conditions, facilitates the use of the kind of comment, identified above, henceforward referred to as a final comment. Most, though not all, examples of its use are comments offered by the narrator, and therefore belong to that group of ironic devices which may be described as intrusive, since they are signalled by a disparity of voice. However, they are often a less obvious form of intrusion, because they are emphasised by their position in the text, rather than by any emphasis given to the statements themselves. One such final comment, directed against Rowcliffe, occurs in Chapter 49, which is itself an interesting example of the fragmented arrangement of the narrative. The chapter describes one of Rowcliffe's Wednesday visits to Gwenda. It is divided into four sections of varying length, each of which deals with a shift in Rowcliffe's mood, therefore being a very good example of the focus on the internal, rather than the external. At the end of the first section, his

irritable mood is softened by the memory of Grierson, the curate, with whom Gwenda did not fall in love. The section ends with the paragraph: 'He raised his head and squared his shoulders with the unconscious

gesture of his male pride' (TS. p.354) The unconscious sexual motivation which underlies his apparently haphazard shifts of mood are thus clearly observed by the narrator's final comment, and the irony is available to any reader who dissents from the conventional construction of manliness. It is an interesting example of the stage Sinclair's examination of unconscious motivation has reached. The narrator is sufficiently distanced from the character under discussion for the use of a fairly traditional narrative technique to probe the unconscious. However, the placing of the paragraph as a final comment enables it to carry unstated implications and thus avoid a preponderance of authorial intrusion which the subject matter would otherwise require, thereby allowing the reader's voice into the narrative.

The use, by the narrator, of a final comment at the end of a chapter or section of the novel is an intrusive form of irony, in that it foregrounds the narrator's judgement. There are, however, a few final comments in The Three Sisters which are placed within the consciousness of a character. Two of these record Rowcliffe's attitude to his courtship of Gwenda. One occurs at the end of Chapter 29, which described one of his lost opportunities of declaring himself to



Gwenda: 'Plenty of time. Plenty of time. He was so sure of her' (TS. p.154) The syntax of the paragraph looks forward to Sinclair's later use of nominal constructions to convey consciousness, while the second sentence represents the narrator's summary of his feelings. The implications are clearly ironic, emphasising Rowcliffe's male arrogance. Like much of the irony directed against Rowcliffe, although it may be recognised as irony by the intelligent reader, it will be given its full implication only by those readers who are prepared to question the conventional expectations of a romantic hero. It is possible to argue that much ironic energy within a novel comes from the clash of voices between narrator, character and reader. The narrative voice here remains unexpressed, except where it summarises Rowcliffe's feelings, but is given expression by the placing of the language of Rowcliffe's consciousness at the end of a section. The second example also pinpoints Rowcliffe's mismanagement of his courtship of Gwenda. A section of the next chapter, which has recounted his conveying Gwenda in his trap, from the moors to the vicarage, colludes with the paragraph: 'But that was reckless' (TS. p.156). The judgement is within Rowcliffe's consciousness,, suggested by the emphatic use of 'that'. Overtly the wise hero expresses caution, but the comment may be read as betraying the

man's subservience to convention, coupled with the same innate confidence displayed earlier. He considers that he has no need to be reckless in order to be certain of Gwenda.

Thus, alternative readings of Rowcliffe's character present themselves: glamorous hero figure, young, handsome with an exciting career before him - the modern version of the heroic quest; or arrogant and deluded victim of his own preconceptions about male-female relationships. These are in turn bound up with the question of what constitutes the female 'self' of Gwenda. This issue is discussed in the following chapter where I shall explore the use of the repeated phrase, 'romantic youth' in relation to Rowcliffe, which, in common with other repeated phrases in Sinclair's novels may be seen as having ironic implications.

If Rowcliffe, according to one reading, is the dashing hero of the novel, then Mary is his worthy companion, admiring his achievements, offering him the comfort and tranquility of home after the exertions of his public life. Mary represents the archetypal good woman and is concerned with her own perception of herself as good:

All the way home she kept on saying to herself, "I've saved Ally." "I've saved Ally." That thought, splendid and exciting, rushed to the lighted front of Mary's mind; if the thought of Rowcliffe followed its shining trail, it thrust him back, it spread its luminous wings to hide him, it substituted its heavenly form for his' (TS. p.68).

The personification of the thought in terms of an angel is the narrator's. Behind the apparent approval of Mary's ideas, is the view that in fact she is deceiving herself, by sentimental and romantic notions of her own goodness. The personification of her thought as an angel may be seen, on closer examination, to contain the contradictory notion of deception, expressed by 'hide' and 'substitute'. Like the earlier comment on the Vicar, it might be seen as self-ironising, foregrounding the fictionality of the text, and implicating the narrator in the romantic discourse, thereby serving to subvert the narrative voice and allowing the reader to assert his/her own view.

Mary's self-image is most clearly emphasised by the use of the repeated phrase, 'goodness and sweetness' in relation to Mary.

In some ways the device recalls other examples which have been discussed, Anne Majendie's 'spiritual

ramparts' and the Vicar's 'wisdom and patience'.

There is however a crucial difference. In the case of 'goodness' and 'sweetness', although any questioning of them inevitably implicates the person who possesses them, it is the supposed virtues themselves which are questioned, and any ironic interpretation will clearly depend on the reader's view of such virtues, which in turn relate back to the central issue of the family. The first reference to 'goodness' occurs while Mary, having summoned Rowcliffe to attend her sister, out of genuine concern over her sister's condition, is sorting out her clothes in the attic. Mary is described thus:

She moved quietly there, her whole being suffused exquisitely with a sense of peace, of profound, indwelling goodness. Every act of hers for the last three days had been incomparably good, had been indeed perfect. She had waited on Alice hand and foot' (TS. p.68).

There follows a list of Mary's good actions. The reader, who has not previously encountered the expression 'goodness' in relation to Mary, will be alerted to possibilities of irony, by the suggestion of sensuous pleasure suggested by the phrase 'suffused exquisitely'. Mary enjoys being good. There is a stern vein running through Sinclair's novels which abhors comfort and the satisfaction of the senses.

Mary is linked with such satisfaction throughout the novel, and her appeal to Rowcliffe is to that part of his character which is like her own. Much of the recognition and interpretation of irony will depend on the reader's understanding of 'goodness'. Many readers may perceive a tension between goodness and comfort, which suggests the possibility of an ironic reading of Mary. This is confirmed a few paragraphs later, in a description of Mary which begins with the Vicar's attitude towards her, and continues with the narrator's description:

Goodness, he said to himself, was in her face.

There had been goodness in Mary's face when she went into Alice's room to see what she could do for her. There was goodness in it now, up in the attic, where there was nobody but God to see it; goodness at peace with itself, and utterly content' (TS. p.69).

The Vicar's approval inevitably casts doubt on the desirability of Mary's goodness, especially in view of an earlier sentence in the same paragraph: 'Mary had never put him in the wrong, never made him feel uncomfortable.' The more subtle issue is that of Mary's complacency. Here, repetition comes into play, alerting the reader to possibilities of ridicule behind the apparent approval of disinterested goodness. The suggestion is that of hypocrisy once

removed, observable only by the spiritual connoisseur. She can acquit herself of the charge of trying to impress her neighbours by the reflection that 'there was nobody but God to see it.' The charge that she is guilty of is indicated by 'goodness at peace with itself and utterly content.' She seeks to impress, not her neighbours but herself. The distinction is a fine one and, for the modern reader, reminiscent of Eliot's portrayal of Thomas Becket, tempted 'To do the right deed for the wrong reason.'<sup>15</sup>

The comparison perhaps inflates Mary's importance, but underlines Sinclair's preoccupation with motivation. The notion of Mary's goodness recurs later in the same scene, as Mary thinks about her sister Gwenda: 'her small, brooding face took on such sadness as good women feel in contemplating a character inscrutable and unlike their own' (TS. P.71). The comment here is the narrator's and adds another dimension to the reader's apprehension of 'goodness'. 'Goodness' is uneasy in the presence of what it does not understand. It is essentially narrow. The note of scorn behind the phrase 'good women' cannot be objectively demonstrated and is a good example of the subjective character of irony. On another occasion a direct criticism of Mary is made through Rowcliffe:

Why, on earth, he wondered, had she [Gwenda] gone away and left him with this sweet and good, this quite exasperatingly sweet and good woman who had told him nothing but lies? He was aware that Mary Carteret was sweet and good. But he had found that sweet and good women were not invariably intelligent. As for honesty, if they were always honest they would not always be sweet and good. (TS. p.74)

There are elements of irony within this criticism, created by paradox, for example in the phrase 'exasperatingly sweet and good' but its main force as irony comes from the reader's increasing awareness that the words are being attached to Mary as a label. Their very repetition, in combination, renders the terms almost comic and implies that Mary wears her sweetness and goodness, rather as the Vicar wears his wisdom and patience. This comment of Rowcliffe's would, of course, have shocked certain contemporary readers who would have perceived goodness and sweetness as unquestionable virtues. Since, however, such readers might also wish to accept Rowcliffe as the novel's hero and a suitable husband, the passage by its contradiction, inevitably challenges any reader to create his/her own internally consistent meaning. The implied criticism of Mary and her 'goodness' in the previous examples is brought into the open, the suggestion of self-deception being made obvious by Rowcliffe's reflections on intelligence and honesty.

However the reflection does not apply to Mary alone but is given general application. It is not Mary alone who is at fault, but the virtues of 'goodness' and 'sweetness' as they are commonly perceived. It is important to note that at this stage 'sweetness' is added to 'goodness', and it is added by Rowcliffe, whose own past, as represented by the red-haired nurse in Leeds, shows his attitude to women. 'Sweetness', much more acceptable in 1914 than it is to the modern reader, suggests qualities of pliability and prettiness. The combination of both words suggest the long enduring legend of 'the angel in the house' with all that that implied for women's destiny.

Mary represents male expectations of womanhood, and it is against this that her independent sister is pitted. At this point in the narrative, the now discredited term 'goodness', discredited at least for some readers, perhaps for all, since some at least of the ironic signals are difficult to ignore, and its companion word 'sweetness', are firmly attached to Mary. Like the Vicar's 'wisdom and patience' they act as a shorthand for her character, and their very repetition, is likely to undermine her character in the reader's mind.



Gwenda is also aware that her sister is 'sweet and good', as she contemplates telling Mary of her intended departure for London, and of the reasons for it:

She was sweet and good. Not so sweet and good that she couldn't hold her own against Papa if she was driven to it, but sweet enough and good enough to stand by Ally and to see her through (TS. p.188).

The irony is complex. There is a direct irony on Gwenda's part against her sister. Gwenda's instincts tell her that her sister is not as perfect as she might seem, particularly to men, such as the Vicar and Rowcliffe. However, a more complex irony involves both sisters. Gwenda is wrong and the events of the novel illustrate the irony of her judgement of Mary. They also throw an ironic perspective on the self-confident Gwenda, for the tone here is one of self-confidence. Gwenda's thoughts are being related and she clearly thinks that she is being rather clever. Not only does she underestimate her sister, but she actually awards some moral status to those dubious virtues, 'sweetness' and 'goodness' which she makes the mistake of accepting at their face value.

In a similar way Rowcliffe becomes implicated in a simplistic judgement of Mary's goodness and sweetness,

in the chapter in which he proposes to her. He watches Mary knitting: ' And he said to himself, "How sweet she is. And how innocent. And good"' (TS. p.241). This is, of course, exactly the way Mary would like him to think of her. The pleasure in her own goodness as a source of self-satisfaction, observable in the first instance of the expression, is now extended to pleasure in the effect of her goodness on Rowcliffe. The most forceful element in the irony is, however, the contradiction between Rowcliffe's pleasure in her goodness and sweetness expressed here, and his contemptuous estimate of such qualities at an earlier stage in the novel, to which the reader is alerted by the repetition of the terms 'sweet' and 'good'. Rowcliffe's thoughts here occur only seconds before he is finally ensnared by Mary, and 'sweetness' and 'goodness' play an important part in the process:

It was odd, but in the moment of his recoil from that imminent contact Rowcliffe remembered the little red-haired nurse. Not that there was much resemblance; for, though the little nurse was sweet, she was not altogether innocent, neither was she what good people like Mary Carteret would call good. And Mary, leaning back in her chair with the recovered ball in her lap, was smiling at his confusion with an innocence and goodness of which he could have no doubt (TS. p.242).

The main thrust of the irony is in the last sentence.

The reader is now aware that Mary is scheming to attach Rowcliffe to herself and therefore is neither innocent nor good, at least for a reader who associates goodness with absolute honesty and unselfishness. 'Goodness' however is a floating signifier and an alternative version of 'goodness', has been developed in the novel, by the constant attachment of the term to Mary. The characteristics of the Mary Carteret version of 'goodness' have been established as complacency, self-deception, narrowness, and an unjustified feeling of superiority. However, to certain readers it will appear quite differently and be approved of as a quality best represented by 'the angel in the house' referred to above. What is signified by this 'goodness' is further indicated by the comment, 'neither was she [the red-haired nurse] what good people like Mary Carteret would call good', presumably suggesting a lack of sexual innocence on the part of the red-haired nurse, which for people with views like Anne Majendie in The Helpmate, invalidates her claim to goodness, although she may have qualities which some readers will value more highly than technical chastity. The phrase 'good people' also carries an irony, of which Rowcliffe, his sensibilities by now fatally blunted, seems only half-aware, since it recalls his own earlier, more clear-sighted judgement about 'good women'. Mary's

association with the cultural construction of goodness, represented by 'the angel in the house', is made explicit a few paragraphs later by the impression Mary makes on Rowcliffe, 'of a house and a household rehabilitated after a long period of devastation, by the untiring, selfless labour of a woman who was good and sweet' (TS. p.244) The irony is driven home by the repetition of the phrase, 'good and sweet'. The effect of repetition is such that the phrase now carries ironic implications whenever it is used.

At the beginning of the novel, Mary shows pleasure in her 'goodness' and this aspect is returned to again after she announces news of her engagement to Alice, who does not hesitate to accuse her of scheming:

She was wounded in her sweetness and her goodness, ....She didn't try to think what Ally had meant. Her sweetness and goodness, with their instinct of self-preservation, told her that it might be better not (TS. p.249).

This passage reveals a great deal about Mary's psychology. The opening sentence relies on the implicit irony, established by repetition of the phrase. The final sentence shows a more direct intervention by the narrator. The passage is a good example of the narrative treatment of this particular repeated phrase, and indeed of the novel as a whole,

fluctuating as it does between implicit irony and explicit comment. At this stage in the development of her narrative approaches, Sinclair requires the use of explicit comment to elucidate inner psychological states, and indeed to the extent that unconscious forces are here under discussion, some kind of comment by the narrating consciousness is unavoidable.

There is a sense in which Mary triumphs in the novel and the final use of the term 'goodness' indicates her approaching triumph, as, after the crisis in her marriage she begins to reassert her power over Rowcliffe: 'She could play off her adorer against her husband, while the candid purity of young Grierson's homage renewed her exquisite sense of her own goodness' (TS. p.334). The emphasis on Grierson's candid purity recalls the obsessive concern with chastity which is such an important element in the cultural construction of 'the good woman' which Mary represents. Furthermore, the phrase strongly recalls the language of the opening examples, 'suffused exquisitely with a sense...' and Mary thus remains, unchanged and untouched by events, luxuriating in her own goodness.

This unchanging and impervious quality within Mary is earlier suggested by her first appearance in the

novel, in the act of darning socks: 'She had learned to darn socks for her own amusement on her eleventh birthday, and she was twenty-seven now' (TS. p.4) The statement is made without comment, its irony most obvious to those readers who will in turn most readily question Mary's 'goodness' and 'sweetness'.

The repeated variation on the terms 'goodness' and 'sweetness' derives its ironic potential, not only from repetition, but from the instability of the signifiers, particularly 'goodness'. It allows the reader to perceive Mary as an ideal woman, or, for the feminist reader, to see her very differently, and consequently to reject a whole ideological interpretation of what constitutes goodness, ideological because it is directly related to the concept of the family with its key place in the economic and social structure of society.

Ironic undercutting in The Three Sisters is sometimes signalled in fairly obvious ways, for example by the use of parenthesis, antithesis and qualification, but often varying to more subtle strategies of omission, the use of a repeated phrase and final comments. The rewriting of the text which the reader who reads ironically must embark upon is, like ironic reading in The Helpmate, dependent on membership of an

interpretive community, in this case defined by distance from a conventional paradigm of male-female relations, which would see Rowcliffe as a splendid match, Mary as a worthy wife, and Alice as a perverse and illogical young woman.

The Three Sisters is a more open text than The Helpmate. No passage of didacticism or explicit judgement occurs and the end of the novel, which is discussed more fully in Chapter 4, resists closure. There are explicit narrative comments, but criticism is not overt. The main thrust of criticism comes from other characters, such as Gwenda's criticism of the Vicar and Rowcliffe's early criticism of Mary.

It is the most ironic of all Sinclair's texts. Ostensibly, the handsome young doctor, turned down by a self-willed, independent woman with ideas beyond her gender, and pursued by her wilful, perverse and sexually precocious younger sister, finds solace in the arms of the third sister, a good and sweet woman who offers him a comfortable home. The most overt clue to an ironic reading is provided by the almost comic treatment of the patriarchal vicar, ruthlessly exposed by comic language and the almost explicit playing on the terms 'wisdom' and 'patience'. Most readers will be alert to the polyvalency of the vocabulary which

describes both Rowcliffe and Mary, as well as to other, sometimes explicitly signalled irony against Rowcliffe, which will have especial significance for those readers who do not accept the conventional paradigm of male-female relationships.

#### IV

The Tree of Heaven, discussed in some detail in Chapters 1 and 2, is an undeservedly neglected novel, which deals with the complex emotions between members of a family, against the background of events before and during the First World War. The novel is structured by the clash between private concerns and public events and, consequently, situational irony is important. Its functioning may be seen in a trivial incident early in the novel which foreshadows the later patterning of events.

Nicky's cat, Jerry, is savagely killed by his tutor's Russian wolfhound. Nicky's father jokingly warns Nicky of the possibility and a section of the narrative ends with the paragraph: 'Nicky laughed. He knew that Boris could never catch Jerry. His father was only ragging him.'<sup>16</sup> It can be argued that irony here is directed against Nicky's too great



confidence, but there is apparently no reason for him not to be confident, and his confidence, in any case, is not placed in himself, but in the cat. An alternative reading might therefore suggest that the paragraph underlines the capriciousness of the events of the novel.

Nicky's first important catastrophe is his disastrous marriage to Phyllis Desmond. The prime responsibility for this lies with Nicky himself, and is the result of his impetuous, over-generous nature, but the narrator emphasises the role played by the sequence of events. A section of Chapter 12 of *The Vortex* has described the affair of Booster's wife, Nicky's assumption of responsibility for her indiscretions, and his subsequent sending down from Cambridge, which results in him going to live in London. The section concludes with the paragraph: 'And it was there that he met Desmond' (TH. p.122). Of course some element of chance plays its part in every disastrous relationship, in fictional worlds as well as in the real world, but here the narrator takes care, by the use of the single paragraph, to suggest that events have their own irony because Nicky's flight from the attentions of one woman takes him into the arms of another.

At this point, it is appropriate to consider the significance of situational irony in the novel form. Whether a novel is written in a realist or an anti-realist tradition, in order to make sense of it, a reader will perceive it as having some relationship to the events of the world as s/he has experienced it, and the material of this novel, published in 1917, clearly relates to events in the public domain, experienced by contemporary readers and their effects on private lives, and it is thus in some sense representational. Verbal irony achieves its energy from a clash of perspectives implied within a particular phrase, while situational irony achieves its energy from a clash involving the events of the novel. In the case of the cat, discussed above, for example, there is a clash between Nicky's expectations of events and events themselves, while in the second example the clash between expectation and event is more diffuse. It involves Nicky's relatives and perhaps the reader, all of whom believe in a vague way in some kind of order in the world (an order which events themselves often deny) and consequently believe that because Nicky has escaped from the clutches of one woman, events will behave as though committed to fairness and balance in their dealings with him, and take a turn for the better. Thus it is easy to see how such a clash, in both the real world and any kind

of fictional world, gives rise to notions such as fate and destiny, whether, as in the Sophoclean universe, in the form of all powerful gods, or as in the novels of Thomas Hardy, of the sheer perversity of chance; or alternatively to notions of 'reality', positing the ironic clash as a clash between fantasy and the 'real' (though fictional) world.

Situational irony is far more important in this than in any other of Sinclair's novels, and the reader may interpret the irony in a variety of ways; among others as a clash between fantasy and reality; between the needs of the private individual and the intrusion of public events; or as the malign intervention of fate.

The interpretation of the character of the mother, Frances Harrison, is crucial to whichever reading is adopted. Unlike mother figures such as Mrs. Olivier and Mrs. Waterlow, Frances Harrison is neither dominating nor apparently manipulative, and superficially, might seem to represent those qualities most desirable in a mother. However, the reader may observe possibilities of ironic reading which expose those faults which are inherent in being the perfect mother. Since the main subject of irony is Frances's distortion of priorities and values, one of the main signals of irony is incongruity. Her total absorption

in her children, to the exclusion of all other concerns is conveyed by the following comment, 'At the bottom of her mind were...an attitude of condescension, as if she honoured the Times by reading it and the nation by informing herself of its affairs' (TH. p.11).

Sinclair's use of the phrase 'as if' as a device of psychonarration is commented on elsewhere. Here it clearly signals irony by introducing an apparently absurd proposition.

As the novel moves towards its climax, external events force Frances into a recognition of the world outside, but its importance can be measured for Frances only in relation to the personal lives of her children. Thus Frances's views of the Women's Suffrage movement are described in such a way that the absurdity of the temporal clause, (which might be read as a causal clause, thereby adding to the ironic effect) emphasises Frances's inverted values:

She had even realised the Woman's Suffrage movement as a vivid and vital affair, since Dorothy had taken part in the fighting and had gone to prison (TH. p.220)

The narrator underlines further the incongruity of Frances's responses to the outside world by the comment: 'Frances expressed her opinion of the Irish

crisis when she said, "I wish that Carson man would mind his own business. This excitement is very bad for Michael"' (TH. p.229). In both these examples, signals such as 'even realised' and 'Frances expressed her opinion' make it difficult to avoid the implications of irony.

On another occasion, criticism of Frances's attitude to the outside world is conveyed differently. It concerns her son Michael's involvement with a group of avant-garde poets: 'And since Frances confused this movement with the movements of Phyllis Desmond she judged it to be terrible' (TH. p.204) Here the pun is sufficient to convey Frances's perennial confusion of the personal with the public. These examples demonstrate how the reader is encouraged to read with the narrator, and share that sense of superiority implicit in the enjoyment of irony. Such a reader might take the following comment on Frances ironically: 'And as Frances's mind, being a thoroughly healthy mind, refused to entertain any dreary possibility for long together...' (TH. pp. 30-31), and yet another reader, sharing Sinclair's interest in psychoanalysis might read the sentence without irony. In this case, of course, it might be possible to return to the other ironic loci under discussion and subject them to a subversive rereading with the irony directed

against the world which suggests that its affairs are more important than those of any individual.

Frances's attitude to the Times and her view of the significance of Women's Suffrage and Ireland can be read as perfectly reasonable. The personal feelings and emotions of Frances's children may well be more important than the games of power politics played by men, (in which one might include the struggle for women's suffrage as playing the game by the same rules). In short, feminist readers may differ in their interpretation of Frances, according to which branch of feminism they subscribe to, that which demands a role for women in the male world, or that which seeks to remake the world according to women's values. The narrator expresses no direct opinion on the matter.

More significantly, an ironic reading of Frances can reveal, not only a distortion in her values, but also, regardless of the reader's opinion about her values, the illusory nature of her optimism. Chapter 6 of the aptly named volume, 'Peace', recounts minor disturbances to 'that peace and tranquillity where nothing ever happened' (TH. p.51) It concludes with the significant paragraph, 'Frances's Tree of Heaven sheltered them all' (TH. p.55). It becomes apparent only on a second reading of the novel, that the phrase gives expression to an irony which is far-reaching and fundamental to any interpretation, because by the

end of the novel the reader is aware that Frances's Tree of Heaven has totally failed to protect her four children, of whom two are dead, one facing likely death, and one bereaved by the death of her fiancé. The irony might therefore be seen as directed against fate, in the sense of an unexpected turn of events, outside Frances's control. The quoted phrase is not obviously ascribed to any figural consciousness, and is more easily read as expressing the narrative consciousness, although it also reflects Frances's world view. In this case it is directed not so much against fate as against the illusions of the reader, but also against Frances who thinks she can control her world. Other ironic strategies may be read as suggesting, not only that she cannot, but that she ought not to wish to, a view which some readers will certainly adopt. It is relevant here to note Frances and Anthony's dispute over the tree which Anthony, who is a timber merchant, insists, apparently correctly, since he accurately forecasts the appearance of black buds, is not a tree of Heaven but an ash tree, 'An ash-tree was a fact and a tree of Heaven was a fancy' (TH. p.10). The illusory nature of Frances's hope of protecting her children is suggested by the dispute over the tree. The unfolding of the plot of the novel can be read as the gradual shattering of Frances's illusions, illusions which at least some of her

readers may share.

Throughout, the dominating motivation within Frances is maternal. It is a motivating force which is essentially private. Forces which are largely subconscious drive Frances towards her own genetic survival. This consideration clarifies what would otherwise remain a rather obscure comment, occurring in the same chapter as the passage discussed above. The whole section can be read as an extended final comment, achieving significance and emphasis from its isolation in the text. It is the love scene between Veronica and Nicky, now freed from his disastrous marriage:

"Do you love me?"

"Do you love me?"

"You know I love you."

"You know. You know"

What they said was new and wonderful to them, as if nobody before them had ever thought of it.

Yet that night, all over the Heath, in hollows under the birch trees and on beds of trampled grass, young lovers lay in each other's arms and said the same thing in the same words: "Do you love me?" "You know how I love you!" over and over, in voices drowsy and thick with love (TH. p.241)

At first sight, the comment seems out of keeping with the tone of the novel. It endows the narrator with an omniscience unclaimed elsewhere, since events, and



particularly public events, are usually described through the consciousness of other characters. However, although the tone is different, the comment is linked with the treatment of Frances, and offers the reader a clue to one way of reading the events of the novel. For these characters on the Heath are in the power of those same unconscious forces as those which drive Frances. The comment is ironic, in the first place because it draws attention to Nicky and Veronica's illusion that what is happening to them is unique, but also because all the lovers on the Heath will soon be embroiled in the war that is about to break out. This unspoken level of irony carries its own poignancy. Nevertheless, as in the case of Frances's previous illusions about the enduring quality of her children's lives, the irony extends far beyond the historical circumstances of the novel, and points to an illusory view of life as in the conscious control of the individual. Zegger's reading of the novel, does not take account of the strong element of irony, particularly in relation to Frances, and seems an oversimplification:

war overtakes the family; and the previous restlessness and discord of the younger generation, as well as the selfish complacency of the older, are replaced by a spirit of harmony and self-sacrifice as all draw together in an effort to save their country

seems an oversimplification.

The text has wider implications than the need to support the war effort. It is structured by an opposition, and the reader is free to choose how s/he interprets that opposition. The contemporary reader may well have chosen to read it as an opposition between Frances's private fantasy and the reality of the adult world. A modern reader is likely to be drawn by two other possible readings, one predominantly literary, the other more overtly political. The first, a postmodernist reading, will interpret the illusion of individual autonomy as opposed to a world which is in fact chaotic. The second, a more historically influenced reading, will see the violence and horror of war as disrupting the lives of individuals. That such a reading was perfectly possible, even in 1918, is indicated by the comment of a contemporary reviewer, that Sinclair romanticizes Nicky while Michael is 'misrepresented and misunderstood'<sup>18</sup> Although such a reading is explicitly against the grain of the novel, it indicates the openness of Sinclair's representation of Michael. In the light of this second possibility, I now wish to consider the extent to which the novel, overtly accepting the war, is open to re-reading.

Opposition to the war is expressed in the novel by Michael Harrison and a group of his avant-garde friends, who are subjected to much irony, which, since it is inherently unstable, in turn allows for re-reading. Their conversation on poetry is described thus,

It was, first, a frenzied assault on the Old Masters, a storming of immortal strongholds, a tearing and scattering of the wing feathers of archangels; then, from this high adventure it sank to a perfunctory skirmishing among living eminences over forty, judged by reason of their age, to be too contemptible for an attack in force. It rallied again to a bombing and blasting of minute ineptitudes, the slaughter of "swine like-and-and-and-"; and ended in a furious pursuit of a volatile young poet, Edward Rivers, who had escaped by sheer levity from the tug of The Vortex, and was setting up a small swirl of his own (TH. p.214-15)

This narrative summary is in fact a complex mingling of narrative and figural voices. In the first place, it is not clear whether the description is to be assigned to Michael or the narrator, since two sentences earlier, the reader is told 'Michael noticed that the talk was not always sustained at this constructive level.' Additionally, some of the language of the narrative 'Old Masters' and 'immortal strongholds' may possibly, but not conclusively, be read as the actual language of the group of poets, and

therefore, to the more restrained reader, along with the actual quoted phrase, 'swine like...' as an ironising of their language, which appears extravagant and inflated. Other phrases such as 'frenzied' and 'furious' carry no such ambiguity and consequently lie outside the field of irony. The military metaphors are to be read as the narrator/Michael's comment on the manner of speech of the group and open up an ironic gap. The metaphors suggest that the poets are embarked on a dangerous and crucial struggle but the reader is likely to read the metaphors as inappropriate, and therefore regard the poets as taking themselves far too seriously. This, in turn, allows the plot itself to act as a vehicle for irony, as the events described take place in the last months of peace, before the Great War, a war in which the poets, initially, refuse to take part, an attitude of which the narrator, in so far as she reveals her hand, is critical. Thus their attitude here may be seen as the displacement of aggression onto the establishment, represented here by 'Old Masters'. Alternatively this apparently stable irony may be destabilised, by the reader of the thermonuclear age. The narrator's extravagant language in this passage may be seen as unconscious irony revealing her own somewhat juvenile attitude to warfare, speaking within a cultural context shared by, for example Rupert Brooke. It is

an attitude partially acknowledged elsewhere in the novel, where it is ascribed to a young poet, George Wadham who is portrayed after he enlists, as 'talking excitedly about the "Great Game" '(TH. p.326), and later, as returning from the Front a broken man. Laura Mumford suggests a feminist development of this criticism of pro-war attitudes:

At best Sinclair hints that, by joining men in battle, women may hope to achieve an ecstasy similar to those her male characters experience.

But by failing - in fact, refusing, to question the basic premise that war is the only real site of such ecstasy, she relegates the very movement she has championed, [i.e. the suffragette movement] as well as the art she practises, to a position of triviality.

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While the prevailing stance of the novel is pro-war, it is not as closed as Mumford's comment would seem to suggest. Nevertheless for the most part, the narrator remains ambivalently caught up in the dominant ideological discourse of 1917. The passage, discussed above, describing the group of avant-garde poets, highlights the problems of reading inflated language. The judgement that the language is inflated is left to the reader, who will decide on grounds of congruity or incongruity. The reader who judges the language incongruous will then be free to locate the ironic intention, in other words to choose the object of

irony. Thus a variety of readers will speak within the text in a variety of voices.

The reactions of the group as a whole towards the war are subject to irony. Finding themselves at odds with the rest of society, they rather enjoy the conflict, 'And yet somehow they all felt curiously braced by the prospect' (TH. p.288) The possibility of an ironic reading here is hinted at by the use of 'somehow' and their enjoyment revealed by the apparent paradox. It is further revealed by the exaggerated language of the following description: 'They told each other these things very seriously and earnestly on Friday evenings' (TH. p.289) combined with the bathos of 'Friday evenings'.

Michael, like his mother in her different way, fails to recognise the demands of society. Possible reasons for his refusal to fight are clearly indicated by the narrator's comparison with his willingness to fight for an independent Ireland. After a discussion of this point, the following comment is added:

Michael was also aware that in the matter of Ireland his emotions, though shared by considerable numbers of the Irish people, were not shared by his family or by many people whom he knew; to all intents and purposes he had them to himself' (TH. p.287).

The incongruous language used in this sentence shows that, just as the reader may have judged Frances's values as distorted, Michael's values may be judged as similarly distorted. This is particularly apparent in the almost casual dismissal of the Irish people implied by the concessive clause. Thus the sentence overtly suggests that the individuality of Michael's views is far more important than the opinion of the Irish population at large, a surface meaning which the majority of readers will have no difficulty in rejecting in favour of an ironic interpretation. Michael, having refused to enlist, continues to write poetry, and the reader is informed that:

In magnificent defiance of the enemy,  
the "New Poems" of Michael Harrison,  
with illustration by Austin Mitchell,  
were announced as forthcoming in October  
(TH. p.290).

This sentence, which may be read in a variety of ways, illustrates the elusive nature of irony. Its interpretation as irony clearly depends on the view taken of Michael's resistance to involvement in the war. The signifier 'enemy' may be read as meaning Germany, in which case it is ironic for the reader who thinks that fighting wars is more important than writing poetry, but without irony for the reader who agrees with Michael that the writing and publication

of poetry means that what is most precious in national life has been preserved. 'Enemy' may also be interpreted as signifying the majority opinion of the time, held by a wide range of establishment and non-establishment figures, including Frances and Anthony, and therefore as an ironic second meaning, revealing the real objects of Michael's defiance.

There are similarities in the use of irony in The Three Sisters and that in The Tree of Heaven. In both novels, Sinclair makes use of fragmented chapters which facilitate the use of final comment, although in The Tree of Heaven the unifying element for a particular section is thematic rather than episodic as in The Three Sisters. In the earlier novel, sections focus on stages in internal mental processes, in The Tree of Heaven, on particular characters. Final comment may be seen as a form of authorial intervention within the text but it is essentially unobtrusive, dependent on a reader's recognition of the device, and can be ignored by a reader who wishes to speak differently, thus rendering the novel more open to the voice of the reader. In both novels, irony focuses on limitations to individual freedom and is therefore fundamental to Sinclair's modernist challenge to the notion of the coherence and integrity of the individual. In The Three Sisters individuals are limited by their own



natures, and the natures of those around them. Thus the final comment in particular, emphasises the determinist elements in the novel, which might be described by Thomas Hardy's quotation from Novalis, 'Character is fate.' As the editor of the Macmillan edition of The Mayor of Casterbridge remarks, Hardy was likely to have encountered the quotation in George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss. However Eliot dissents from Novalis, remarking that, for all his character failings, Hamlet might have lived to a ripe old age if the events of his life had been different. Both novelists however resist the notion of the autonomous self in control of his/her own destiny, and Sinclair writes within the same tradition of resistance.<sup>20</sup> In The Tree of Heaven, individuals, are still the victims of their own natures and in many cases of their own illusions about themselves, which figure more strongly in this novel. However the central characters of the novel manage to negotiate more successfully between their own natures and the world around them, until that world throws up totally unexpected events which are outside their control. Irony thus emphasises the role of fate in the novel, an emphasis which is unusual in Sinclair. Fate itself, is of course, a literary construct, which may be read differently by different readers. Many of the ironic loci I have been discussing may therefore be seen as expressing the

horrors of war, and its effect on the individual, or, for the superstitious, the malign power of a providence which ought not to be tested. Influenced by certain of the ironic signals in the text, particularly in relation to Frances, I prefer to read the novel as expressing the illusory nature of characters' beliefs about themselves, their ability to control their world, and the order and logic of that world.

## VI

The Tree of Heaven is, of all Sinclair's novels, the one most directly engaged with public events and public debates. Both The Tree of Heaven and The Three Sisters are polyphonic by virtue of the range of characters whose consciousnesses contribute to the text and their dialogic relationship with one another. The two novels which remain to be discussed here provide some contrast in that they focus very strongly on the consciousness of a single individual, and would at first sight therefore, seem less likely to be open to a multiplicity of voices.

In narrative form Mary Olivier: A Life stands apart, in a category of its own. All events are channelled

through Mary's viewpoint, no scene is depicted in which she is not present, and no distinct narrative voice offers judgement, although I would argue that there is a discernible narrative consciousness which allows Mary to be expressed as a separate consciousness. Paradoxically, although the effect is almost to remove the author/narrator from the text, an enterprise in which Sinclair was clearly interested, and which was discussed in Chapter 3, it would appear that it allows little possibility of irony, and consequently of inviting the reader's voice and the reader's apprehension of reality into the text. Nevertheless, the narrative form is not entirely that outlined in Sinclair's review of Richardson's Pilgrimage, nor that suggested in the sentence from Far End already referred to: 'If Peter misunderstands the other characters they are misunderstood'. The polyphonic element in the novel comes from the external voices of other characters, transmitted by Mary which create a fictional world on which the reader is free to make judgements which differ from Mary's. In this way Mary Olivier: A Life although almost certainly influenced by Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage, nevertheless differs from the earlier novel, which allows the reader less freedom to dissent from Miriam Henderson's perception, because the reader has little evidence on which to do so.

Mary becomes the unwitting vehicle for irony, the chief importance of which is that it allows the reader to separate him/herself from Mary, enabling the reader to adopt a different perspective. Much of it focuses on the incident of Mr. Sutcliffe, the cultured neighbour, with a wife much older than himself, who apparently falls in love with Mary. Mary does not realise what is going on, but unwittingly betrays the truth to the reader by a whole series of observations. The reader is first alerted when Mary, talking to Sutcliffe at the age of eighteen, innocently, and with a very transparent cloak of anonymity discusses her failed love affair with Maurice Jourdain. She comments: 'He smiled to himself. He had funny, secret thoughts that you would never know.'<sup>21</sup> Much later, when she tells Mr. Sutcliffe she can't accompany his family to Agaye, she misses the depth of his distress:

A long pause. She noticed little things about him. The proud handsome corners of his mouth had loosened; his eyelids didn't fit nicely as they used to do; they hung slack from the eyebone  
(MO. p.261)

Mary observes without understanding, failing to understand that the changes in Sutcliffe are the result of her tidings. He comments, (of her brother, Mark)

"He knows what he wants .....Well. It's my fault. I should have known what I wanted. I should have taken you a year ago."

"If you had," she said, "it would have been all over now."

"I wonder, would it?"

For the life of her she couldn't imagine what he meant (MO. p.262).

It is the nearest Sutcliffe comes to openly declaring his love for Mary, but in her innocence she fails to recognise the hint. The more worldly reader however is capable of understanding the implications which the overt observations conceal.

She remains sublimely and innocently unconscious of the sufferings of Mrs. Sutcliffe, informing her brother Mark, who questions her about whether Mrs. Sutcliffe plays tennis:

"No. She's too old. Much older than he is."

"That'll do, Mary."

Mamma's eyes blinked. Her forehead was pinched with vexation. Her foot tapped on the floor (MO. p.239).

Mamma clearly has some inkling of the truth, which coincides with the reader's likely interpretation. This has the effect of implicating the reader in Mamma's lack of innocence. The curious effect is that reader, mother, the society in which Mary lives and the narrator, who implicitly makes available such an

alternative reading, assert a voice of worldly wisdom in contrast to Mary. Amongst other effects, this provides justification for the view that the narrator remains a separate voice in the text, distinguishable from the voice of Mary. It can be argued that Mary is simply naive, but I would dissent from this reading of the novel. The peace that Mary finally achieves is the consequence of a profound religious impulse which leads her to link her will with what she perceives as the will of God. Her honesty and openness of mind, with its accompanying lack of self-deception are the qualities which lead her along her difficult road.

It is Mary's innocence which leads her, unaware of the nature of Mr. Sutcliffe's regard for her, to say,

Mrs. Sutcliffe didn't count; she wouldn't do anything at Agaye, she would just trail about in the background, kind and smiling, in a shawl (MO. p.259)

She fails to draw the logical conclusion from her presumably accurate observation. Likewise, she observes and fails to understand the phenomenon that occurs when her visit coincides with Mrs. Sutcliffe's sewing party:

The last time she came on a Wednesday Mrs. Sutcliffe had popped out of the dining-room and made them go round to the tennis court by the back, so that they might not be seen from the windows. She wondered why Mrs. Sutcliffe was so afraid of them being seen, and why she had not looked quite pleased (MO. p.255).

The effect of the vein of irony which runs through all the Sutcliffe incidents in the novel is to create a different kind of ironic distance between reader and character. The reader is not here adopting a perspective important for interpreting the novel which Mary misses, since it is of no intrinsic importance that the reader should understand the nature of Mr. Sutcliffe's regard for Mary. Indeed the nature of his regard is revealed unambiguously by Nicholson at the end of the novel, but as I have already remarked, reading is a temporal activity and the importance of the ironic distance which the reader creates while reading is that it throws Mary's character into relief, and enables her to be seen at least partly from the outside as Miriam Henderson isn't, endowing the reader with the freedom to make his/her own judgements and separating Mary's consciousness from that of the narrator.

The characteristic of honesty with its inevitable consequence of delusions about her family stays with

Mary to the end. She fails to understand Mamma's objection to her spending time with Richard Nicholson, and rejects Nicholson's explanation:

"She knows enough to frighten her. She knows what I want ....I want to marry you, Mary."  
(This then was what she had been afraid of. But Mamma wouldn't have thought of it) (MO. p.346).

Once more the reader recognises Mary's underestimation of her mother's worldly wisdom and is him/herself implicated in that wisdom:

In this novel, as in The Three Sisters and The Helpmate the reader is invited to debate the issues of family relationships and of religious beliefs and practice.

The most important figure, apart from Mary herself, is undoubtedly Mamma, a traditional Victorian matriarch. The narrative form of the novel means that she is a much less obvious victim of irony, than the Vicar or even Rowcliffe, in The Three Sisters, although many readers are likely to interpret the character of Mamma in a hostile way. She is consistently exposed by final comment, often in relation to her manipulation of Mary. For example, a section of Chapter XX in 'Maturity' has described a conversation



between Mamma and Mary which has been concluded by Mary agreeing not to speak of her lack of religious belief, in order to preserve Mamma's respectability. The final paragraph reads: 'Mamma held her face up, like a child, to be kissed' (MO. p.171). The position of the final comment alerts the reader who chooses to read with an awareness of this device. The only other clue is the brief phrase, 'like a child' which is highlighted by its placing in the final line. It suggests, to a reader unsympathetic to Mamma, that she simulates likeness to a child, but is in fact a subtle manipulator, although of course many of Sinclair's readers might have thought her demand for compliance on Mary's part perfectly acceptable. One of Mamma's methods of attempting to control Mary is a possibly unconscious misunderstanding of her motives. For example Chapter XIII ends with a discussion in which Mary first confesses her lack of religious faith. Her mother refuses to take her seriously, pointing to her inexperience. Then the section concludes thus:

Not crying. Smiling. A sort of cunning  
and triumphant smile.  
"You just want an excuse for not  
learning those Thirty-Nine articles."  
(MO. p.114).

The ironic undercutting of Mamma is achieved partly by the words 'cunning' and 'triumphant' placed within

Mary's consciousness, but also by the position of the comment at the end of the section which underlines, for those readers sympathetic to Mary, the manipulative element in Mamma's treatment of her daughter. Her surface appearance of having perceived her daughter's ulterior motive apparently masks her own ulterior motive, although of course, it should again be pointed out that there is nothing in the text to prevent a reader in sympathy with Mamma's matriarchal attitudes, from reading the passage without irony, as simply drawing attention to Mary's laziness.

A strange attempt at consolation occurs much later in the novel, at the end of one of the sections in the volume, 'Maturity'. Mary has just cancelled her arrangements for a longed-for trip abroad with the Sutcliffes because of Roddy's illness. Mamma's attempted consolation concludes the chapter: "Well, anyhow," Mamma said, "you've laid in a good stock of underclothing" (MO. p.262). Nothing could better illustrate her profound insensitivity, and total lack of imagination, than these twelve words.

Nevertheless, the terms are capable of being substituted. What I have termed Mamma's lack of sensitivity and imagination might be characterised as sanity and common sense by a different reader.

The final comments which open up for the reader a critical response to Mamma's attitude to her daughter, are placed within Mary's consciousness. Some are articulated thoughts, and achieve added poignancy for this reason. Mamma's insensitivity is revealed by the visit to the City of London Cemetery which so upsets the child Mary. Mark reprimands Roddy for pointing out that they should not have been taken there. The narration is placed within the consciousness of Mary and concludes with the words: 'Darling Mamma. She had taken them because she thought they would like it. Because of the wagonette. Because she was brave, like Mark' (MO. p.57). The force of the irony derives from the contrast between what the reader may see as the supposed good will and bravery of Mamma, and these same qualities actually possessed by her daughter.

Unconscious irony on Mary's part is a device used several times in the novel, but here it is given greater emphasis by its position at the end of the section. A further two examples also derive from Mary's unawareness, as a child, of her mother's selfish and manipulative qualities, as well as from her own absolute honesty. This is conveyed without comment in a section remarkable for its economy. Mary has been found reading Shelley by Mr Propart. It is

worth quoting the two final paragraphs of the section,

Next morning the Shelleys were not in their place behind the curtain. Somebody had moved them to the top shelf. Catty brought the step ladder.

In the evening they were gone. Mr Propart must have borrowed them.' (MO. p.130).

It is not only Mamma but the whole repressive society of which she is a part which is condemned here. Mary's innocence is the source of the irony and is revealed by the delightful economy of the narrative, which to some extent implicates the worldly wise reader who is likely to supply the reason for the disappearance of the Shelleys. A less amusing and altogether sadder incident occurs when Mary has been removed from school at the request of a sympathetic head teacher because she fears Mary's lack of religious belief will be a corrupting influence. A series of half-truths and evasions finally convince Mary that she is going home because her mother misses her, although again they are unlikely to deceive the worldly sagacity of the reader. On the journey home she contemplates the difficulty of explaining her unconventional yet liberating religious views to her mother. The section concludes, 'Yet- perhaps- now that the miracle had happened' (MO. p.144). The miracle is her mother's supposed need for her, which the reader is likely to

consider to be non-existent. The comment evokes something of that pity observable in the use of the final comment in The Three Sisters, this time because of the inevitability of Mary's disillusionment. The reader, wherever his/her sympathies might lie can predict Mamma's savage reaction to Mary and again there is a sense of people trapped within a doomed relationship.

All these examples of irony signalled by a final comment relate to the relationship between Mary and her mother. It is important to note that the awareness of the possibilities of irony, or the interpretation given to it depends on a particular view of family relationships and ideals of womanhood. There are, and certainly were readers to whom Mamma will appear as a paragon of the sort of virtues suggested by Sarah Ellis, dutiful, a prudent housewife, courageous, and determined to guide her daughter's essentially sinful nature along the paths of righteousness and to keep her away from temptation.<sup>22</sup> Religious ideas are a crucial element in this novel because of the role they play in Mamma's attempted repression of Mary, but also because they are a matter of profound interest to the central character.

Mary's childish mind perceives that the God of whom

she is taught is an unpleasant, authoritarian figure. This is conveyed by her association of her father with 'Jehovah', and incidentally provides comment on Mary's father. Thus when he suddenly takes to being kind to her, in order to assuage his own jealousy of his wife's treatment of Mark and Dan, Mary, who is at this time seven years old, observes: 'Then suddenly, for no reason at all, he left off being Jehovah and began trying to behave like Mr. Batty' (MO. p.62). A few pages later, after the departure of Mark and Dan for school, Mary's consciousness records: 'Papa left off teasing and flying into tempers and looking like Jehovah and walking by himself in the cool of the evening' (MO. p.65). The statement is a delightful merging of the language of a seven-year old with the seductive rhythms of the Book of Genesis. The seven-year old accepts 'Jehovah' uncritically, but the connection she makes with her own tyrannical and all too human father provides an unconscious critique of the authoritarian, Old Testament style theology in which Mary is brought up, in which God all too easily appears to her childish imagination as a bad tempered old man. It is a view which might help the discerning reader to escape the seduction of Genesis, since it exposes the edifice of patriarchy which constructs Victorian society's attitude to both God and the family. This view is confirmed by her interpretation of

the meaning of The Passion: 'The Passion meant that God had flown into another temper and that Jesus was crucified to make him good again' (MO. p.51). The object of the irony created by Mary's unconsciously comical and incongruous connection of the revered deity of Christian worship with undignified behaviour such as flying into a temper, is the crude notion of 'atonement' which fits all too easily with the picture of a tyrannical Jehovah. Nevertheless to some readers the description would appear shocking and irreverent and might lead them to resist the irony. The novel offers no overt comment or explicit guidance on this matter.

Mary herself unwittingly records the hypocrisy of adult religious practices when she observes, after she and Roddy, recovering from whooping cough are sent to a different church in order to avoid passing on infection: 'But they had to go to church somewhere, whooping cough or no whooping cough, in order to get to Heaven' (MO. p.42). What appears to be a childish misunderstanding of the reasons for church attendance, implies that this is in fact the chief motive for such attendance, a motive which the adults around her would not admit to. The implication about adult attitudes is unconscious on Mary's part and left for the reader to draw. Again conservative Christians

will dissent but because the criticism is more muted and less outrageous they might at this point question their own actions rather than completely resist the irony.

In Mary Olivier: A Life with its restriction to a single consciousness, the opportunities for irony are far fewer than in the more overtly polyphonic novels which I have so far discussed. Nevertheless the text offers the reader sufficient opportunity to interpret the central character. Mary may be judged as innocent or naive or essentially self-deceiving or as a combination of some or all of these. The text in no way directs or guides. In the case of Mamma, the relationship of Mary and Mamma offers the reader two possible interpretations - good mother or insensitive manipulator. The text as I read it suggests the latter view - but the opportunity is there to take the former. What happens here is that final comments, channelled through Mary's consciousness, alert the reader to a gap between the perspectives of the matriarchal figure of the righteous Mamma and her naive but sensitive and imaginative daughter, a gap which the reader may bridge with his/her own judgements. The child Mary's religious ideas likewise open the debate on religious beliefs and practice to the reader through an ironic device which



is akin to defamiliarisation. They would have shocked and offended many of Sinclair's contemporaries but many modern readers will see them as exposing the outrageous anthropomorphism of the doctrine of the atonement as well as the repressive attitudes of the late Victorian era in which the novel is set. More than in any of the novels so far discussed, the separable narrative voice is reduced, and the reader's judgement is proportionately given free play.

## VI

Life and Death of Harriett Frean belongs to Sinclair's experimental phase, and like Mary Olivier: A Life focuses on a single consciousness. However, it differs from the earlier novel in that, although stream of consciousness techniques are employed to reveal Harriett's state of mind, there is a more readily discernible narrative voice whose distance from Harriett provides a structural pivot for the novel. The distance is the disparity between what Harriett thinks of herself, or persuades herself to think of herself, and what the narrator apparently thinks of Harriett, although the narrative voice is never explicit. Many of the gaps opening up possibilities for ironic interpretation of the

character of the virtuous daughter focus on the gap between Harriett's unconscious and conscious thoughts. Such disparity is an increasing interest of Sinclair's, and, as has been seen, it plays an important role in other aspects of her narrative technique. It is presumably related to her interest in the work of Freud, and the influence of the unconscious. Harriett differs very much from Mary. She is a much more one-dimensional character, totally lacking in Mary's wide-ranging intellectual interests although the extent of the difference between the two characters' avoidance of self-knowledge, conscious or unconscious, must be left for the reader to judge. I would argue there is a considerable difference, Harriett being far more culpable than Mary.

The narrative voice asserts itself almost imperceptibly, most frequently in the area of Harriett's repressed sexuality. It is never directly referred to in the novel, but I would argue that it provides the groundwork for a coherent reading. For example, after Harriett has learnt of the death of Priscilla's baby and her hope that one day she will have another:

Harriett was aware of a sudden tightening of her heart, of a creeping depression that weighed on her brain and worried it. She thought this was her pity for Priscilla:23

The juxtaposition of the two statements creates its own irony. The reader is left to supply an alternative explanation, the most obvious one being sexual jealousy and the fear that Priscilla will have another baby, although it is worth pointing out that many of Sinclair's original readers would not have acknowledged the possibility of such emotions in a woman, and therefore would not have read the comment in this way.

Sometimes Harriett's self-deception is more conscious. When she hears of Prissie's illness there is a hint of this in her reaction: 'She kept on saying to herself she couldn't bear to think of Prissie paralysed' (HF. p.68) The line between self-deception which is conscious, and that which is not, is narrowly drawn and this example seems close to it. It can of course be read, not as an example of self-deception at all but as a simple statement, since the only signal is 'kept on saying to herself'. Like the example above, an ironic reading depends on a reader who is sensitive to the dimensions of sexuality being explored in the novel.

A clearer and more obviously presented case of self-deception is Harriett's visit to Sidmouth where the newly re-married Robin lives, 'she told herself

that she wanted to see the place where she had been so happy with her mother (HF. p.120-2). The qualification, 'she told herself' strongly invites the reader to supply the notion of self-deception. This suggestion of self-deception in relation to Robin, is probably available to a wider range of readers, particularly amongst Sinclair's contemporaries since it requires the reader only to acknowledge romantic rather than sexual jealousy on Harriett's part.

The most flagrant case of self-deception concerns Harriett's suppressed guilt at her refusal to marry Robin, this time after he has remarried and his second wife, referring to his pathetic state, points out that he should never have married Priscilla, 'But Harriett's mind refused obstinately to connect the two Robins and Priscilla' (HF. p.134).

Except for the last example, where the narrator's judgement is made explicit by the use of the word, 'obstinately', almost all these examples of self-deception contain very similar qualifying phrases which convey the ironic element, 'she thought', 'saying to herself', 'she told herself', 'she made herself believe'. They indicate a careful distancing of the narrator from her central character, almost without the element of humour normally associated with

irony. Nevertheless, the conclusion that Harriett is deceiving herself is only implied, and the reader is free to ignore it, and certainly to ignore Harriett's sexual motivation.

There are only two direct confrontations in the novel; between Harriett and Robin, and between Harriett and Robin's niece. The narrator's position in the latter conflict is suggested subtly by the description of Harriett during the confrontation: 'Harriett's face smiled its straight, thin-lipped smile, the worn, grooved chin arrogantly lifted' (HF. p.145).

'Thin-lipped' suggests a great deal about Harriett, which a reader alert to the issues raised in the novel may develop, since lips carry connotations of sensuality and express it most completely when they are at their fullest.

Most of the examples of ironic undercutting in Life and Death of Harriett Freen are of the same order, qualifying phrases which to a more or less obvious extent, imply difference between the rarely glimpsed narrative consciousness and the fully explored figural consciousness, although occasionally the strategy is one of significant vocabulary or omission. Most of the comments concern Harriett's attitude to her would-be lover, Robin, and his wife

Priscilla, which is the area of the novel in which Harriett's denial of her sexual nature is most obviously explored but an ironic reading of many of these comments, as in the case of The Three Sisters which deals with similar issues, will be open only to those readers whose views diverge from the conventional construction of womanhood, which is explored elsewhere. Other readers may well see Harriett as the perfect daughter, just as Mary's Mamma may be seen as the perfect mother, since she conforms to those ideals of womanhood put forward by Sarah Ellis and others. An example of such a reading is provided by the following comment by a contemporary reviewer:

The heroine of Harriett Freen shows such admirable qualities as love for her parents and self-sacrifice: ...the heroine provides relief from the portrayals of emancipated women all too frequent in contemporary fiction.<sup>24</sup>

However, such a reading is, I would argue challenged by the use of the repeated phrase, 'behaving beautifully', although, as in the case of the repetition of 'goodness' and 'sweetness' applied to Mary Carteret, its ironic force is dependent on the signification attached to the terms. However, the technique is developed in a different direction in Life and Death of Harriett Freen. There is a sense in which the key phrase of the whole novel is 'behaving

beautifully'. There are obvious similarities to Mary Carteret's 'goodness' and 'sweetness', but there is the important difference that the phrase comes from the thoughts and words of characters within the novel, and not from the narrator. The first example of the use of the phrase in its entirety occurs in what I have elsewhere described as the most crucial incident in the novel, Harriett's single attempt at rebellion, her excursion into Black's Lane. The phrase first comes from Harriett's father who tells her that they want her 'To behave beautifully' (HF. p.23). It therefore represents an instrument of control used very effectively by her parents against the young Harriett. Its emphasis is on surface appearance, rather than innate moral qualities, and it strikes a sympathetic chord within Harriett, who has already learnt after the school feast incident that, 'being good was being beautiful like Mamma' (HF. p.15). The phrase carries its own irony, created by the incongruity of the terms, and is the false premise on which Harriett conducts her entire life. After her escapade in the lane, she sees her mother, 'tall and beautiful in her silver-gray gown' (HF. p.19), and her mother focuses on the beauty of the flowers Harriett has picked, to divert her from her own naughtiness and from anything she may have observed in Black's Lane, thus converting the beauty of the flowers into an instrument of

repression. Consequently the soil has been well prepared in Harriett's mind and the idea takes root.

The phrase acquires ironic overtones, as soon as it is picked up by Harriett two paragraphs later: 'The first minute of tomorrow she would begin behaving beautifully;' (HF. p.24). The childish tones suggest the childishness of the idea. 'Beautiful' becomes the watchword of Harriett's life with her parents. She and her mother smile at one another when they come to the 'beautiful places' in Evangeline (HF. p.26).

Something of the way Harriett must appear to outsiders is indicated by the fact that Prissie is at first afraid of her 'because she behaved so beautifully' HF. (p.30). For the reader who knows the origins of the behaviour which so impresses Prissie, there is an element of irony. Later Robin declares, 'Do you know what a dear little face you have, Hary? It 's so clear and still and it behaves so beautifully' (HF. p.59).

The repetition of the phrase by others suggests that Harriett has made her rule of conduct take over her whole personality. There is a further irony in that it is Harriett's beautiful behaviour which will make her reject the declaration which Robin is about to make. Later, when Harriett reflects on this in the years that follow, 'She felt a thrill of pleasure in her beautiful behaviour, and a thrill of pride in



remembering that he had loved her more than Priscilla' (HF. p.67) Here the repetition of the word 'thrill' with its suggestion of surface excitement, combined with the effect of superficiality achieved by yet another repetition of 'beautiful behaviour' are sufficient to convey a strong tone of irony. The irony is further emphasised by the fact that although she regards herself as someone who behaves beautifully, she actually derives pleasure from the misery of Robin and Priscilla. The falseness of 'beautiful behaviour' becomes more apparent than ever when Harriett, replying to a letter of condolence on her father's death, writes of feelings which she does not possess: 'She only felt that to feel it was the beautiful and proper thing' (HF. p.93). The repetition of 'beautiful' is sufficient to convey to the reader the source of Harriett's perplexity, that she thinks only in surface appearances, but Harriett herself is unaware or only partially aware of this. She has, in fact, replaced the word 'good' in her consciousness, by the word 'beautiful'.

This is emphasised by the next occurrence of the word, after Harriett, now alone, has dismissed her servant Maggie who has had a baby: 'After the first shock and three months' loss of Maggie, it occurred to Harriett that the beautiful thing would be to take Maggie

back...' (P136) There is obvious irony here in the implicit connection between the loss of Maggie and the feeling of virtue in taking her back, but it is reinforced by the repetition of 'beautiful', which the reader is by now likely to be aware of as an inadequate substitute for 'good'.

There is only one moment in Harriett's adult life when she seriously questions the actions of her youth: when she is challenged by Mona Floyd, about her rejection of Robin: 'She thought of herself. Of her own moral beauty. She was a selfish fool' (HF. p.144). Harriett allows herself a few moments' doubt: 'Was it true that she had sacrificed Robin and Priscilla and Beatrice to her parents' idea of moral beauty?' (HF. p.147-8). There is self-questioning here, but it is momentary. Henceforward Harriett deteriorates rapidly, becoming aware of the 'crumbling away, bit by bit, of her beautiful and honourable self' (HF. p.148-9). The irony again lies in her continued use of the 'beautiful' which she never again questions. Finally, and typically, she undergoes an operation, walking to the theatre with tightly compressed lips, lest she say anything improper under the anaesthetic. The penultimate section of the novel is a single line which reads, 'She had behaved beautifully,' a superbly ironic phrase, utterly inappropriate in Harriett's

life and death situation, and combining both the irony of the repeated phrase, and of its position as a final comment. It achieves the dimension of a comment on Harriett's entire life.

There are similarities between Harriett's behaving beautifully, and Mary Carteret's 'sweetness' and 'goodness'. Both are concerned with Victorian and post-Victorian ideas of acceptable female behaviour and both are sources of satisfaction to the characters to whom they are applied. Furthermore, in both novels, ironic interpretation depends on a reader's view of reality, constructed by his/her own cultural paradigm, or at least by the extent of his/her willingness to question it. In The Three Sisters, the phrase itself becomes a subject of exploration. Its meaning is built up as the novel progresses, and its use by other characters conveys something about their own psychological make-up. Life and Death of Harriett Frean is a very different sort of novel, and, in many respects exceptional amongst Sinclair's novels. It is primarily symbolic. The phrase 'behaving beautifully' acquires its full meaning from the context in which it is first introduced, which is a carefully constructed scene with strong visual elements such as the red campion and Mamma's dress. The phrase itself conveys superficiality, assisted in

this by its alliterative qualities. There is a non-naturalistic element in the novel, which accounts for the ready use of the phrase by Prissie, Robin and Mona, who are not being explored in themselves, but merely reflecting Harriett's consciousness. The novel works by economy and suggestion, and the short phrase and its variations, carry a range of suggestions about the central character every time they are used. It goes without saying that this very economy, by creating elisions within the text provides space for the reader's voice.

Life and Death of Harriett Fream, in spite of its economy, does not suppress the narrative voice totally. The narrator's qualification of Harriett's thoughts runs like a thread through the novel, and yet the elliptical nature of the text prevents the qualification ever being amplified or explained. The ironic reading which I have suggested, which sees Harriett as a sexually repressed figure who lives more and more by external appearances, must come and can only come from the reader.

I have argued that what might be described as the invitation to read ironically, is an invitation to the reader to add his/her voice to the voices of the text and his/her perception of reality to that conveyed by the text. Irony does not direct and prescribe interpretation and indeed its very recognition within the text is subjective. I have considered novels which do not have a narrator who explicitly judges events and characters. Such novels leave the reader greater freedom to read ironically, since there is no pressure to make the ironic reading conform to the stated narrative judgement. This is not to say that a narrative judgement is not discernible. In the case of The Helpmate it is foregrounded at the end of the text by a sustained passage of psychonarration. The other novels under discussion, particularly Life and Death of Harriett Freen and Mary Olivier: A Life offer less indications of narrative judgement, although in most cases the interpretations I have offered are ones which I believe to be in accordance with clues offered in the text to the narrator's and ultimately the author's judgement. However two points are important here. First, this opinion is subjective. The same ironic loci may be read differently, sometimes without irony, with equal validity by other readers, and I have

pointed out examples of the sort of readings which might be made. Secondly, whether or not I assent to the narrative voice, the text gives me space to make such assent or to withhold it. In the case particularly of The Tree of Heaven I have offered some readings which I judge to be at variance with the narrative voice and I suspect, in so far as I can judge to be at variance with the author's intention. Furthermore there are several occasions when a variety of judgements might be made in accordance with, or at least not opposed to, the narrative voice. The interpretation of Mary Olivier's motivation and her reliability as a narrator is, in the judgement of this reader at least, a matter left entirely to the reader's judgement. The most notable example of such freedom of interpretation for feminist readers is the approval or disapproval of Frances's preoccupation with her family.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### I

My treatment of Sinclair's approach to the representation of reality has acknowledged in passing, among other features, her commitment to what might be broadly termed feminism. Her perception of reality will doubtless have been structured by such views, but those views themselves will have been structured by other discourses influential at the time. Thus, it is hardly to be expected that her feminism will correspond to any modern version of feminism. Her attempts to portray the dilemmas of contemporary women are themselves subject to the forces which have shaped these women's dilemmas.

Feminist critics have found a rich source of material in the female characters of nineteenth-century novels, especially those written by women, and have observed the frequent juxtaposing of contrasting characters.<sup>1</sup> Such juxtaposition is, of course, a common rhetorical device as old as narrative itself, but the form of the juxtaposition is culturally determined. In the realm of Victorian fiction, female opposites can frequently be categorised in terms of cultural stereotypes:- dutiful wife, innocent

prospective wife, fallen woman, old maid. What these potentially oppositional stereotypes reflect is the tendency to define women in relation to men, clearly indicated for example in the titles of Sarah Ellis's exhortatory works or in the titles of magazines and periodicals directed at the female market.<sup>2</sup> It can therefore be argued that the female character does not exist within Victorian culture, or that if she exists, it is only in fragmented form. The most exciting studies of female opposites have explored the links between such opposites, seeing them as constituting a submerged myth of female power or an unconscious expression of suppressed rage.<sup>3</sup> Both these studies argue a link between oppositional characters, the most notable example being the link between Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason. Implicit in such arguments, in whatever direction they are pursued, is the suggestion made above, that women characters are not fictional representations of complete women but represent only aspects of womanhood, and that a representation of a complete woman can be found only by combining two or even more fictional characters.

Sinclair's early novels can be analysed in terms of oppositional female characters, which suggests that her view of womanhood is in part constructed by the cultural paradigms within which she writes.

Mr and Mrs Nevill Tyson, her second novel, published in 1898, is the tragic story of a man and woman who marry for love, whose marriage is destroyed, not by any of the social or economic factors which conventionally blight lovers in nineteenth-century fiction but by the wife, Molly's, loss of physical beauty after a fire from which, ironically, she saves her husband. He, even more than she, loves only with his senses and leaves her in order to fight in the Soudan where he dies, shortly after hearing of Molly's death. Molly is portrayed throughout the novel as a beautiful woman, possessed by a childlike devotion to Nevill, her epitaph being the last words of the letter to Tyson which announces her death: "Her brain could never have been very strong." At that he laughed - horribly, aloud.'<sup>4</sup> At one point she is portrayed as reading Shakespeare, (significantly Othello), and the narrating consciousness, perhaps that of Tyson himself speculates:

Perhaps she had said to herself: "Some day I shall be old, and very likely I shall be ugly. If I am stupid too, he will be bored, and perhaps he will leave me. So now - I am going to be his intellectual companion" (NT. p.199).

The passage obliquely suggests that beauty and brains might be regarded as alternatives, a point reinforced by the fact that Molly's efforts apparently come to

nothing. She is a woman of beauty and passion, not of brains, and the death of her beauty, with the inevitable loss of her lover, signals her disintegration. The suggestion is reinforced by the presence in the novel of Miss Batchelor, who has no function in the plot other than the purely incidental. The opening chapter of the novel begins by establishing the fact of Tyson's marriage to Molly and goes on to describe not Molly but Miss Batchelor. She is introduced in the following terms: 'Miss Batchelor was clever - frightfully clever - but she never showed up well in public; she had a nervous manner...' (NT. pp.2-3). The character's rhetorical relationship to Molly is made clear even before Molly herself is introduced:

...it [his marriage] was more than a mistake; it was madness. He ought to have married some powerful woman like Miss Batchelor, a woman with ideas and money and character, to say nothing of an inviolable social reputation. But men like Tyson never do what they ought. Miss Batchelor was clever, and he hated clever women (NT. p.11).

The two women thus echo a familiar pattern of opposition in nineteenth-century fiction - reflecting the contrast between intellect and surface attractiveness to be seen in such pairs as Rosamond Vincey and Dorothea Brooke. In Sinclair's novel,

however, the opposition is more starkly stated, and stated in the opening chapter, not revealed through the slow unfolding of the plot. Even her earliest novels mark a break with the traditions of nineteenth-century fiction, in that, for the most part, they deal with the progress, often the breaking of marriages rather than their making. For the significantly named Miss Batchelor, there is no Will Ladislaw, and in any case the heroine is Molly, although it should be noted that Miss Batchelor is a forerunner of Sinclair's later strong heroines: Gwenda, Dorothy and Mary. Like them she is defined, at least in part, by what she reads, significantly, The Principles of Psychology 'lying about as the light literature of her drawing-room table' (NT. pp.178-179). Psychology is apparently already an influence on Sinclair herself, who, it is reasonable to believe is the origin of all the strong heroines.

The novel shows Sinclair's lifelong attention to the determinist elements in contemporary psychology. Both Molly and Batchelor are treated as victims of something beyond their control. Of Batchelor, the narrator comments with sympathetic irony:

I am not going to be hard on her. To some women a bitterer thing than not to be loved is not to be allowed to love.

And when two women insist on loving the same man, the despised one is naturally sceptical as to the strength and purity, and eternity of the other's feelings (NT. p.90).

Like Sinclair's subsequent strong heroines, Batchelor is apparently all too capable of love while the verb 'insist' has some implication of a driving force beyond Batchelor's control.

In the case of Molly, the presence of something beyond her control is made even clearer. After she has addressed a question about Tyson's past to his friend Stanistreet, the latter observes her thus:

She was sitting bolt upright, staring out over the vague fields; she seemed to have uttered the words unconsciously, as if at the dictation of some familiar spirit (NT p.47).

It is the first occurrence of the word 'unconsciously' in Sinclair's fiction, and indicates an early interest in the workings of the mind. Later Molly is seen as the victim of her body:

It seems a simple thing to believe in the divinity of motherhood, when you have only seen it in the paintings of one or two old masters...But sometimes the divine thing chooses some morsel of humanity like Mrs Nevill Tyson, struggles with and overpowers it, rending the small body, spoiling the delicate beauty (NT. p.77).

Readers may feel some pity for nineteenth-century 'anti-heroines' created by women writers, such as Cynthia Kirkpatrick, Hetty Sorrel and Rosamond Vincey, victims of their own folly and ambition, but none are portrayed so completely as helpless and tragic victims of their own nature. Molly is beautiful, sensual and stupid, a stereotype of an aspect of womanhood, perhaps best represented by the sort of renaissance painting which in the shape of 'Cleopatra' calls forth such vitriolic condemnation from Lucy Snowe.<sup>5</sup> Her fictional opposite, Miss Batchelor is clever and powerful, reads difficult books, and in spite of a capacity for love, is condemned to remain unmarried, yet another stereotype of womanhood, the old maid.<sup>6</sup>

The most successful of Sinclair's early novels, The Divine Fire, published in 1904, is a psychological study of the moral development of a young poet, Savage Keith Rickman. The role of women in the novel is made explicit by the following comment:

Poppy had drawn him by his senses;  
Flossie by his senses and his heart;  
Lucia held him by his senses, his heart,  
his intellect, his will, by his spirit,  
by his genius, by the whole man. <sup>7</sup>

Women characters thus have the essentially subordinate role of charting the development of the hero, of

acting almost symbolically as representations of aspects of his nature. Such a role inevitably involves the sort of fragmentation into cultural stereotypes discussed above. Interestingly, each of the three women is represented in art form at some point in the novel. Poppy is probably the most stereotypical, representing that late nineteenth-century and Edwardian variation on the fallen woman, the music hall artist. At one point, she is described as, 'the abandoned figure of Low Comedy incarnate' (DF. p.60). Flossie too, in a quite literal sense, apparently creates her own portrait although it is more accurately to be thought of as a portrait created for her by the culture within which she lives, 'framed beautifully and appropriately in white silk, embroidered with blue forget-me-nots by Flossie's clever hands' (DF. p.295), an icon of respectable womanhood. Lucia's artistic representation is as the subject of Rickman's sequence of twenty-nine sonnets which, while it is much less suggestive of Victorian/Edwardian views of womanhood, evokes a centuries old tradition of the reification of women into the subject of poetry.

The role of these three women in the novel is inevitably oppositional. Lucia shares some of the features of the earlier Miss Batchelor, but her



intellectual interests are given much greater emphasis. She is revealed from the beginning as a character of some intellectual stature, symbolised by her association with her family library, The Harden Library. When Rickman undertakes to catalogue the library, he finds that she has already embarked upon the task and she assists with its completion. He is surprised to learn that she is well-read in Greek drama, although, unlike those other strong women, Mary Olivier and Gwenda Carteret, she has read nothing of philosophy. Much later she is forced by poverty to become a career woman: 'She had been working for her living as music mistress in a women's college somewhere in the south of England' (DF. p.437). Her friend Miss Roots, herself a working woman, reacts defensively to Rickman's horror when he hears of this, pointing out that, 'at the end of her first year she had the pick of the students waiting for her.' (DF. p.438), thus making clear the view that her work has value in its own right, a value which the ardent sonneteer is perhaps not over-anxious to acknowledge. Indeed the prevalence of Rickman's viewpoint accounts for a certain ambivalence in the presentation of Lucia. The crucial difference between Lucia and Batchelor is the former's physical weakness, observed by Rickman early in the novel, 'Lucia was not strong' (DF. p.159), which results in two illnesses, one of which is a case

of hysterical paralysis.<sup>8</sup> As will be seen later, such physical symptoms are normally ascribed to characters on the other side of Sinclair's oppositional fence. It is hard to imagine either Miss Batchelor or the later trio of Dorothy, Gwenda and Mary welcoming the courtship of Rickman who speaks of giving Lucia the divine fire 'to warm your little hands by' (DF. p.661). In fact it is surely more than pedantic to point out that little hands are not normally possessed by tall women, and Rickman attests to Lucia's height early in the novel, 'for this lady was tall' (DF. p.86). Tall women, however, are perhaps uncomfortable to love and the incongruity reveals a certain contradiction at the heart of the character of Lucia. She is a strong character, and yet her role in the novel is a subordinate one. Sinclair apparently finds difficulty in reconciling the strong intellectual woman with the love object or woman of passion. This perhaps accounts for her lack of satisfaction with the novel which Theophilus Boll attributes to a sense that her two main characters contain too much of herself.<sup>9</sup>

Much of the character of Lucia is in fact presented in terms of what she is not. There is an attempt to convey her as beautiful, and yet in spite of the suggestion quoted at the beginning of this discussion, that she fulfils every aspects of Keith's needs,

including those of his senses, there is a clear suggestion that her beauty is somehow removed from sensuality, and therefore inevitably from sexuality:

Of her beauty he grew every minute more aware. It was not of the conspicuous and conquering kind; it carried no flaming banner of triumphant sex...all her colour and her light were, where her soul was, in her mouth and eyes (DF. p.100-101).

Later in the novel, Flossie's friend Ada Bishop, underlining the oppositional nature of the characters, puts the matter somewhat more bluntly: "You've got a bust, and she hasn't. Gentlemen don't care to look at a girl who's as flat as two boards back and front' (DF. p.467).

She might have added that neither do they care for a woman who is clever, which was Miss Batchelor's problem. On the surface the narrative suggests that Rickman is not to be limited in such a way, although the modern reader may doubt the completeness of his admiration for the woman of intellect. There is no such ambiguity about Lucia's cousin, Horace Jewdwine, the man whom Lucia is expected to marry. Early in the novel he congratulates himself that, 'She had none of the nasty tricks that clever women have, always on the look out to go one better and to catch you tripping' (DF. p.13).

His view reflects that of their family, for the Harden Library with which Lucia is closely connected from the first, and which ultimately unites her with Rickman has previously been devoid of female influence. The History of Harmouth's account of the Library: 'was silent also as to the ladies of that house, beyond drawing attention to the curious fact that no woman had ever been permitted to inherit the Harden Library' (DF. p.85).

Lucia therefore represents something of a rebel, in spite of the smallness of her hands and the increasing ill-health, which, towards the end of the novel, gives an impression of vulnerability. For all her apparent correctness, she is a rebel too in her behaviour. Escaping from the chaperoned splendour of Edith Jewdine's home in Hampstead, she finds freedom living at close quarters with Rickman and a motley collection of her social inferiors in unfashionable Bloomsbury: 'In the fine air of Hampstead she had been white and languid and depressed; here in Bloomsbury she had a faint colour' (DF. p.457). The contrast suggests the recurring motifs of rooms, houses, railings and boundaries within the plots of women's novels.<sup>10</sup> Later she takes the audacious step of proposing marriage to Rickman. Thus a close analysis reveals her to be a morally stronger character than the

physically stronger Miss Batchelor.

If Miss Batchelor is at least in part represented in the character of Lucia, then Molly reappears divided between Flossie and Poppy. Flossie has Molly's attractiveness, while Poppy has her sensuality, and at least something of her devotion. Flossie, by far the least likeable of the three women, does not belong to the crucial opposition between intellect and passion which I wish to pursue. She is the ideal of Victorian respectability, passive and manipulative, to live again as Mary Carteret, possessed of neither intellect nor passion. She encounters books only to dust them, and her lack of any real feeling can be gauged by the ease with which she exchanges Rickman for Spinks.

Poppy's passion is directly evoked only once, in the scene with Rickman early in the novel:

it bent forward and put out its mouth (for it had a mouth, this extraordinary flower) and kissed him...She laughed wide-mouthed, her head flung back, her face foreshortened, her white throat swelled and quivering (DF. p.60).

In a later novel, Kitty Tailleure, where the issue of sexual passion is much more central, a similar flower image is used to convey sexuality. Later Poppy's sexual experience is tentatively suggested: 'If she

knew the secret of the world, she would not have told it to Ricky-ticky; he was much too young. Men, in Poppy's code of morality, were different' (DF. pp.55-56).

Any more explicit evocation of Poppy's sexual nature might have offended Edwardian sensibilities. The music hall performer is after all only a slightly sanitised version of the fallen woman, as Rickman's opinion after he has met Lucia makes clear: 'To advertise a little painted - he disposed of poor Poppy in a powerful word which would have given her propriety a fit if it could have heard him' (DF. pp.248). And yet, in spite of the implied insult, Poppy needs none of the pity readers feel for Hetty or Ruth or Tess, or for her predecessor, Molly. Poppy is brilliantly and unashamedly proclaimed by her room:

Portraits of Poppy on the walls, in every conceivable and inconceivable attitude. Poppy's canary in the window, in a cage hung with yellow gauze. Poppy's mandoline in an easy chair by itself. Poppy's hat on the grand piano, tumbling head over heels among a litter of coffee cups...a pair of shoes...In the waste paper basket a bouquet... cigarette ash and spent vestas... Two immense mirrors facing each other... (DF. p.54).

The scene is the reverse of Flossie's propriety, of the care and anxiety with which she furnishes her future home, and the reverse too of the retiring self-effacing ideal of womanhood to which Flossie pretends, and which temporarily ensnares Lucia until she finally escapes. There is another characteristic which Poppy shares with Lucia rather than Flossie, the genuineness of her affection. Her fondness for Rickman or for any man will never be immortalised as a great love affair but it is proved by her warning to him, long after he has left her: "'Why? Because I think he owes you something. And that's a grudge. It isn't my business, but if I were you, Rickets, I'd pay him off and have done with him"' (DF. p.322), and by the fact that she alone among his friends and acquaintances tries to find him when he has fallen on hard times. Admittedly there may be something of the stereotypical 'tart with the heart of gold' in this portrait, but it is given credibility by the contrast between Poppy and the self-seeking Flossie. In terms of intellect, however, there is no suggestion that Poppy's is any more developed than Flossie's. Early in the novel, in response to Jewdwine's, 'I didn't know you cultivated that sort of person', Rickman's tone of reply 'implied that the soil was rather too light for that' (DF. p.36).

Lucia and Poppy may be seen as oppositional characters who reflect the opposition of Miss Batchelor and Molly Tyson. The intellectual and strong minded woman is opposed to the woman of sensuality and passion who has no intellectual attainments. However there are differences between the two oppositions. Unlike her predecessor, Lucia attains happiness in marriage, and this seems to entail some capitulation to vulnerability and physical weakness. More interestingly, the oppositional characters in this novel share some characteristics. They both show themselves capable of living outside the boundaries of what is socially acceptable, and they both show themselves capable of genuine, disinterested kindness. It is important to note that in these respects they differ from the character in the novel who adheres most closely to the social norm, Flossie.

At this comparatively early stage in the development of Sinclair's fiction an important shared interest has been identified between the woman of intelligence and the woman of passion. They both find themselves outside the narrow construction of womanhood created by the demands of the patriarchal family within contemporary culture. Although Lucia eventually marries, the marriage is responsible for the paradoxical elements within her character.



## II

At this point I wish to digress from the question of the central opposition I have been discussing, to examine in more detail one side of the opposition, that which in some respects resembles the cultural construct of the fallen woman. The fallen woman figures quite prominently in three of the four novels written between 1907 and 1913. The first of these is the character of Maggie, a minor but not insignificant character in The Helpmate, published in 1907.

It has to be said that Maggie exists primarily as a function of the plot. It is necessary to provide a woman with whom Walter Majendie may be unfaithful without being responsible for her ruin, and this dictates certain aspects of her character. However she is developed beyond the strict requirements of the plot. Maggie has fallen before Majendie encounters her, in an attempt to discharge his friend Gorst's obligations to her. Gorst declares: 'I'd marry her if I'd been the first and only one. I'd marry her if I were sure I'd be the last.'<sup>11</sup> Of course on one level this simply reflects the frequently observed inequality between the sexes. Once one man has seduced Maggie, then Gorst and Majendie, characters who are treated with sympathy in spite of their

faults, are free to use her and discard her as they choose. Social and economic pressures are likely to drive a fallen woman into further falls even if it is the somewhat splendid fall of Hardy's 'Ruined Maid'.<sup>12</sup> However, significantly, it is not economic want that drives Maggie, as is shown by the brief account of Maggie's history:

ever since she was nine she had been waiting and wondering. For there always had been somebody whom Maggie loved insanely. First it was the little boy who lived in the house opposite at home... Then it was the big boy in her father's shop who gave her chocolates one day and snubbed her cruelly the next... Then it was the young man who came to tune the piano in the back parlour. Then the arithmetic master in the little boarding-school they sent her to. And then... it was one of the young gentlemen who studied at the Vicarage; he was engaged to Maggie for a whole term... At last, on an evil day for Maggie, it was one of the gentlemen (not so young) staying up at "the big house"... And so Maggie went on her predestined way (H. p.206).

Maggie is no Hetty Sorrell, driven by ambition. In fact the latter character has much more in common with the Flossies and Mary Carterets of Sinclair's world. The passage implies that she is driven by emotional and sexual need, innate and inescapable, which fact is conveyed by the word 'predestined'. 'Predestined' is used to describe Maggie on three separate occasions in the short section of the novel which she occupies.

Sinclair's language when she talks of characters such as Maggie being 'predestined' or, in other cases, 'foredoomed' may well have been suggested by the work of the contemporary psychologist, Henry Maudsley.<sup>13</sup> It reflects Sinclair's interest in psychology, a suggestion reinforced by the briefly mentioned intervention of a doctor who has told Maggie's father that, 'there was no sense in which the poor girl could be held responsible' (H. p.207). Significantly her father 'called such madness sin' (H. p.207). Thus Sinclair draws attention to two opposing ways of judging Maggie's conduct, viewing it as either the consequence of innate instinct, or of wilful deviation. It is also important to note at this point that Maggie possibly suffers from a hysterical illness in the form of anorexia. Majendie offers a rational explanation, 'Had the little thing been starving herself to save enough to repay him?' (H. p.193) but Maggie's landlady offers the opinion, 'I think she's fretted herself ill' (H. p.197).

At this point I wish to digress briefly to discuss the influence of psychology on Sinclair's work.

Sinclair's novels before The Helpmate show an awareness of the findings of contemporary psychology. I have pointed out, above, the suggestion that an unconscious force within Molly Tyson prompts her to

ask Stanistreet about Tyson's past. The portrait of Flossie in The Divine Fire owes much to Darwinian psychology. Rickman's nickname for her, 'the Beaver' is derived from her instinctive desire to build a home. The force which drives her is made explicit in the following passage:

They were both [Rickman and Flossie] blissfully unaware that Nature cares nothing about love, but was bent upon using them for the only end she does care about, the end that gives to love the illusion of its own eternity (DF. p.422).14

It is inconceivable that someone of Sinclair's intellectual stature and wide-ranging tastes (attested to by both her published writings and the partially autobiographical fictional portraits of strong women) should not have been aware of the contributions made to psychology by writers such as Darwin, Maudsley, Spencer, Janet and Ellis. Contemporary psychology offered a view of the human mind which modern feminists in particular find disturbingly essentialist and deterministic.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless such a view represents an advance on the moralistic psychology of the early and mid nineteenth century reflected in the attitude of Maggie's father, which sees all individuals as being in conscious control of their own destinies, and it enables Sinclair to avoid the

moralistic censure which even the most sympathetic of her female predecessors apply to their fallen women.<sup>16</sup> Maggie is not doomed to face deportation or a heroic death from fever after the manner of Hetty or Ruth, but rather, the novel hints strongly that honourable marriage awaits her in the form of Steve Pearson, of whom his father says: 'He's a good lad and he'll look after 'er. he'd give his 'ead to marry her. Only she wouldn't look at 'im' (H. p.271).

In her discussion of The Three Sisters, Zegger offers a useful summary of the contrast between the ideas of Freud and Janet, suggesting that Sinclair favours Freud's ideas and those of Havelock Ellis because they emphasise the repression of sexual desire as a cause of hysterical and neurotic behaviour, while Janet de-emphasises sex and regards hysteria as a consequence of pathological heredity.<sup>17</sup> However this may be to suggest a polarity evident only to historical hindsight. Her point about Freud's emphasis on sex is undoubtedly true.<sup>18</sup> However it is not quite true to suggest that Janet believed that hysterics 'are somehow weak people'. He argues in fact that 'Hysteria may attack very different persons - rich and poor, intelligent people and fools, virtuous and vicious persons.'<sup>19</sup> There is some continuity between Janet's work on hysteria and that

of Freud, and Janet was a significant influence on Dr Jessie Margaret Murray, the originator of The Medico-Psychological Clinic of London of which Sinclair was a founder member.<sup>20</sup> Moreover the character of Alice, as I shall show, does owe something to Janet's ideas. My point here is that while Sinclair's perception of psychology is not completely recoverable to the late twentieth century reader, it is reasonable to assert that Janet had some influence over her and this is significant because he does assert that 'Pathological heredity plays in hysteria, as in all other mental conditions, a role absolutely preponderant.'<sup>21</sup> Sinclair also makes reference in her work to the ideas of Henry Maudsley and Theodore Ribot. There is evidence of Maudsley's influence in Sinclair's repeated use of terms such as 'predestined' and 'foredoomed' and in her explicit references to Maudsley in Mary Olivier: A Life which I shall discuss below. Maudsley's emphasis on heredity is heavy. 'There is a destiny made for a man by his ancestors' he declares ominously, and relates the human being's dependence on his heredity specifically to insanity, calling it 'a disease which is one of the most heredity of diseases.' He even specifically links sexuality with such conduct, remarking at one point, that 'an absence of moral sense is an occasional result of descent from an insane family.'<sup>22</sup>

Ribot is even more specific, 'There is scarce need to insist on the heredity of all that is connected to the sexual appetite.'<sup>23</sup> Therefore it is important to remember, that while Sinclair was obviously influenced by thinkers such as Freud and Ellis, there were other influences at work. In a period of change in ideas, one does not become a wholesale convert from one set of ideas to another, as the simplifications of history sometimes suggest. On the whole, Sinclair's 'fallen women', to use the term as a convenient label, are not portrayed as the victims of sexual repression but as women who are in some way 'predestined' or 'foredoomed', and the implication in the key cases of Alice Carteret and Charlotte Olivier is that such predestination is hereditary.

All Sinclair's novels praise disinterested affection and condemn manipulation of other human beings. Maggie's saving grace is the undoubted sincerity of her devotion. While she is capable of transferring it from one object to another, she remains loyal until she is rejected. The presence of Mr Mumford in the novel illustrates this point. He has offered honourable marriage to Maggie which she disinterestedly rejects, 'I don't love 'im. I can't - Mr Magendy - because of Charlie [Gorst]' (H. p.179). It is this quality in her that leads Majendie to

associate her with the adjective 'pure': 'His finer instinct had surrendered to the charm of her appealing and astounding purity' (H. p.182). Her disinterestedness is crucially opposed to Anne, who believes in her own super fine spirituality but who is in reality a monster of egotism:

There were times, so deep was the illusion, when he could have believed that Maggie, sitting there at his feet, was the pure spouse, the helpmate, and Anne, in the house in Prior Street, the unwedded unacknowledged mistress. (H. p.229).

Like Poppy, but also, significantly, like Lucia, Maggie is portrayed as outside the boundaries of society. Since the society of this novel is the narrow and enclosed world of Scale (presumably Hull), Maggie's escape into the wild landscape of Holderness seems preferable. The description of the landscape suggests the elemental:

Field after field they stretch, they stretch, lands level as water, only raised above the river by a fringe of turf and a belt of silt and sand. Earth and water are of one form and of one colour, for, beyond the brown belt, the widening river lies like a brown furrowed field, with a clayey gleam on the crests of its furrows. When the grey days come, water and earth and sky are one, and the river rolls sluggishly, as if shores and sky oppressed it, as if it took its motion from the dragging clouds (H. p.226).



Nevertheless Maggie's emotional and sexual nature does not altogether escape censure at the hands of the narrator, rather than Majendie, for the narrator is not subject to Maggie's physical attraction. The subject is Maggie's persistence in sending money to Majendie, to pay off what she sees as a debt, 'There was no assurance in her tone, nothing to remind him that Maggie had been the spoiled child of pleasure whose wants were always reasons' (H. p.196). For all that she is devoid of the capacity to scheme and manipulate, there is nothing of the power of self-sacrifice about Maggie. She is the embodiment of an id whose ego has never asserted itself. As the narrator comments on another occasion, 'She had always believed what she liked' (H. p.208). At his first meeting with Maggie, before he makes the judgement about her essential purity, Majendie assesses her:

she had gone out, fervent and swift, dream-drunk, to meet her destiny. She was a creature of ardours, and of tenderness, and of some perverse instinct that it would be crude to call depravity. Where her heart led, her flesh, he judged, had followed; that was all. Her brain had been passive in her sad affairs. Maggie had never schemed, or calculated, or deliberated. She had only felt (H. pp.179-180).

Here the opposition between passion and intellect is made clear and may be reformulated in terms of an

opposition between ego and id. the truth about Maggie is that while she lacks the vices of Flossie, or Anne or Mary Carteret, she lacks also the virtues of Lucia, Gwenda, Dorothy and Mary.

Maggie's mind is described in the animal and spatial imagery which Sinclair frequently uses in order to describe the unconscious, 'It was such a funny, fugitive, burrowing darting thing, Maggie's mind, transparent and yet secret in its ways' (H. p.209). Such a description conveys something of the appeal of Maggie's character by the use of the word 'funny' which might be applied to a baby or a pet cat and yet something too of the sinister. The spatial metaphor conveyed by burrowing occurs in Maggie's own description of her sex drive, although she does not see it as such, 'And sometimes, again, I'm that restless, it's as if you'd lit a fire under me feet' (H. p.195).

Maggie has something of the characteristics of her predecessors, Molly Tyson and Poppy Grace. She is a woman of beauty, passion and devotion. Like Poppy she exists beyond the pale of conventional morality, as well as outside the boundaries of respectable society. Although, unlike Molly and Poppy, she does not form part of a rhetorical structure which opposes

brains and sexual passion, such an opposition provides a context for understanding her character, as Sinclair has constructed it. She is portrayed as someone who does not think with her mind at all, who represents unlimited id, and therefore, as one half of an opposition, as a partial woman. Significantly she is the first of the characters of sexual passion whose psychology is portrayed in terms of abnormal pathology, and her character therefore represents a significant development in Sinclair's treatment of the mind, showing clearly how contemporary determinist psychology has influenced her transformation of the cultural construction of the fallen woman into that of the woman as psychiatric case history.

It is not unreasonable to suppose that the incidental and yet vividly drawn character of Maggie gave rise a year later to Kitty Tailleux, the central character of the novel of that name. Kitty Tailleux, published in 1908, describes a chance meeting at a seaside hotel between a young widower, Robert Lucy and Kitty, a woman of ill-repute. Unaware of her reputation, Robert proposes to her, but, moved by the arrival of his children, whom she fears she will corrupt, Maggie tells him the truth about herself and then apparently commits suicide. The novel is exceptional in Sinclair's fiction in having a fallen woman as its

central character, and indeed among Sinclair's female predecessors only Elizabeth Gaskell's Ruth is directly comparable in this respect. At the time of the novel's action, Kitty confesses to a series of doubtful liaisons which serve to label her in the morally censorious society in which she lives:

'Charley Tailleux was the first...The first. There were others; ever so many others. I'm - that sort.'<sup>24</sup>

Kitty shares certain characteristics with Maggie. Like her predecessor's, her destiny seems to have been marked out from childhood, in her case a very respectable childhood as the daughter of a parson. She tells her innocent companion, Miss Keating, 'I had little sisters...My mother sent me away from home for fear I should harm them"' (KT. p.108). She hints darkly to Jane Lucy, the hero's sister, presumably of an early propensity to transgress, in some way, the strict boundaries of sexual morality: 'Ah, I was never too young to understand. That's the difference between you and me' (KT. pp.128-129). Much later in the novel, after she has confessed the truth to Robert, and he has suggested that she live honourably under his protection, she confesses her true nature, in terms which recall the descriptions of Maggie, 'How long do you think I shall bear it? A woman made like me?' (KT. p.290).

The difference in this respect between Maggie and Kitty seems to be one of emphasis. Maggie is less educated and less articulate than Kitty and never analyses her own character, whereas a large number of the judgements about Kitty come from Kitty herself, and there is a much less prevalent narrative voice which in part accounts for the fact that less emphasis is given in this novel to what is unalterable and predetermined about Kitty's character. Nevertheless all the above quoted comments do imply such a character, particularly the last one, which employs terms which are to be used again of Violet Usher and Alice Carteret.

In the treatment of both characters emphasis is given to their affectionate natures. In the above quoted comment about her little sisters, Kitty asserts, 'I wouldn't have harmed them for the world' (KT. p.108). She shows kindness to her rather pathetic companion, Miss Keating, and when the latter leaves her, her grief is excessive, provoking Robert to reflect, 'how like a child she was in her complete abandonment!' (KT. p.113). Although Kitty's strong affections are reminiscent of Maggie, the later more fully drawn character shows affection towards women as well as men.

Nevertheless, the nature of her grief for Keating suggests something of Maggie's lack of self-control. It is not, in Kitty's case, observed by others, but openly declared by Kitty herself, whose self-knowledge far exceeds that of Maggie: 'When you're gone on a man all you want is to get him, and keep him to yourself' (KT. p.27). It is also observed and understood clearly by Kitty's most recent seducer, Wilfrid Marston: 'Passion, which was great in her, greater than her will, made his will powerless over her' (KT. p.207).

There is an important sense in which the portrayal of Kitty is very different from the portrayal of Maggie. Maggie's sexual nature is given no direct emphasis in the earlier novel. The existence of sexuality in such a character is implied by her history, but is not a part of the representation within the novel. It may be Edwardian reticence which accounts for the fact that much is said of Maggie's heart and little of her sensual nature. If this is so, then the later novel goes some way towards grasping the nettle of sexual passion, at least in the narrating voice's statement that, 'She had been so joyous, so defiant in her sinning' (KT. p.229). Robert, unaware of her history, meditates on her 'tremendous and tragic passion' (KT. p.149). It is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the strongly physical nature of her love for

Robert's child Barbara:

She held her close, pressing the tender body close to her own body with quivering hands, stroking the adorable little face with her own face, closing her eyes under the touch of it as she closed them when Robert's face touched hers. She was aware that she had brought some passionate, earthly quality of her love for Robert into her love for Robert's child (KT. p.249).

This is as near as this novel, less reticent only in comparison to its predecessor, comes to a demonstration of physical passion, albeit displaced onto the child.

Kitty then, is a more conscious Maggie, more uncompromisingly represented, predetermined in her sensuality with strong but undisciplined affections. However, this novel offers a wider, more radical dimension to the fallen woman. Maggie was a plot device, convenient object for the frustrated passions of Gorst and Majendie, her social status, or lack of it, remaining unquestioned. On one level, Kitty Tailleur seems similarly to leave uninterrogated the social status of such women. The novel offers no suggestion, through any of its voices, that Robert should overlook Kitty's offences and make her his wife and the mother of his children. What it does more subtly question, is the way in which Kitty is regarded

by others, the way in which she is made to conform to the cultural stereotype. This is suggested metaphorically by Robert's initial view of her, 'He noticed that she had the sudden, furtive ways of the wild thing aware of the hunter' (KT. p.42). The image of the hunter anticipates the language which is later to describe that most resilient of women, Gwenda Carteret. The implication of the later novel is clearly that the sexual identity of all women renders them objects of pursuit in a male-ordered world. In the case of Kitty, whose sexuality is a dominating force, her destiny as an object of pursuit in such a world is impossible to escape. Kitty's plight, by implication is as much attributable to patriarchy as to her own nature. Later in the same scene Robert reacts to her in an image even more strongly suggestive of male coercion:

It [her face] was like a young bud opened by inquisitive fingers and forced to be a flower. Some day, the day before it withered, the bruised veins would glow again, and a hectic spot betray, like a bruise, the violation of its bloom' (KT. pp.43-44).

In a world in which women are regarded only in terms of their relationship to men, Kitty is categorised just as surely as wife, widow or spinster. She complains to Robert of the only people she encounters



socially, 'The people...who are sure of me; who think I'm so easy to know' (KT. p.56). The complaint echoes the weariness of the stereotyped individual, desirous of being more than a cultural signifier. A weariness which leads her to declare to Jane that her brother is 'the first nice man who-who hasn't been what men are' (KT. p.126), and equally significantly that, 'You're the first nice woman I've known who hasn't been horrid to me' (KT. p.126).

While the novel does not appear to question the impossibility of Kitty's marriage to Robert, it does appear to question the social ostracism which is part of the cultural stereotyping she undergoes. Such ostracism is manifested by the microcosmic society of the seaside hotel in which the action takes place, where one of the inhabitants tells Keating:

I've looked...and I can't see anything about her different from other people. She dresses so quietly; but I'm told they often do. They're very careful that we shouldn't know them (KT. p.82).

The evasive use of the pronoun, 'they' and the simplistic equation of character with dress are sufficient to establish a note of irony at the old lady's expense.

In one respect Kitty is marked out from Sinclair's other fallen, or potentially fallen women. In spite of her powerful passions, her lack of self-restraint, and apparently predetermined nature, she overcomes herself and exercises self-discipline, becoming, at least for the space of an episode, one of Sinclair's strong, self-sacrificial characters, suggested by the American title of the book, The Immortal Moment: The Story of Kitty Tailleur. She has from the start a desire to be good, a wish to have been better. She seizes on Robert's praise of her kindness, to say, 'That's something, isn't it?' (KT. p.119). She is prepared to deceive Robert in order to gain him, in accordance with her own previously stated philosophy, 'when you're gone on a man all you want is to get him' (KT. p.27), but after she has encountered his children, she steels herself for the final renunciation which she achieves in uncompromising terms, making sure that Robert understands her past, 'Because I want to make you loathe me, so that you can go away and be glad that you'll never see me again' (KT. pp.269-70)

Ultimately the novel asks questions but offers no answers. It questions the stereotyping of Kitty, and suggests a certain inevitability about her character, but for Kitty, perhaps because she was originally Maggie's social superior, there is no Steve Pearson,

prepared to marry her in spite of all. She promises Robert and Jane that she will not resume her former life, and consequently her options are reduced. Either her social position or the structure of the novel determine her fate. Like Maggie Tulliver, whom in many ways she resembles, drowning seems her only escape, at least from the pages of the novel.

In some ways, the portrait of Kitty, despite the elements of social criticism, is more conventional than that of Maggie Forest, and closer to the fallen women of nineteenth-century novels. A simplistic paradigm of the novel is that she sins, repents and pays the price. Gaskell's Ruth conforms to a similar paradigm but an important difference is the extent to which Kitty has, for at least part of her life, rejoiced in her sinning. Unlike Ruth she was never, 'too young to understand' (KT. p.128). Nevertheless, she is treated with sympathy, more attractively presented than either Miss Keating or the small-minded inhabitants of the hotel. The novel moves nearer to an acceptance of unconventional sexual behaviour than its nineteenth century predecessors, and, although the intellectual context remains that of scientific determinism, there is less emphasis on the psychological pathology which serves to excuse Maggie and the later fallen women.

Thus this novel modifies the cultural construct of the fallen woman, rather than replaces it by that of the woman as psychiatric case history, and in this respect points forward to the more radical social ideas of later novels such as Anne Severn and The Fieldings and The Allinghams. However, the last of the three novels under discussion marks a return to Sinclair's interest in pathological psychology. The earliest external evidence for Sinclair's interest in the ideas of Freud is her involvement with the London Medico-Psychological Clinic early in 1913.<sup>25</sup> Her novel of the same year, The Combined Maze, a powerful novel of neglected merit, is for my present purposes, chiefly interesting for the use made of Freudian psychology. The novel's hero, Ranny, a poorly paid clerk, pays diffident courtship to Winny Dymond but is lured into marriage by the sexually attractive Violet Usher. The marriage proves disastrous but Ranny's attempts to obtain a divorce after Violet's departure are frustrated by his having to pay off his father's debts. Violet's return, at the moment when divorce becomes a realisable possibility permanently separates Ranny and Winny.

Violet is the third of the trio of fallen women mentioned above. On the surface at least, Violet is presented less sympathetically than either Maggie

or Kitty. Her sexuality is powerful like Kitty's, but unlike Kitty's, it is threatening: 'and in the cleaving of her mouth to his there was a savage will that pressed as if it would have crushed between them all memory and premonition.'<sup>26</sup> At the moment of Violet's betrayal, Ranny thinks of her as 'a woman so foredoomed as Violet' (CM. p.253), recalling the 'predestined' Maggie, and echoing yet another word in the psychiatric writings of Maudsley. Earlier Winny has reflected on 'her friend's disastrous temperament' (CM. p.120), and later Ranny tells his uncle: 'God knows she can't stop herself, poor girl. She's made like that. I'm not blamin' her' (CM. p.275). Later Violet lives up to these judgements by taking another lover after Mercier, for whom she leaves Ranny, has deserted her: 'I had to have some one when Lenny left me' (CM. p.386). Her words reflect the element of compulsion which the other characters give voice to, and which in turn suggests the essential determinism, in Sinclair's view of psychology, already evident in the character of Maggie Forest.

On the surface, Violet is an unpleasant character who does untold harm to the hero and their children, but one can detect in one place an ironic voice in the novel which speaks in Violet's favour. Violet steps outside the traditional parameters of womanhood,

rebellling first against the contemporary construction of motherhood:

And he [the doctor] entered on a brief and popular exposition of the subject, from which Ranny gathered that Violet was flying in the face of that Providence that Nature was. Superbly and exceptionally endowed and fitted for her end, Violet had refused the task of nursing mother (CM. p.153).

On one level, the whole rhetorical construction of the novel pushes the reader towards a revulsion at Violet's 'unnatural' conduct here. However, there is a strong note of irony in the quoted passage, conveyed by the derogatory term 'popular' as well as the hyperbolic adverbs. The doctor, who has just advised Ranny to 'insist' on Violet nursing the child, may well recall Henry Brodrick, the tyrannical medical man of *The Creators*, (see below). Like Brodrick he sees the care of the child as Violet's 'end', in itself a far more ambiguously suggestive word than 'purpose' or 'function' would have been.

Indeed the whole treatment of the childbirth episode is capable of an ironic reading. Violet's agony is recounted through the consciousness of Ranny: 'such cries as Ransome had never heard or conceived, that he would have believed impossible; the cries and groans of some outraged animal' (CM. p.150). Ranny's point of

view is countered by the viewpoint of those with more experience of childbirth, 'He wouldn't believe his mother and the doctor and the nurse when they told him that everything was as it should be' (CM p.151). On the surface level, of course, the irony is directed against the naive Ranny, but irony is endlessly subversive and dependent on the viewpoint of the reader. Thus, when the doctor replies to Ranny's 'tortures weren't in it. How'd you like-" by the bland assertion: 'We can't alter nature my dear boy...in all my experience I've never known a woman have an easier time' (CM. p.152), it is equally possible to see the doctor as the victim of the irony; a figure who happily attributes pain he does not have to suffer to 'nature', and thinks it is lessened in intensity by the fact that others have to suffer more. Unfeeling professional expertise is subverted by human sympathy and sensitivity. Consequently Violet's rejection of socially constructed motherhood is placed in a very different light.

This novel also marks a reappearance of oppositional females, but the opposition is tangential to that which I have been tracing. It is developed initially in a way which suggests continuity with the oppositions of Mr and Mrs Nevill Tyson and The Divine.

Fire, with an interesting difference. Winny, the dominant figure of the oppositional hierarchy, who meets the novel's hero, Ranny, at the gymnasium of the London Polytechnic is distinguished, not by her intellect, but by her physical fitness. Sinclair's later strong characters, particularly Gwenda, are represented as physically strong and fit, which in itself suggests a variety of interpretations. There is the obvious Freudian concept of repression, which in this novel is explored through the character of Ranny, who achieves peak physical fitness when his dawning love for Violet Usher is thwarted by her disappearance. However physical fitness also has interesting parallels to mental fitness. For an Edwardian woman both forms of self-development represent a straying beyond the parameters of ideal womanhood, as Winny's rival, Violet is careful to intimate to Ranny who comes to a new view of Winny:

It was magnificent, but it was not a thing that could be done by a nice woman, by a woman who respected herself and her own womanhood and her own beauty; not a thing that could be done by Violet Usher (CM. p.85).

In fact Violet's own dislike of such activities is subtly different from the one which Ranny attributes to her, and is presumably based on the sexuality which is the dominating influence of her life, and leads her



to declare, 'But it is queer, Mr Ransome, if you're a woman, not to care what you do, or what you look like doing it' (CM. p.86).

Winny is thus indicated, in the opening chapters of the novel, as a strong woman, straying outside the accepted construction of womanhood, and opposed to the sexually passionate character of Violet. There is an irony here of course, in that Winny and Violet, like other oppositional characters share a rejection of contemporary constructions of womanhood, Winny by her unfeminine activities in the gymnasium, and Violet by her later unmaternal conduct. However they are constituted as rivals for the love of the hero and thus cannot acknowledge what they share. Nevertheless Violet's comment contributes to the construction of Winny's character as strong woman opposed to the sexually passionate character of Violet herself. After this, however the opposition loses its edge and becomes absorbed into a moral opposition of good and bad, the potentially good wife, Winny, and the actual bad wife, Violet. As a consequence, Winny's character becomes idealised, and only Violet retains her role in the opposition of strength and sexual passion. As I have shown earlier, both sides of the opposition involve a straying beyond the boundaries of ideally constructed womanhood, but once Winny has left the

Polytechnic behind, only Violet steps beyond these boundaries.

The Combined Maze is an important novel in tracing the development of Sinclair's views on psychology. The character of Violet is in many ways the most interesting of the three fallen women of this period. As in the case of Maggie Forest, the determinist terminology replaces the construct of the fallen woman with that of the woman as psychiatric case history. However, it is most important to observe that ironic signals, particularly in the childbirth incident, by virtue of the instability which always attends irony, enable the reader to see her as the victim, not only of contemporary social mores, but more importantly of medical opinion. The possibilities of ironic reading enable the reader to question the novel's construction of Violet as psychiatric case history. As I shall show in the case of Mary Olivier, medical opinion, for all its claims to be in advance of more conservative morality is often used as a weapon to uphold that morality. Sinclair's own attitude towards it is ambivalent, at once respecting it as objectively acquired knowledge when it appears in the works of respected writers of the time, and yet often, by her creation of flawed physicians, apparently questioning its validity, recognising the essential subjectivity

behind its apparent objectivity.

### III

Oppositional females characters in Mr and Mrs Nevill Tyson and The Divine Fire suggest two opposing cultural constructs: the strong, intellectual spinster and the sensual woman of passion. The latter is linked to the construct of the fallen woman, developed and modified in subsequent novels into woman as psychiatric case history. The former, in the case of Lucia, is modified into some kind of reconciliation of the two constructs, but it remains an unsatisfactory reconciliation.

Of the four novels published in Sinclair's central period, three, The Three Sisters, The Tree of Heaven, and Mary Olivier: A Life use oppositional characters of the kind which I have observed in Mr and Mrs Nevill Tyson and The Divine Fire and to a lesser extent in The Combined Maze. Of these novels, The Three Sisters and Mary Olivier: A Life both display a significant and interesting development and require examination in detail.

Gwenda Carteret, the heroine of The Three Sisters, published in 1914, is created in the tradition of Miss Bachelor and Lucia Harden. However all three sisters can also be linked closely with the three women of The Divine Fire, not only by Gwenda's similarity to Lucia, but also by a close parallel between those two exemplars of feminine virtue, Flossie and Mary Carteret, and by similarities between the sexually unrestrained Alice Carteret and her predecessor, Poppy Grace. However, unlike their predecessors, they are the central concern of the novelist, not merely vehicles for the development of the hero, and as such, the implications of the aspects of womanhood which they represent are much more fully explored.

Alice, the successor of Poppy, should also be explored in the light of the portrayals of Maggie, Kitty and Violet. The essentials of her character and history are established early on in the novel:

She had made a fool of herself.  
She knew it; he knew it; everybody knew  
it in the parish they had left five  
months ago. It had been the talk of the  
little southern seaside town.<sup>27</sup>

The vicar's reflections represent yet another cultural stereotype of the figure which I wish to categorise as the fallen woman (although Alice has not yet

technically fallen). The opening phrase, the contemporary euphemism for openly seeking a lover, emphasises the constraints with which women were surrounded in their compulsory pursuit of a husband. To pursue unobserved as Mary does, is to behave with due decorum, to pursue as Alice does subjects her to the public gaze, so that she is judged by appearances, judged a fool. That her pursuit takes place in a seaside town has the weight of a literary convention, following a long tradition from Lydia Bennet to the almost parodic portrayal of the fallen woman in Tess Durbeyfield's splendid appearance at Sandbourne. Although, to her father and Mary, Ally is thoroughly reprehensible, Gwenda sees Alice as the victim of her sexuality. She is 'poor little Ally'. Gwenda enters imaginatively into Ally's state. Her remark to Mary, 'Molly, it must be awful to be made like that' (TS. p.26) recalls the vocabulary used of both Kitty Tailleir and Violet Usher but goes beyond it, in the imaginative involvement of the speaker, hinting at the fear which lurks at the back of Gwenda's mind. Her view of Alice's problem, so much more sympathetic than anyone else's, has important implications for her own behaviour 'She looked on little Ally as the victim of a malign and tragic tendency, the fragile vehicle of an alien and overpowering influence. Little Ally was doomed' (TS. p.58).

Once more the language recalls previous fallen women, this time Maggie and Kitty, as well as the pessimistic views of Maudsley.

Superficially Ally is portrayed as that particular manifestation of improper womanhood, the woman of vanity, who arouses her father's anger when he discovers her using his full length looking glass, which recalls the 'two immense mirrors' which figure in the description of Poppy Grace's room. Poppy's use of mirrors is not explored, but Alice's is less to do with the vanity of Hetty Sorrell in the celebrated mirror scene in Adam Bede than with the sexuality of Constance Chatterley, for her primary motive appears to be the enjoyment of her own body:28

She had just caught sight of her little white nose as it appeared in a vanishing profile...if Ally had not been blinded and intoxicated with her own beauty she would have seen him before she began smiling, full-face first, then three-quarters, then sideways, a little tilted...Then she shut to the door of the wardrobe (for the back view that was to reassure her as to the utter prettiness of her shoulders and the nape of her neck)... (TS. pp.88-89).

Thus her vanity is a manifestation of her innate sensuality, a feature which she shares with Molly, Poppy, Maggie, Kitty and Violet. It is manifested also through music. When Gwenda contemplates venting

her sexual frustration on a journey on to the moors, where Rowcliffe might see her (see above), Alice vents hers on an excruciating performance of Chopin's Grande Polonaise:

She played, neither with her hands nor with her brain, but with her temperament, febrile and frustrate, seeking its outlet in exultant and violent sound. She fell upon the Erard like some fierce and hungry thing, tearing from the forlorn, humble instrument a strange and savage food (TS. p.13).

Significantly the language recalls that used later in the novel to describe Gwenda's intellectual activity (see below). Later, Alice's enjoyment of organ playing, at a calmer moment, emphasises the sheer sensuousness of her pleasure: 'She enjoyed the massive, voluptuous vibrations that made her body a vehicle for the organ's surging and tremendous soul' (TS. p.95). Her passion for Greatorex is first revealed, through the medium of Rowcliffe's observation, when she accompanies Greatorex's hymn singing: 'On both faces there was a look of ecstasy' (TS. p.227).

The analyses of Maggie and Kitty, in particular, suggest a lack of self-restraint as an essential component of their obsessive characters. For the most

part, in the sympathetic portrayal of Alice which comes from the voices of Gwenda and the narrator, this lack of self-restraint is implied rather than stated. However towards the end of the novel, the narrator comments:

She hadn't really forgotten what Gwenda had done for her, but she couldn't go on thinking about it forever. It was the sort of thing that wasn't easy or agreeable to think about and Ally's instinct of self-preservation urged her to turn from it. She tended to forget it, as she tended to forget all dreadful things, such as her own terrors and her father's illness and the noises Greatorrex made when he was eating (TS. p.367).

The statement recalls the caustic comment on Maggie, that 'she had always believed what she liked' but here the more extensive analysis offers an exploration and extenuation which shows an awareness of contemporary psychology. Ally's reaction is wholly healthy and is attributed to unconscious forces, 'her instinct for self-preservation' just as immediately after her marriage, in the most explicit departure into text-book psychology, the following explanation of Ally's conduct is offered:

So, without Ally being the least aware of it, Ally's mind, struggling towards sanity, fabricated one enormous fear, the fear of her father's death, a fear that she could own and face, and set it



up in place of that secret and dangerous thing which was the fear of life itself (TS. p.294).29

Yet, before her marriage, Ally lacks such psychological health, and demonstrates the symptoms of the hysteric, particularly anorexia; a condition which is explored fully in relation to Alice, rather than hinted at, as in the case of Maggie. The beginnings of her first period of self-starvation are described thus:

More than a year ago Alice had been ordered milk for her anaemia. She had milk at eleven, milk at her midday dinner, milk for supper, and milk last thing at night. She did not like milk, but she liked being ordered it. Generally she would sit and drink it, in the face of her family, pathetically, with little struggling gulps. She took a half-voluptuous, half-vindictive pleasure in her anaemia. She knew that it made her sisters sorry for her, and annoyed her father. Now she declared that she wasn't feeling well, and that she didn't want her milk (TS. p.32).

This account of Alice's conduct clearly recognises the hysteric's use of illness as a means of control. The evening has been spent by the sisters in listening to Rowcliffe passing the vicarage on his way to see old Greatorex, and waiting for the only event of their evening, family prayers. Earlier, after hearing Rowcliffe speak to Greatorex's son, Alice has

resolved, 'I will make myself ill. So ill that they'll have to send for him' (TS. p.10). This of course is a conscious rather than an unconscious motivation and therefore may not truly belong to the classic Freudian hysteric.

This novel witnesses an extension in Sinclair's hitherto limited use of the language of contemporary psychology. Alice is the fallen woman reconstructed as psychiatric case history. Rowcliffe most clearly expresses such a construction when he labels her as a hysteric, judging her early in the novel as 'a poor parson's hysterical daughter' (TS. p.80). Rowcliffe is the third medical man to figure in a significant way in Sinclair's fiction (see my comments below on The Creators). He is more enlightened than his predecessor, Hugh Brodrick, who like Rowcliffe later in the novel, is brother-in-law to his patient, and therefore within the contemporary patriarchal family structure, in a position of power over her. His comparative enlightenment, as so often in Sinclair, is attested by his reading, in this case, Janet's Etat Mental des Hysteriques which he has been reading when Gwenda comes to him in the course of Ally's second illness. His judgement on Ally's case is clear:

What I tried to impress on him is that she will go out of her mind if she's

kept shut up in that old Vicarage much longer. And she'd be all right - perfectly all right - if she was married.

...  
I know she's as good as gold. And she'd be as strong as iron if she was married and had children. I've seen no end of women like that, and I'm not sure they don't make the best wives and mothers. (TS. p.181).

At first sight it appears an enlightened judgement, and indeed compared with the judgement of the Vicar and his eldest daughter it is enlightened. However it recalls unpleasantly closely, Brodrick's judgement of Jane Holland, discussed below, as well as the anonymous doctor's verdict on Violet Usher, and suggests further cultural stereotyping. Alice has already been classified by Rowcliffe as a hysteric and he offers the most obvious interpretation of hysteria, and that most favoured by contemporary psychology, the need for sexual fulfilment as wife and mother. Of course on the surface level of the narrative Rowcliffe's judgement is justified; Alice fulfils herself as wife and mother. Nevertheless it is clear that Alice as a character drawn according to Sinclair's perception of reality manifests the limitations of Sinclair's own construction of reality and is limited by the construct of woman as psychiatric case history. However, as in the case of Violet Usher, the ironic signals within the text

provide the possibility of extending the limits of the construction, since the most explicit agent in its creation, the flawed physician Rowcliffe, is open to the possibility of ironic reading.

However, Rowcliffe helps to construct not only Alice, but Gwenda. Superficially Alice is clearly Gwenda's opposite. Physically weak, Alice keeps to the house while Gwenda seeks escape in long walks. She eschews intellectual effort, while increasingly Gwenda seeks intellectual satisfaction, reading extensively in literature and philosophy. Their opposition is marked by broadly similar features, as is that of Batchelor and Molly Tyson and Lucia and Poppy.

However there are profound links between Gwenda and Alice, as indeed there are hints of links in the earlier oppositions. Firstly, the two are sisters and share a bedroom, which almost in itself suggests a common identity. This goes some way towards explaining Gwenda's attitude to Alice, which is an ambivalent combination of fear and affection.

One of her fears is of being compared to Alice, for, after all, they are sisters. When she goes to Rowcliffe to seek medical help for Alice, she wonders, 'How was he to know that she hadn't done it on

purpose?' (TS. p.57). She reflects that Ally has done that sort of thing on purpose, and concludes 'he would think that there were two of them.' More importantly she fears, not only being compared to Alice, but actually being like Alice. On the occasion discussed in Chapter 3 above, of her admission to herself of her love for Rowcliffe she fears that: 'He might see in it something morbid and perverted; something horribly like Ally. She went in terror of the taint' (TS. p.146). Words such as 'morbid' and 'perverted' suggest a distorted viewpoint. 'Taint' suggests a fastidiousness in Gwenda's outlook.

There follows a longer passage of comment in which the narrator represents Gwenda's state of mind in relation to Rowcliffe until the moment of realisation which has just occurred, 'She dreaded the secret gates, the dreamy labyrinths, the poisonous air of the Paradise of Fools' (TS. p.146). The use of the term, 'Paradise' clearly refers to Ally's state of mind, while she is in love with Rowcliffe, for she is described on several occasions as dwelling in her own Paradise. Papa 'wasn't even an effective serpent in her paradise' (TS. p.90), Ally herself 'reasoned in her Paradise' (TS. p.92) and 'was behaving like an angel in her Paradise' (TS p.94). Greatorex's farmhouse 'was on the border of her Paradise' (TS. p.110). Garth itself

was 'the hill of Paradise' (TS. p.118). However the description of Gwenda's state of mind would seem also to have more general significance, using as it does language with strongly literary overtones, reminiscent of the tradition of poetry of unrequited love. The comment, taken as a whole, suggests not only the influence of Ally's behaviour, but Gwenda's wish to separate herself from her sisters, and perhaps most importantly of all, from the fate of all women caught in such a poetic construction.

The passage is followed by a further image: 'But, if she stood on the edge of an abyss, at least she stood there' (TS. p.146). The cumulative effect of these images, of Gwenda's sexuality as a hunted thing, of falling in love as entering the Paradise of Fools, or tottering on the brink of an abyss is to underline the intensity both of Gwenda's horror and of the struggle within her. It leaves unanswered the question of why Gwenda's horror is so intense. There are two possible explanations: the first is Gwenda's own construction of Alice as hysteric, in which Rowcliffe is significantly complicit; the second is Rowcliffe's attempt to construct Gwenda as romantic heroine.

Apart from Rowcliffe, she is the only person who understands Alice's plight, and she evinces much

greater sympathy for her than the doctor, shown in her reaction to Alice's piano playing in the opening scene: 'It was she alone that appreciated its vindictive quality; she admired the completeness, the audacity of Alice's revenge' (TS. p.15). This establishes some sympathy and common cause between the sisters which Gwenda becomes more aware of as the novel progresses. Her appreciation of those qualities which Alice shares with herself is apparent in her radical defence of Ally against Mary's attack early in the novel, in relation to the period of her life when Ally 'made a fool of herself':

"She managed to let everybody see, anyhow."

"What if she did? At least she was honest. She went straight for what she wanted. She didn't sneak and scheme to get him from any other girl. And she hadn't a mother to sneak and scheme for her. That's fifty times worse, yet it's done every day and nobody thinks anything of it" (TS. pp.26-27).

The comment, of course, anticipates ironically Mary's own scheming against Gwenda herself, underlining the fact that the real difference, as in the parallel case in The Divine Fire is between Mary and her two sisters. Ally's conduct and Gwenda's defence of it, place them both outside the pale of the hypocritical society in which they live. The extent of Gwenda's

fondness for, and kinship with Alice is revealed to her only gradually:

And in her look, a look that for the moment was divinely lucid, Gwenda saw Ally's secret and hidden kinship with herself. She saw it as if through some medium, once troubled and now made suddenly transparent. It was because of that queer kinship that Ally had divined her. However awful she was, however tragically foredoomed and driven, Ally was decent. She knew what Gwenda was doing because it was what, if any sustained lucidity were ever given her, she might have done herself. But in Ally no idea but the one idea was very deeply rooted. Sustained lucidity never had been hers. It would be easy to delude her (TS. p.193).

'The one idea' suggests strongly 'The fixed idea' which is the subject of one of Janet's chapters, and indicates another influence on the portrayal of Ally.<sup>30</sup> The 'queer kinship' which Gwenda feels is a kinship of the mind. The passage implies an identity between Gwenda and Alice. Alice is Gwenda without 'sustained lucidity'. Gwenda, therefore, without her lucidity would be Alice.

Such a kinship is attested by Rowcliffe:

Gwenda's eyes were ominously somber and she had the white face of a ghost, a face that to Rowcliffe, as he looked at it, recalled the white face of Alice.



He disliked Alice's face, he always had .  
disliked it, he disliked it more than  
ever at that moment; yet the sight of  
this face that was so like it carried  
him away in an ecstasy of tenderness.  
He adored it because of that likeness,  
because of all that the likeness  
revealed to him and signified (TS.  
p.178).

It is a remarkable testament to the similarity that  
lies beneath and is expressed through contrast, for  
neither sister will conform to Rowcliffe's idea of  
what a woman should be, his own particular  
construction of woman as romantic heroine. The  
meaning of the last sentence is left to the reader,  
and the reading I wish to suggest is that Rowcliffe  
rejoices to discover that part of Gwenda which is  
Alice. What I am suggesting, is that Gwenda and  
Alice are fragments of the same woman, fragments which  
the cultural constructions of the time prevent from  
uniting. Both exist outside the acceptable norm for  
womanhood, represented by Mary, who darns socks,  
knits, marries and has children, and therefore their  
eccentricity must be named. Gwenda is blue stocking  
or old maid; Alice is fallen woman or hysteric,  
depending on one's point of view. The latter slightly  
~~more enlightened~~ view, at least has the merit of  
allowing a route back for Alice into acceptable  
society. However the effect of society's construction  
of them is that they cannot be united. Alice is

condemned to perpetual unawareness. This unawareness is manifested in the final scene in which she appears, when, surrounded by children, she is unable to think of anything else:

Gwenda was used to this apathy of Ally's and it had never hurt her till to-day. To-day she wanted something from Ally. She didn't know what it was exactly, but it was something Ally hadn't got (TS. p.367).

The final phrase seems a fitting epitaph for Ally. 'Poor little Ally' has achieved a lover and children but remains wanting. Gwenda's fate, hardly surprisingly, is the reverse of Ally's, and needs to be considered in some detail.

Gwenda is conscious of her affinity with Alice but Alice appears to her through the construction of Alice, in which she is complicit, as psychiatric case history, more precisely as sexually driven hysteric. Rowcliffe, who encourages her construction of Alice offers her yet another construct through which to perceive her own identity, that of romantic heroine.

Gwenda is distinguished by physical and intellectual strength and by unconventional attitudes, all of which features become apparent from the early stages of the

novel. In the opening scene the sisters are waiting for the nightly ritual of evening prayers. Gwenda is described in terms which at once link her with, and distinguish her from, her sisters:

She was the tallest and the darkest of the three. Her face followed the type obscurely; and vividly and emphatically it left it...The bridge of her nose and the arch of her upper lip were higher, lifted as it were in a decided and defiant manner of their own. About Gwenda there was something alert and impatient...

Gwenda had gone fifteen miles over the moors that evening. She had run and walked and run again in the riotous energy of her youth (TS. pp.4-5).

The link between above average height and unfeminine behaviour has already been noted, in relation to Lucia Harden. Gwenda's physical strength, her constant delight in long walks and physical exertion link her with that other potentially strong but undeveloped heroine, Winny Dymond in The Combined Maze. The ambivalence in the portrait of Lucia has already been noted, and together with the failure to develop Winny as a strong heroine suggests a whole unresolved area of the relationship of strong women to sexual and emotional fulfilment, an area which is fully explored ~~for the first time~~ in The Three Sisters.

Like Lucia, Gwenda is unconventional, which is one of

the reasons for her father's fear of her. His reflection that 'if Rowcliffe married Gwenda he would keep her straight.' (TS. p.168) illustrates very clearly the point I have already made about the social and political ambiguity of virginity. The loss of virginity at the right time, within the institution of marriage, is the most socially acceptable way for Gwenda to behave, and her failure to marry is as offensive to her father and society as a whole, as the conduct of her sister Alice. Equally offensive is her proposal to leave home and earn her own living, which in the view of her father is so far beyond the pale of acceptable conduct for middle class women as to be described as 'preposterous' (TS. p.205).

The novel focuses directly on the issue of marriage for a woman like Gwenda, more unambiguously strong and independent than Lucia, and more fully drawn than any of her predecessors. Gwenda is a character with a high degree of consciousness of her self as an individual identity. She is aware of the pressures on her individual self from both within and without, and because she is aware, she struggles.

Early in the novel, Sinclair establishes a relationship between Gwenda and the natural surroundings of Garthdale. It is largely through the

natural environment that Gwenda explores her own identity. This relationship enables the author to establish a symbolic connection between the surroundings of Garth and Gwenda herself. The novel opens with a description of the village, before any characters have been introduced:

It crouches there with a crook of the dale behind and before it, between half-shut doors of the west and south. Under the mystery and terror of its solitude it crouches, like a beaten thing, cowering from its topmost roof to the bowed back of its stone bridge (TS. p.1).

The image of a hunted creature is clearly suggested by words such as 'crouches', 'beaten' and 'cowering'. The implication of this only becomes fully clear when the final chapter is reached. By then Gwenda's inner self has become almost totally identified with the natural world around her. She returns from her final conversation with Rowcliffe, in which he has revealed that he no longer cares for her, aware of nothing except the imminent onset of profound suffering. She sees the village waiting for her, described now through her own eyes rather than those of the narrator:

It had always waited for her; but she was afraid of it now, afraid of what it

might have in store for her. It shared her fear as it crouched there, like a beaten thing, with its huddled houses, naked and blackened as if fire had passed over them (TS. p.387).

The similarity of language establishes a link between the opening and final scenes, and a justification for regarding the novel as the story of Gwenda's consciousness, or self, or identity, being hunted and hounded from all sides, from within herself and from the social and cultural constructs which seek to define her.

Thus Rowcliffe, whom the Vicar sees as providing the opportunity to define Gwenda as married woman, seeks himself to define her as romantic heroine. The hunting image introduced in the opening chapter of the novel is extended in several ways. Inevitably the image carries a sexual connotation made explicit by the statement: 'Rowcliffe was now beginning to form that other habit...the hunting down of Gwendolen Carteret in the open' (TS. p.96), to describe his first unconcealed attempts to seek her out. Earlier, in an effort to avoid a more discreet attempt to waylay her, 'She darted away at the clank of his horses hoofs, half-savage, divinely shy' (TS. p.40). Significantly, this recalls the imagery used of a character who belongs emphatically to the other side of the

opposition, Kitty Tailleux.

The imagery makes explicit the link between the sexual pursuit and Gwenda's struggle to free her self from the constructions of others and above all from Steven's attempt to define her as romantic heroine. Rowcliffe makes his first appearance in the novel as a voice heard outside the Vicarage by the three sisters, who feel as one. At the sound, 'life, secret and silent, stirred in their blood and nerves. It quivered like a hunting thing held on the leash' (TS. p.9). The word 'secret', as I have shown, frequently refers to unconscious motivation. This time the hunting image is applied to Gwenda's own sexuality, as it will later be applied by Rowcliffe, to that of Alice. Gwenda's following thoughts indicate that she sees this as a threat to herself. The other important factor is that the sisters are treated as one, reacting in a unified way to a common stimulus which conflicts with Gwenda's need to express herself as an individual and separate herself from her sisters. At the same time the passage raises the question of the connection between Gwenda and her sisters, and whether, in fact, she can be separated from them, or whether the three simply represent three aspects of womanhood.

There follows the account of their thoughts, referred

to above, which distinguishes Gwenda as the one who 'knew what she was thinking'. She plans a late night excursion on to the moor:

He will see me when he drives back and he will wonder who is that wild, strong girl who walks by herself on the moor at night and isn't afraid. He has seen me three times, and every time he looks at me as if he wondered. In five minutes I shall go... I shall do nothing of the sort...I don't care if I never see him again. I don't care (TS. p.10).

The last sentence clearly expresses her desire to separate herself from the others. Already the 'hunting thing' in her 'blood and nerves' is at war with her hunted sense of self. Even her sense of self is expressed in terms of contemporary constructions of womanhood which make her remarkable as 'that wild strong girl'.

The possibility of sexual fulfilment for Gwenda is present in the novel only in the form of Steven Rowcliffe, for whom, as I have shown, she acknowledges love. However their relationship is as much a power struggle as it is a courtship. At their first proper meeting, when she has overcome her reluctance to visit him, for the sake of Alice, who needs his help, she feels his influence over her:



She talked to him as if she had known him a long time. All these things he made her do, and when he talked to her he made her forget what had brought her there; he made her forget Alice and Mary and her father (TS. p.65).

The full significance of this is only clear in the light of Gwenda's habitual independence. She wanders about the moor at will, regardless of conventional opinion. She has resisted her overpowering and dominating father, for example making clear her dissent from Prayers and later disputing his judgement over Essy. Now Rowcliffe displays a power over her actions and thoughts which no-one else has done. Later, wrongly supposing that he is driving behind her on the road, she admits to herself his power over her: 'He would ask her where she was going and he would make her drive with him over the moor. And she knew that she would go with him. She would not be able to refuse him' (TS. p.143).

Later, the narrator comments:

Once in a while he would meet Gwenda Carteret or overtake her on some road miles from Garth, and he would make her get up and drive on with him, or he would give her a lift home. It pleased her to be taken up and driven (TS. p.155).

Thus, he exerts power over her which, the words imply, she cannot resist, although the last sentence suggests a glad surrendering rather than a simple lack of resistance. Presumably the power which Rowcliffe exerts over her is one reason for Gwenda's resistance to him. The power constitutes, like her sexuality, which she has seen in Alice as an 'alien impulse', a threat to her individual self. It is important however to note the socially situated basis for his power. His economic and professional independence means that it is he who drives the ominously named trap, and he who will wield the greater power in their relationship, unless of course she stoops to 'sneak and scheme' which neither Gwenda nor Alice can do.

Thus her sexual needs, that part of her which is Alice, conflict with her desire for independence. Her historical and social situation dictates that she must marry for sexual fulfilment. In this she might be compared with other heroines of contemporary women writers, the most obvious being Clarissa Dalloway. But Steven Rowcliffe's house does not seem to include an attic where she might escape. His character is important, for not only is he the potential husband of Gwenda, but he it is he who has labelled Alice a hysteric.

Sinclair's habit of attaching particular words or phrases to specific characters, often with ironic intent, has been noted elsewhere. Rowcliffe is often linked with something called his 'romantic youth'. The phrase is used of him on his first appearance in the novel:

At thirty Rowcliffe was still in his romantic youth. He had all its appearances about him. A life of continual labour and discomfort had kept his body slender; and all the edges of his face - clean-shaven except for his little dark moustache - were incomparably firm and clear (TS. p.36).

The word 'discomfort' is of special importance. The avoidance of comfort and the stultifying satisfaction of the senses which goes with it, is a recurring theme in Sinclair's novels. The seeking of comfort, more than anything else, marks the decline of Harriett Freen, and the vice is given its fullest expression in the character of Canon Chamberlain, the central character of A Cure of Souls. A life of discomfort, by contrast, produces something 'firm', 'clear' and 'slender.' However the use of the word 'still' seems to qualify the phrase. There is an implication contained in the very word 'youth' itself that this will not always be Rowcliffe's condition. Rowcliffe is introduced as a character susceptible to the charms of women, who has previously enjoyed the attentions of

the red-haired nurse in Leeds. Rowcliffe stereotypes the women he meets and it is revealed that two categories of women fail to appeal to him. Of the inhabitants of Morfe, the reader learns 'there was nothing about them that appealed to his romantic youth' (TS. p.38). The visitors to the place 'offended his romantic youth' (TS. p.38). On the first night he sees Gwenda: 'The apparition fairly cried to his romantic youth' (TS. p.40). These phrases are used in fairly quick succession. They seem to suggest that Rowcliffe's romantic youth is something separable and apart from himself, thus confirming the idea of its being a temporary state. The phrase carries connotations of a literary convention. Rowcliffe is playing out a culturally defined role in relation to these women, who are measured in terms of whether or not they can play their part.

Later the phrase is used in a context which hints for the first time at a false note in Rowcliffe's character. He has just told Gwenda that he would like to go rambling on the moor after dark and before dawn. His inner thoughts are different: 'He knew he would not really have liked it. But his romantic youth persuaded him in that moment that he would' (TS. p.67). This, more clearly than previous uses of the word, marks off Rowcliffe's romantic youth as something

separable from himself; or to put it another way, as a part of himself created by a particular and identifiable cultural construction. It also indicates that it is a psychological force of considerable power. The longest examination of Rowcliffe's 'romantic youth', and how it operates occurs when he walks back with Gwenda after her visit to him on the occasion of his supposed illness. In an important passage which is discussed at length in my chapter on irony, he recounts his ambitions in the medical field, as well as describing his past. It is the last time the phrase appears until the final quarter of the book when Rowcliffe's character has already begun to degenerate. The whole incident serves to marginalise Gwenda to the position of the mediaeval lady who gives her token for her knight to carry into battle or on his quest. It suggests that were Gwenda to choose marriage to Rowcliffe, this would be her position.

Not surprisingly, Rowcliffe resents any tendency in Gwenda which will distract her from the role he has unconsciously assigned her. The distance between them is most clearly indicated by the conversation about the moon 'one night in April' when Rowcliffe has decided to declare his love for her. Rowcliffe's response to her rapturous admiration is deliberately prosaic:

"She doesn't go...At least you can't see her going, and the cloud isn't wrapped round her head, its nowhere near her... Why can't you see things as they are?" She was detestable to him in that moment (TS. p.159).

The note here is one of antagonism. Zegger compares Sinclair's use of the moon to the treatment of hostility between male and female in The Rainbow and Women in Love, calling it a 'symbol of the antagonism between men and women.'<sup>31</sup> Certainly here, while Rowcliffe's attitude is laughably pedantic, it is nevertheless sinister. With his superior education he has the advantage of knowledge, scientific knowledge which his society has made a male preserve. He marks Gwenda's exclusion from that preserve, and at the same time displays its limitations, rejecting an alternative and equally valid vision, a vision which, as will be seen, he has good reason to fear. It is at this point that one suspects that Gwenda, married to Rowcliffe might have suffered the fate of Virginia Woolf's Mrs Ramsay.

The preceding chapter shows further evidence of Rowcliffe's hostility to and distance from Gwenda, when the narrator explains why Rowcliffe 'never found his moment' (TS. p.156). Gwenda is constantly distracted by her surroundings:

She shared the earth's silence and the throbbing passion of the earth as the orbed moon swung free. And in her absorption, her estranging ecstasy, Rowcliffe at last found something inimical (TS. p.158).

The fair lady should not be distracted from watching her knight in the tournament. Something within Gwenda finds expression in the natural surroundings of Garthdale, and Rowcliffe is threatened by it and therefore in turn threatens it.

In this respect, the role of the moon is particularly important. The earliest mention of the moon is important in understanding its function, and occurs significantly on the occasion of Rowcliffe's very first sighting of Gwenda:

She was in white...and she carried herself like a huntress; slender and quick, with high, sharp-pointed breasts. She looked at him as she passed and her face was wide-eyed and luminous under the moon (TS. p.39).

Later in the same evening, Rowcliffe sees her again: 'She flashed by like a huntress, like Artemis carrying the young moon on her forehead' (TS. p.40). The linking of Gwenda with the moon-goddess Artemis has obvious implications for her conduct in the novel. The chastity and power of the huntress-goddess evoke male

fears of the female. No wonder that two days later Rowcliffe, meeting Gwenda again 'supposed that it was the light of that detestable moon that gave her face its queer morbid whiteness' (TS. p.41). It is, of course, whiteness which, as I have shown links Gwenda with Alice who, while lacking Gwenda's chastity, also escapes from Rowcliffe's pattern of womanhood. In this context, the reader is able to appreciate the full significance of the argument over the moon referred to above. Towards the end of this argument Gwenda expresses the two objects for which her mind is searching:

"You've got the moon and your idea of the moon. I don't see that you've got much more."

"Anyhow, I've got my liberty."

"Your liberty - if that's all you want!"

"It's pretty nearly all. It covers most things."

"It does if you're an incurable egoist" (TS. p.160).

The last remark, coming from the egotistical Rowcliffe is richly ironic. A few sentences later, Gwenda expresses her second object, '..."I said if I was in love with the moon, I'd be in love with it and not my idea of it. I want reality"' (TS. p.161). The quest for reality, which Rowcliffe will not allow her space for, is the quest of all Sinclair's major heroines, as



it is the quest of Sinclair herself.

The moon, then is, both on a literal and symbolic level, the cause of Rowcliffe's failure to 'find his moment'. The lovers' final interview before Gwenda leaves for her step-mother's home, a decision which, unknown to Rowcliffe, she has made in the course of the interview, ends thus:

"Don't. I'm going back alone."

...  
But she persisted.

"No. I shall be all right," she said.

"There's a moon."

In the end he let her have her way.

Moon or no moon he saw that it was not his moment' (TS. p.186).

It is the summary statement about their relationship.

The usual reading of the novel concerns itself with moral choice and sees Gwenda as a character who makes such a choice, a choice which is usually judged as mistaken. For example, in her introductory essay to the Virago edition of the novel, Jean Radford describes Rowcliffe as 'uselessly sacrificed to her [Gwenda's] younger sister's health and happiness' and judges Gwenda as someone who 'recognises her own and her sisters' sexuality but is dominated by her over-developed conscience or super-ego. She is shown as caught and crushed between her instinctive needs and the code of "decency" imposed by the narrow

morality of women of her class.' A similar judgement is reached by Hrisey Zegger.<sup>32</sup> However this seems to me to answer the wrong question in relation to the novel. The novel offers no absolute choice but a range of contemporary constructions of womanhood. The two oppositional females are bounded by such constructions. They share an essential kinship in spite of their opposition, both being outside the limited parameters set for women of the period, and being in fact reverse sides of the same potential identity.

The role played by the medical man, Steven Rowcliffe in such constructions, is of particular interest. While he allows Alice to escape the label of fallen woman, by re-labelling her as sexually frustrated hysteric, his flawed character opens up the possibility of interrogating this second label, in spite of its surface acceptance within the novel. Gwenda too escapes from his intention to construct her romantically and survives as yet another construction, spinster/blue stocking. However, for the reader, the possibility remains of freeing both characters from their constructions and recognising them as two halves of a whole woman.

The most interesting exposition of the connection between strong heroine and sexually driven, apparently weaker opposite, is to be found in Mary Olivier: A Life, published in 1919. Mary Olivier is the most intricately constructed of all Sinclair's heroines, because this is the novel in which she most fully explores the possibilities of the the portrayal of consciousness. It should also be pointed out that, on the surface at least, Mary's life is drawn from Sinclair's own; the only daughter in a family of sons who survives her brothers' early deaths and supports herself and her mother by writing. Whether her inner life is drawn from the same source must remain a matter for speculation.

There is no difficulty in identifying Mary as a strong heroine in the tradition begun by Miss Batchelor. The novel abounds in her meditations on works of philosophy, she displays tremendous physical energy, and, like Batchelor and Gwenda, she remains a spinster.

Like her predecessors, she is a sexual being. Her deepest, although unrecognised desire is for her brother Mark, of whom, she innocently remarks, at the

age of seven, 'I shall marry Mark and have thirteen children'<sup>33</sup> After that a series of suitors come in the form of Mark's friend Jimmy Ponsonby who is sent to Australia in mysterious disgrace; Maurice Jourdain, her shortlived fiance; Harry Craven, with whom she does no more than hold hands during a party game; her brother Dan's friend, Lindley Vickers, whose moral code shocks her; and finally her lover and potential husband, Richard Nicholson.

I have observed already, the link made between physical and sexual energy, both on the level of sublimation, but also because of the delight in the body which both entail. This is a very clear element in Mary's life, as appears from the following childish game of jumping down a flight of stairs which, at the age of seven, she plays with Mark:

She let go the rail and drew herself up. A delicious thrill of danger went through her and out at her fingers. She flung herself into space and Mark caught her. His body felt hard and strong as it received her. They did it again and again (MO. p.58).

There are clear sexual overtones to this account, the element of surrender to Mark who is 'hard and strong', the 'delicious thrill' and the element of risk-taking. Later the same day he calls her to share in the game of

'brook-jumping', 'Mark could jump all the brooks in the fields between Ilford and Barkingside, and in the plantations beyond Drake's Farm' (MO. p.59).

The same physical delight is a component of her only fulfilled relationship, that with Richard Nicholson. For all their intellectual compatibility, their relationship is shown as rounded by their shared enjoyment of cycling:

They had finished the run down Reyburn hill. Their pace was slackening on the level.  
He said, "That's a jolly bicycle of yours" (MO. p.344).

This element in her character is best summed up when, at the age of thirteen, she seeks to analyse herself: 'sometimes she had queer glimpses of the persons that were called Mary Olivier' (MO. p.94). One of these persons is described, significantly, in relation to Mark:

There was Mark Olivier's sister, who rejoiced in the movements of her body, the strain of the taught muscles throbbing on their own leash, the bound forwards, the push of the wind on her knees and breast, the hard feel of the ground under her padding-feet (MO. p.94).

Mary's sexuality, like Alice Carteret's, is also expressed through music. This is particularly true of her hidden love for Mark, as the following incident which takes place at Mark's coming of age party makes clear:

"The Hungarian March." She could play it better than Mamma. Mamma never could see that the bass might be even more important than the treble. She was glad that she could play it better than Mamma, and she hated herself for being glad.

Mark stood by the piano and looked at her as she played. They talked under cover of the "Droom - Droom - Droom - era - room."

"Mark, am I looking too awful?"

"No. Pretty Minx. Very pretty Minx."

"We mustn't Mark. They'll hear us.

They'll think us idiots."

"I don't care if they do. Don't you wish they'd go? Clever Minx. Clever paws."

Mamma passed and looked at them. Her face shrank and sharpened under the dropped wing of her hair. She must have heard what Mark said (MO. p.120).

The scene of the suitor addressing his object under cover of her piano playing is a cliché of romantic fiction. There is a strong hint of sexual jealousy on the part of Mamma who has long ago substituted Mark as the object of her affections in place of her husband. Mamma's neglect of the importance of the bass notes suggests that she is less susceptible to the elements of passion within the music than her daughter.

Five years later, when Mary is nineteen, Mark comes home on leave, and the two dance together at the Sutcliffes' dance:

Mark was dancing better now. Better and better. His eyes shone down into yours. He whispered.

"Minky - Poor Minky - Pretty Minky."

He swung you. He lifted you off your feet. He danced like mad, carrying you on the taut muscle of his arm.

Somebody said, "That chap's waked up at last. Who's the girl?"

Somebody said, "His sister" (MO. p.248).

The recurrence of the pet name links this passage with the previous one. The suggestion of sexual awakening is implicit in the observer's comment. Repressed sexual desire on Mark's part is also strongly hinted in the brief passage which follows:

Mark laughed out loud. You could have sworn he was enjoying himself. But when he got home he said he hadn't enjoyed himself at all. And he had a headache the next day. It turned out that he hadn't wanted to go. He hated dancing. Mamma said he had only gone because he thought you'd like it and because he thought it would be good for you to dance like other people. (MO. p.248)

As on so many occasions in this novel, surface actions are capable of being interpreted in a variety of ways, and Mamma's typical reaction, which apports sympathy to Mark and guilt to Mary, although it may blind the

innocent Mary, need not deceive the reader.

At this point, having considered the dynamic, positive forces with which Mary is linked, it will be helpful to consider Aunt Charlotte, Mary's apparent opposite. Aunt Charlotte is the culminating figure in a long line of sexually driven women, and her fate, incarceration in an asylum, is the most horrifying. Nevertheless there are many positive aspects to her character, which it would be misleading to overlook. She is introduced in the following way:

Aunt Charlotte -

Aunt Charlotte had sent the Isle of Skye terrier to Dank.

There was a picture of Aunt Charlotte in Mamma's Album. She stood on a strip of carpet, supported by the hoops of her crinoline; her black lace shawl made a pattern on the light gown. She wore a little hat with a white sweeping feather, and under the hat two long black curls hung down straight on each shoulder.

The other people in the Album were sulky, and wouldn't look at you...the ladies hung their heads and looked down at their crinolines. Aunt Charlotte hung her head too, but her eyes, tilted straight up under her forehead, pointed at you. And between the stiff black curls she was smiling-smiling (MO. p.10).

The passage is interesting for several reasons. The first point to note is that Aunt Charlotte is introduced as a picture in an album, strongly



emphasising that she is being pictured, and that the act of picturing will freeze her into a pattern, an image of womanhood, one that Mamma dislikes sufficiently to make her try to 'turn over the page of the Album quick' (MO. p.10). Her clothes are attractive, and probably rather too fashionable, particularly the hat and the curls. They please the innocent, untutored child, but alarm the culturally constructed mother. Aunt Charlotte smiles, and thus is contrasted with everybody else in the Album, presumably the whole sum of Mary's relations. Her smile and her direct look provide a welcome contrast to the false modesty which marks the other females. Amongst Aunt Charlotte's frequent gifts are animals, the Skye terrier mentioned here, and later the cat, Sarah. They are suggestive of life and provide a strong contrast to the gift of Mary's Uncle Edward, the husband of her mother's sister, the censorious Aunt Bella. Edward promises Mary a lamb, but when the one which, according to him, he has earmarked for her, is born in a feeble state, he puts the child through the horrifying experience of coming to watch it in its dying state, rather than provide her with another one, thus beginning the child's long struggle with the fear of death. Charlotte, by contrast, is linked with life, and as will be seen, with that mysterious experience 'being born'.

Much later, one is reminded of the influence of Aunt Charlotte as a life-giving force within the novel, when the middle-aged Mary is able to spend her legacy on European travel:

you would have to work like blazes, after spending all the money Aunt Charlotte left you on rushing about, and half the money Aunt Lavvy left you on settling down (MO. p.372).

Aunt Lavvy's unorthodox opinions set her, like Mary and Charlotte, outside the shelter of Victorian respectability, but unlike her sister and her niece she makes compromises, for example attacking Mary for her interest in Pantheism, so it is appropriate that it is Charlotte's money which is used for the liberating experience of foreign travel.

Like her predecessors, and ultimately like Mary, Charlotte stands outside the boundaries of acceptable conduct. Like many of those without power, she defends herself by lying, telling Mamma, with the promptness of an habitual liar that the miniature doll she has just given Mary is 'Butter-scotch' (MO. p.37).

The doll in question is described thus:

Inside the match-box there was a china doll no bigger than your finger. It had blue eyes and black hair and no clothes

on. Aunt Charlotte held it in her hand and smiled at it.  
"That's Aunt Charlotte's little baby"  
(MO. p.37).

Previously, among the gifts which Aunt Charlotte is described as sending on the occasions when she is about to be married, is listed, 'the white china doll with black hair and blue eyes and no clothes on that Jenny hid in the nursery cupboard' (MO. p.10).

The most obvious reason why Aunt Charlotte's dolls have to be concealed by and from the family and its agents is that they are naked. Thus in Mary's dreams Aunt Charlotte takes off her clothes or appears in the form of a doll. Dolls, since they enable a girl child to act out the future role that has been chosen for her are a very acceptable, even necessary element in a Victorian childhood. This is made clear in the significant scene where Mary having failed to tease her mother into saying 'I love you', is shown Mamma's needlework:

The basket was full of tiny garments made of the white stuff, petticoats, drawers and nightgown, sewn with minute tucks and edged with lace. Mamma unfolded them.  
"New clothes," she said, "for your new dolly" (MO. p.69).

Mamma's remark implies that Mary will periodically receive a new doll almost as a matter of course. The

clothes are significantly white and highly decorative. The Victorian doll is clearly to be as well protected by underclothing as the Victorian woman. The clothes, in fact, are more important than the doll. In the light of this passage, it is possible to perceive the full horror of Aunt Charlotte's dolls.

Aunt Charlotte's dolls hint at the biological reality beneath the decorated surface by their nakedness, but also by the fact that she refers to the doll she gives Mary as a baby. Aunt Charlotte's obsession with babies suggests the influence of the ideas of Henry Maudsley on the way in which her character is constructed. Maudsley, discussing the effect of puberty on the sanity of young women, remarks, 'the intact virgin chatters incoherently of religion and of babies which she imagines herself to have had or be going to have.'<sup>34</sup> When Charlotte has been confined to bed, apparently as a cure for paying too much attention to Mr. Marriott, an unmarried clergyman, the ten-year old Mary goes to visit her and asks her, with her usual frankness if she would like to have a baby. She replies:

"You mustn't say it, Mary, you mustn't say it. Don't tell them you said it. They'll think I've been talking about the babies. The little babies. Don't tell them. Promise me you won't tell" (MO. p.81).

In the same conversation, Mary asks Charlotte about the mystery that has long puzzled her, 'do you know what being born is?', the mystery that is at the root of her mother's ambivalence about dolls. On the surface, Charlotte's response to Mary's questions is as repressive as that which might have been offered by the authority figures who surround Charlotte and her niece: '"Nice little girls don't think about those things"' (MO. p.80). But something in her expression reassures Mary: 'Her tilted eyes had turned down and her mouth had stopped smiling. So you knew that being born was not frightening' (MO. p.80)

Amidst the repressive forces which surround the growing girl, Aunt Charlotte stands out as someone associated with the forces of life. Charlotte's fate, however, is horrific. When Mary returns from school to the family's former home in Ilford, now occupied by Victor and his two sisters, she is told, 'Aunt Charlotte is upstairs. She isn't very well' (MO. p.149). In fact, the whole house has been altered to imprison Charlotte in a manner reminiscent of Bertha Mason's incarceration on the third floor of Thornfield Hall,

Aunt Charlotte looked out through the bars of the old nursery window... There was a door at the head of the stairs, in a matchboard partition that

walled the well of the staircase. You rang a bell. The corridor was very dark. Another partition with a door in it shut off the servants' rooms and the back staircase. They had put the big yellow linen cupboard before the tall window, the one she [Mary] used to hang out of (MO. p.150).

The passage itself links Charlotte and Mary, with Charlotte imprisoned in the very room from which Mary used quite literally to hang out by her arms, a dare-devil prank which on one occasion alarms Mr Ponsonby. A link between the two is further suggested by the parallel with Jane Eyre, in relation to which, Gilbert and Gubar have argued persuasively for a psychological link between Jane herself and Bertha Mason.<sup>35</sup> The links with the earlier novel are fairly obvious, being reinforced by the presence of Britton, Aunt Charlotte's maid, 'a tall, iron-grey woman in an iron-grey gown' (MO. p.149) who recalls Grace Poole and also by the scene in which Charlotte makes her final, disastrous attempt at rebellion, before being removed to more secure imprisonment by the medical profession. Mary, like Jane, on the night when Bertha attacks her brother, is awoken from a dream by the sound of a scream. Like Bertha, who bites Mason, Charlotte presumably bites her nephew, Dan, 'He was sucking the back of his hand and spitting the blood out on to his sleeve' (MO. p.153).<sup>36</sup> I have pointed out elsewhere in this study other links

between this novel and the Bronte sisters themselves, particularly Charlotte. As Charlotte Bronte is characterised in Elizabeth Gaskell's biography, she combines within herself the frustrations of both Charlotte and Mary Olivier in Sinclair's novel, and perhaps it is no accident that the former shares her name.

Aunt Charlotte's fate, as well as the way others treat her, means that in spite of being, in many ways an attractive character, there are elements in her which disturb the youthful Mary. She is the victim of an obsession, responding to a dinner-table discussion of John Bright's speech in Parliament by remarking, 'A man with a face like that oughtn't to be in Parliament' (MO. p.35). By the time that Mary has her final conversation with her she has become the victim of illusions, believing that: '"Your father hasn't gone. He's here in this house. He's in when Victor's out' (MO. p.150). Such illusions are directly connected with the repression and secrecy with which she is treated. In Mary's mind an unconscious connection appears to be formed between her sense of the way her family regard Aunt Charlotte, and the stair cupboard. The origin of the association occurs at the dinner table conversation referred to above. Mary has met Aunt Lavvy and Aunt Charlotte for the first time. She

cannot but see, however obscurely she understands the issues, that both aunts transgress against the values of the rest of the family, the combined power of Mamma, Papa, and Uncle Victor. Remembering her mother's threat that, 'if Lavvy Olivier brings her Opinions into this house Emilius and I will walk out of it' (MO. p.30) with its absurd assumption that opinions are separable entities, which if they don't appear don't exist, Mary asks Lavvy if she has brought them. When she replies that she hasn't the six-year old child, confusing opinions with opossums, asks if she has shut them up in the stair cupboard. To which Aunt replies: 'No, but I may have to some day' (MO. p.34).

At this point, the significance of her Aunt's reply is totally lost on Mary. Later, however when her mistake is discovered, she begins to understand something about opinions,

"Opinions," Papa said, "are things that people put in other people's heads. Nasty, dangerous things, opinions."  
She thought: "That was why Mamma and Papa were frightened" (MO. p.34).

At this stage in her life, Mary has no real understanding of the issue but simply senses her parents' fear. Previously, she has anticipated the aunts' visit with excitement:



In another minute Aunt Charlotte would come in, dressed in her black lace shawl and crinoline, and Aunt Lavvy would bring her Opinions. And something, something that you didn't know, would happen (MO. p.32).

Her aunts are therefore linked together in her mind. In some way they offend against the established authority of her little world; they represent something both exciting and frightening.

These elements become connected in Mary's mind and become the material for the first of three dreams which concern Aunt Charlotte, a dream which occurs the night after the dinner party:

That night she dreamed that she saw Aunt Charlotte standing at the foot of the kitchen stairs taking off her clothes and wrapping them in white paper; first, her black lace shawl; then her chemise. She stood up without anything on. Her body was polished and shining like an enormous white china doll. She lowered her head and pointed at you with her eyes.

When you opened the stair cupboard door to catch the opossum, you found a white china doll lying in it, no bigger than your finger. That was Aunt Charlotte' (MO. p.37).

Anybody familiar with Freud's Interpretation of Dreams will be aware of the complexities of dream interpretation, and acknowledge that Mary's dream lacks the complex verbal and associative substitutions

which would have qualified it to stand in the pages of Freud. Nevertheless its appearance in the structuring of Mary's character represents Sinclair's acknowledgement of the role of the unconscious within character, and of her attempt to grapple with one of the problems presented by realism. Of course the dream may be interpreted in a variety of ways but the following points can be observed. The first part of the dream, in which Aunt Charlotte takes her clothes off, is a dream of revelation, appropriate for Aunt Charlotte, since revelation of herself is precisely her crime, and links Charlotte with her china dolls, which in turn are connected with that obscure mystery of 'being born'. The representation of the naked Charlotte as a china doll, while it could be taken to suggest a denial of sexuality, since she is china and not flesh, might also be seen as containing for the child Mary the possibilities of the future which dolls contain. As I have shown, they hold the promise of one day becoming babies. The second part of the dream is a dream of concealment. Aunt Charlotte is hidden away in the cupboard, and moreover is diminished in size. The cupboard clearly recalls Lavvy's threat that she may have to lock her opinions up, with all the repression and censorship which the image implies. If Aunt Charlotte represents an aspect of Mary, then the war within Mary's unconscious is a battle between

revelation and concealment, or expression and repression. The division of the dream is confirmed by Mary's subsequent reflection:

In the dream there was no break between the end and the beginning. But when she remembered it afterwards it split into two pieces with a dark gap between. She knew she had only dreamed about the cupboard; but Aunt Charlotte at the foot of the stairs was so clear and solid that she thought she had really seen her (MO. p.38).

This seems to suggest Freud's notion of the censoring of the dream by the memory, with the young child distancing herself from the unpleasant overtones of fear and repression.

Mary's second dream occurs ten years later on the night before Aunt Charlotte is finally taken away:

She had dreamed that she saw Aunt Charlotte standing at the foot of the basement stairs, by the cat's cupboard where the kittens were born, taking her clothes off and hiding them. She had seen that before. When she was six years old. She didn't know whether she had been dreaming about something that had really happened, or about a dream. Only, this time, she saw Aunt Charlotte open her mouth and scream (MO. p.152).

Once again Aunt Charlotte appears as the figure of revelation, but also present is the cupboard, the

spectre of concealment and repression, this time associated with the birth of the kittens. I have shown how Aunt Charlotte becomes linked in Mary's mind with the notion of birth. Earlier in the novel, when Mary is seven, kittens are explicitly linked with the birth mystery:

Perhaps nobody knew. Jenny said being born was just being born. Sarah's grandchildren were born in the garden under the wall where the jasmine grew. Roddy shouted at the back door, and when you ran to look he stretched out his arms across the doorway and wouldn't let you through. Roddy was excited and frightened; and Mamma said he had been very good because he stood across the door' (MO. p.46).

An essential part of the method of this remarkable novel, is that tiny incidents such as these are not analysed by any reflecting consciousness but simply take their place within the supposed consciousness of Mary. They allow the reader freedom to draw a variety of conclusions but some connections can be clearly seen. The incident is yet another example of repression. The child's natural way of learning about birth is barred, quite literally by the figure of Roddy at the doorway which in turn can be seen to symbolically represent a means of transition and growth. Roddy's action is approved by the arch-figure of repression, Mamma, and he himself is portrayed as a

victim of such repression, being at the same time excited and frightened. The link with Aunt Charlotte is completed by the fact that Sarah is one of her gifts. In Mary's second dream she is linked once more with life and its attendant mysteries but ominously with the cupboard, presumably judged the proper place for the birth of kittens.

Mary's final dream is recounted after the lapse of another sixteen years, and is brought about by the death of Mark. This time the dream is recurring and set in a more explicit context, by the more reflective adult character:

Since Mark died she had begun to dream about Ilford. She would struggle and break through out of some dream about Morfe...

Sometimes the door stood open. She would go in. She would go up the stairs and down the passages, trying to find the schoolroom. She would know that Mark was in the schoolroom. But she could never find it. She never saw Mark. The passages led through empty, grey-lit rooms to the bottom of the kitchen stairs, and she would find a dead baby lying among the boots and shoes in the cat's cupboard. (MO. pp.310-311).37

The element of searching for the lost brother is crudely obvious, but the dream may be interpreted on other levels. It occurs before Mary achieves sexual fulfilment with Richard, and may be taken to

symbolise the final frustration of her desire for Mark. However it equally suggests repression of sexual desire. The presence of the cupboard, this time referred to as the cat's cupboard, as the ultimate destination for Mary's journey through the house is significant. The choice of a cupboard is reminiscent of the metaphor for the unconscious which Sinclair uses in A Defence of Idealism, 'I have spoken of instincts and desires, symbolic meanings and ideas hidden away in our Unconscious, as if our Unconscious were a cupboard or a cellar.'<sup>38</sup> Within Mary's consciousness the cupboard has come to represent the repressive forces which surround the sexuality and life-giving possibilities of Aunt Charlotte. This time there is no naked china doll with its suggestion of the possibilities of adult realisation but only a dead baby, the ultimate symbol of futility.

For the child Mary, sexuality is surrounded by fear in other ways, not directly connected with Aunt Charlotte. In her introduction to the Virago edition of the novel Jean Radford dismisses both the Mary's funeral phobia and the presence of Charlotte as 'somewhat insistent'.<sup>39</sup> This is to miss the subtlety of their role in Mary's unconscious and conscious minds.

The origin of Mary's phobia about funerals might reasonably be traced to the gruesome incident referred to above, when her parsimonious Uncle Edward confronts her with a dying lamb, at the age of five. I have already pointed out the direct contrast with the live gifts of Aunt Charlotte. It is also worth remarking that while she is permitted to witness death, a year later in the incident of the kittens, she is not permitted to witness birth. It suggests that her mother sees birth as being more frightening than death, a fact confirmed by the emphasis on the atonement in her version of Christianity. Such a view is made clear in Mary's hearing in a conversation with Aunt Bella, when her mother remarks of the approaching marriage of the servant Jenny, who has long past her youth, 'I'd rather see her in her coffin. It would be less undignified' (MO. p.72). Whether or not Mamma means it literally it says much about her attitude to sexuality, and more importantly, for Mary it becomes a horrific reality, when shortly afterwards the servant dies in the night. The narrative makes no explicit connection but it is there for the reader to make.

Years later, after the Jourdain affair, when Mary is beginning to connect herself with Aunt Charlotte, the phrase recurs:

"If she'd had her own way she'd have been married, and then perhaps she wouldn't have gone mad."

"She might have gone madder," said her mother. "It was a good thing for you, my dear, you didn't get your way. I'd rather have seen you in your coffin than married to Maurice Jourdain' (MO. p.229).

The two incidents connect madness and death with sexuality and contribute to the fearful images which surround it.<sup>40</sup> Mary's own sexuality is regarded by both her mother and her Aunt Bella as something to be feared. At the age of thirteen, Mary reflects on herself as:

Mary Olivier, the little girl of thirteen whom her mother and Aunt Bella whispered about to each other with mysterious references to her age (MO. p.94).

They thus ensure that puberty, with its promise of womanhood, is not welcomed by Mary, simply by failing to prepare her for it. Ironically it is the whispering Aunt Bella who, considering that Mary is too precocious and spends too much time with her brothers, recommends the friendship of Bertha Mitchison:

Bertha pushed her soft sallow face into yours. Her big black eyes bulged out under her square fringe. Her wide red



mouth curled and glistened. There were yellowish stains about the roots of her black hair. Her mouth and eyes teased you, mocked you, wouldn't let you alone. Bertha began: "I know something you don't know."

You listened. You couldn't help listening. You simply had to know. It was no use to say you didn't believe a word of it. Inside you, secretly,, you knew it was true. You were frightened. You trembled and went hot and cold by turns, and somehow that was how you knew it was true; almost as if you had known all the time" (MO. p.96).

There is more than the similarity of names to connect this Bertha with the Bertha of Jane Eyre. Her physical appearance recalls that of her monstrous predecessor.<sup>41</sup> Both women represent what is denied by Victorian constructions of womanhood. The sensibilities of Mary can no more endure the revelations of Bertha than those of Jane Eyre could endure the revelation of the first Bertha's crimes, for her sensibilities have been moulded by her virtuous Mamma, whom Mary cannot bear to link with such knowledge. But if the link seems dreadful it is because it has been carefully concealed by the woman who condemns Charlotte so roundly and who takes care that her daughter's doll should be thoroughly clothed in elaborate garments. Only when Mary connects her first potential lover, Jimmy Ponsonby with the knowledge does it become less dreadful, 'Perhaps when Papa was young Mama thought about him as you thought

about Jimmy; so that it couldn't be so very dreadful, after all (MO. p.97).

As Mary's adolescent and adult self encounters a series of men, it encounters also expectations and categorisations of female behaviour. The paradox which I have already discussed presents itself again. It is her business in life to fit herself for the role of wife and mother, while any attempt to seek out that role is strictly forbidden. Her innocent romance with Ponsonby is spoilt for her by her mother's remark that, 'Men...are not interested in little book-worms. He told me it was very bad for you' (MO. p.88). Her mother's remark stems from the fundamental paradox. Combined with her desire that her daughter will be pleasing to men is her wish that her daughter will not draw unseemly attention to herself by behaving in an unusual way. There is some justification in the remark, at least as it applies to the superficial Jimmy. His response to Mary's question about innate ideas, 'Seems to me...I was born with precious few...Anyhow I can't say I remember them' (MO. p.83), implies that he is only amused by Mary and will not take her seriously. Thus Mary faces the same problem as Lucia in The Divine Fire, who is expected by Horace Jewdwine to have none of the tricks of clever women. In the patriarchal society in which she lives she must conform to a man's

expectations of woman, which is precisely why Mary's mother is so anxious for her to sit and sew. The issue becomes more serious for her when she encounters Maurice Jourdain. Jourdain, more intelligent than Ponsonby, is, like his predecessor, enchanted by the young girl who reads serious books, but when he returns three years later with the intention of becoming engaged to her, he is inconsistently disappointed because she doesn't conform to his expectations. The inconsistency is made all the more obvious by the fact that he has offered to have her educated in Paris. He complains to her, in a manner reminiscent of Rowcliffe's attitude to Gwenda in the argument over the moon:

You don't care as a woman does. No woman who cared for a man would write the letters you do. I ask you to tell me about yourself - what you're feeling and thinking - and you send me some ghastly screed about Spinoza or Kant. Do you suppose any man wants to hear what his sweetheart thinks about Space and Time and the Ding-an-Sich? (MO. p.215).

The generalisations about man and woman, show how easily Maurice accepts conventional stereotypes of womanhood. While he may have wished to educate Mary, she is apparently not to display her education. For all her dislike of Jourdain, Mary's mother shares his expectations, "I can tell you one thing...It was

those books you read. That everlasting philosophy. He said it was answerable for the whole thing' (MO. p.224). Mary is apparently to be labelled as a blue stocking by both her mother and her ex-fiance. the attitude of her mother throughout the Jourdain affair is ambivalent.

In spite of her undoubted dislike of Jourdain as, witnessed by the remark about Mary's coffin quoted above, Mamma's attitude to the engagement does not convey disapproval:

Mamma had smiled a funny, contented smile. Mamma was different. Her face had left off being reproachful and disapproving. It had got back the tender, adorable look it used to have when you were little. She hated Maurice Jourdain, yet you felt that in some queer way she loved you because of him (MO. p.214).

The contradiction in her attitude has its roots in the same fundamental contradiction at the heart of Victorian expectations of women. For all that she dislikes the thought of her daughter's relationship to Jourdain, Mary has pleased her because she is about to fulfil her function in life.

The contradiction and the hypocrisy which it generates, becomes even clearer at the ending of the

engagement. Maurice, using his business affairs as an excuse, says that he can no longer marry Mary. Failing to recognise the excuse, she takes him at his word and says that she will wait for him, or as her society would see it, she refuses to release him from his engagement. She has acted with total honesty. She is prepared to wait for him and work to help him out of his financial difficulties. But total honesty is not acceptable, as is shown by the later confrontation with her mother:

"He says he asked you to release him.  
Did he?"  
"Yes."  
"Then why on earth didn't you?"  
"I did. But I couldn't release myself."  
"But that's what you ought to have done.  
Instead of leaving him to do it."  
"Oh, no. That would have been  
dishonourable to myself."  
"You'd rather be jilted?"  
"Much rather. It's more honourable to  
be jilted than to jilt."  
"That 's not the world's idea of  
honour."  
"It's my idea of it...And after all he  
was Maurice Jourdain." (Pp.220-221)

For 'the world', her mother might have substituted 'patriarchy', but on the other hand the Biblical overtones of the expression point to the fact that Mary's philosophy is a purer and less self-seeking one. It is the status of women as a marketable object that has produced the world's peculiar system of honour, which Mary does not recognise. What Mary has

done, in the world's view, is to commit the sin of Aunt Charlotte, in allowing it to be publicly perceived that she wished to continue the engagement.

I have shown already, as in the case of Alice Carteret, that such behaviour earns the label 'fool', and that to 'make a fool of yourself' is death to the reputation of any young woman. Mary's conduct over Jourdain, in addition to her general failure to conform to female stereotypes earns her such a reputation, at least with her own family, so that in the case of Lindley Vickers, the next young man whom she encounters, they are very quick to charge her with it. At the end of his initial stay with Mary's family, in a gesture of honest warmth, she gets up early to give him and Dan breakfast, and is quickly reprimanded by Dan, 'Don't be a little fool. Go back to your room' (MO. p.281). Later, when Vickers, embarrassed by Mary's witnessing of his kissing Nannie Learoyd, a local character of ill-repute, fails to keep a lunch appointment with the family, Mary is blamed by her mother:

"...It's hard for poor Dan if he can't bring his friends to the house any more because of you."

"Because of me?"

"Because of your folly."

She understood. Her mother believed that she had frightened Lindley away.

She was thinking of Aunt Charlotte.

(MO. p.287).

Mary has begun to perceive that her refusal to conform to the prevailing stereotype of womanhood is earning her two other stereotypical labels, the label of blue stocking, referred to above, but more frighteningly, the label of madwoman. For women who do not restrain and hide their affections are either wicked or mad. Mary's conscious linking of herself with Aunt Charlotte begins immediately after the Jourdain affair, when Aunt Lavvy tells her, in relation to her Uncle Victor, who, she reveals loved Mamma:

"He wouldn't have married her if she had loved him. He was afraid."  
"Afraid?"  
"Afraid of going like your Aunt Charlotte. Afraid of what he might hand on to his children" (MO. p.222).

After this, reflecting on the Jourdain affair, Mary begins to see herself as others see her, remembering the connection with Charlotte:

They all thought the same thing: that you wanted Maurice Jourdain and that you were unhappy because you hadn't got him. They thought it was awful of you. Mamma thought it was awful, like - like Aunt Charlotte wanting to marry the piano-tuner, or poor Jenny wanting to marry Mr Spall (MO. p.225).

After her mother has told her of Jourdain's marriage, her tone conveys a continuing sense of disapproval

which reinforces Mary's feelings, and brings the Aunt Charlotte issue into the open:

"Does Mark Know?"

"No, he does not. You surely don't imagine anybody would tell him a thing like that about his sister?"

"Like what?"

"Well- he wouldn't think it very nice of you."

"You talk as if I was Aunt Charlotte... Do you think I'm like her?"

"I never said you were like her..."

"You think - you think and won't say."

"Well, if you don't want to be thought like your Aunt Charlotte you should try and behave a little more like other people" (MO. pp.236-237).

Her mother does not deny the connection, and the whole conversation reveals Mary's fear. What is really interesting however, is the continued use of the word 'like', both in relation to Charlotte and in relation to 'other people'. However Mary behaves, her behaviour will be judged not on its merits, but by its likeness to the behaviour of others. If she behaves like 'other people' she will win respect, as conforming to the stereotype of the good woman. If she behaves like Aunt Charlotte, she will lose respect and be labelled as insane.

However, it is not only the views of others which begin to frighten Mary but her own sexual hunger which she recognises only too clearly. Lying awake one



night in 'her white cell', itself suggestive of reluctant virginity, she reflects that: 'She didn't want him [Jourdain]. But she wanted Somebody. Somebody. Somebody. He had left her with this ungovernable want' (MO. p.226). In this respect she is no different from Maggie Forest, Alice Carteret, or Aunt Charlotte herself, which brings into question the whole opposition of intellect to sexuality, which on the surface, seems to influence much of Sinclair's fiction. Later Mary falls from contemplating an imaginary lover, a combination of Jimmy, Mark, Shelley, Spinoza and Kant into a dream, which I have quoted in another chapter of this study. The sexual and emotional hunger recalls all the novels of Charlotte Bronte: In fact one episode in the dream recalls Jane Eyre's awakening of Rochester from the fire in his room: 'The fire was between his bed and the door' (MO. p.227). The difference between Mary and Sinclair's previous characters, on the other side of the opposition, who experience so much sexual and emotional hunger, is that she is much more self-aware: 'A screw loose somewhere. A tap turned on. Your mind dribbled imbecilities' (MO. p.227). The same revulsion occurs later, when she finds herself once more contemplating an imaginary lover, this time trying to name him:

It couldn't be Jimmy or Harry or any of those names. Not Mark. Mark's name was sacred.

Cecil, perhaps.

Why Cecil? Cecil? - You ape! You drivelling, dribbling idiot! That was the sort of thing Aunt Charlotte would have thought of (MO. p.230).

The identification with Aunt Charlotte is there to be made. Mary simply recognises that the same hunger drives each of them, but Aunt Charlotte has been labelled as madwoman, the woman who 'can't help herself' (MO. p.106), and this is the source of Mary's unease, and her desire to repress the hunger that drives her. She becomes gripped by the fear that she will 'go like Aunt Charlotte' (MO. p.291). Again the word 'like' suggests the classifying and stereotyping of women which is so prevalent in the society in which Mary finds herself.

Mary herself, does not appear to question the construction of Aunt Charlotte's madness. Certainly with her talk of 'clockwork stomachs' and her hallucinations about Emilius (MO. p.150), the novel constructs her as mad but this is certainly not the opinion of the egotistical Mark who observes that:

"Poor Charlotte's the sanest of the lot, and she's the only one that's got shut up."

"Why do you say she's the sanest?"

"Because she knew what she wanted."  
"Yes. She knew what she wanted. She spent her whole life trying to get it. She went straight for that one thing. Didn't care a hang what anybody thought of her."  
"So they said poor Charlotte was mad."  
"She was only mad because she didn't get it" (MO. p.250).

There seems to be a crucial difference here between Mark's opinion and Mary's. Mark appears to believe that Charlotte is still sane, Mary that she has been driven mad. The second voice, that of Mark, at least partially questions the novel's construction of Charlotte as mad.

Mary is not only the victim of contemporary cultural assumptions, but of contemporary science, itself of course inevitably constructed by those very assumptions. The fear of hereditary influences has been sown by the conversation about Victor's avoidance of marriage. It is inevitably reinforced by the fact that Dan, like her father, becomes habitually drunk, and it comes to the surface in a conversation with Dan's friend Lindley Vickers:

"...I knew your father, I know Dan and your mother, and Victor Olivier and your aunt - "  
"Which aunt?"  
"The Unitarian lady; and I knew Mark - and Rodney. They don't account for you."

"Does anybody account for anybody else?"

"Yes. You believe in heredity?"

"I don't know enough about it."

"You should read Haeckel - The History of Evolution, and Herbert Spencer and Ribot's Heredity. It would interest you...No it wouldn't. It wouldn't interest you a bit."

...

"Look here, promise me you won't think about it, you'll let it alone"

(MO. p.284).

The conversation operates on two levels. On the submerged level, Vickers' hesitation after 'aunt', as well as Mary's question implies an awareness of Aunt Charlotte on both their parts. He displays a more than passing anxiety that she shall not read the books on heredity which he has just recommended. It may stem from a thought about Dan, or Roddy's death from heart disease, but the possibility that he is thinking of hereditary insanity cannot be excluded. Thus Vickers, one of Mary's potential lovers, takes on something of the role of Rowcliffe, becoming complicit in the construction of Charlotte as psychiatric case history.

The books which have most influence on Mary are Maudsley's Body and Mind, Pathology of Mind, and Responsibility in Mental Disease. The vision which they present to Mary, who has always sought to preserve her independence of mind, is horrific:42

You had thought of yourself as a somewhat less powerful, but still independent and separate entity, a sacred, inviolable self, struggling against them [your family] for complete freedom and detachment... But it was not so. There were no independent, separate entities, no sacred, inviolable selves. They were one immense organism and you were part of it; you were nothing that they had not been before you. It was no good struggling. You were caught in the net; you couldn't get out (MO. p.290).

Mary's response is typical. Her independent mind and indomitable will find a way forward. She observes that not all her family are alike:

Papa and Uncle Victor were different; and Aunt Charlotte and Aunt Lavvy... You would be like Aunt Lavvy. You would live in Morfe with Mamma for years and years as Aunt Lavvy had lived with Grandmamma. First you would be like Dorsy Heron; then you like Louisa Wright; then like Aunt Lavvy. No; when you were forty-five you would go like Aunt Charlotte (MO. pp.290-291).

The passage is crucial in understanding the forces which influence Mary. There is a confusion in the passage between biological and cultural determinism, and Mary appears caught between the two. On the level of biological determinism, Mary does not seem to understand the laws of heredity, since, assuming that her behaviour is a consequence of hereditary traits, she implies she can make a choice about which aunt she

will be like, although her last sentence may be taken as an acknowledgement of this mistake. The whole passage, however, is shot through with cultural determinism which Mary does not appear to recognise for what it is. The only options available for her are to be 'like' a series of other women. More importantly, she must choose between two aunts, she must be like one or the other. Society does not allow her to be Charlotte and Lavinia. In spite of the fact that this whole section is a reflection on heredity, it is not so much her fear of hereditary influences as unacknowledged cultural forces which influence Mary. Although it is impossible to ignore the presence of heredity in this novel, in which Mark, Roddy and Mary herself all suffer from a hereditary heart condition, the issue is given a more balanced treatment than some critics seem aware of, by, for example, Mr Sutcliffe's sceptical comment that, 'There's hardly a family that hasn't got somebody with a tile loose.' (MO. p.294).

Throughout this chapter I have traced an opposition between strong, independent, intellectual women and sexually driven women who have no intellectual interests. Mary herself says of Aunt Charlotte, 'I don't think she ever read anything.' (MO. p.294) It is my contention that this division is artificial, that Mary and Aunt Charlotte are two sides of one woman who

have been driven apart by the fragmentation which results from the cultural construction of women. Mary of course, unlike Gwenda Carteret, does achieve sexual fulfilment, after she meets Richard Nicholson. Her rejection of marriage and acceptance of the role of mistress seem to allow her to define herself other than by the two constructions which are offered to Gwenda, whatever the reader may think of her reasons for rejecting marriage. However the crucial point is not Mary's rejection of marriage but her later rejection of a sexual relationship:

"Can't you see, can't you feel that it's no use coming again, just for this? It'll never be what it was then. It'll always be like last night, and you'll think I don't care. Something's holding me back from you. Something that's happened to me. I don't know yet what it is."

...  
"I did want you, all last year. It was so awful that I had to stop it. You couldn't go on living like that... I willed and willed not to want you"  
(MO. p.366).

The narrative argues that Mary has given up Richard as part of a neo-Platonic search for a higher good. This is made clear in the final sections of the novel:

But if I had to choose now - knowing what reality is - between losing Richard in the way I have lost him and losing reality, absolutely and for ever,

losing, absolutely and for ever, my real self, knowing that I'd lost it?... If there's anything in it at all, losing my real self would be losing Richard, losing Richard's real self absolutely and for ever (MO. p.379).

The argument is perfectly logical, given the existence of an inner vision, which like all such fictional visions has to be taken on trust, by those whose experience they do not match. While the predominant tendency in published criticism is to argue against Mary's decision as a satisfactory ending, some recent comment in dissertations has argued in favour of the ending. Hoyser and Richardi both see the ending as happy while Gelinas argues strongly that readers 'must understand that Mary deliberately chooses the life of the mind over the heart' that her choice is not 'a second best or a reserve option'.<sup>43</sup>

It is of course possible to find other explanations. Kaplan argues that Mary 'is forced to stay and care for her domineering mother and gradually gives up the strong-willed passions of her youth, as she retreats further and further into the life of the mind' while Johnston also sees Mary's relationship with her mother as restricting her development.<sup>44</sup> Similarly Jean Radford offers two explanations, sublimation of sexual drives to the writing of poetry, or 'a defeat of desire by a tyrannical super-ego'.



Certainly much of the evidence which I have assembled to show the fear which surrounds sexual desire, could be used to explain such a defeat, and my argument is not incompatible with viewing Aunt Charlotte as representing the 'id' to Mary's super-ego.

Evidence for the repression of desire as a motive for Mary's renunciation can be found, earlier in her relationship with Nicholson, before his offer of marriage. She resolves not to hope that Nicholson will return to Morfe:

Look at the others: the ones that hadn't come back and the ones that had. Jimmy Ponsonby, Harry Craven, Mr Sutcliffe. And Maurice Jourdain and Lindley Vickers. If Maurice Jourdain had never come back she would always have seen him standing in the cornfield. If Lindley Vickers had never come back she wouldn't have seen him with Nannie Learoyd in the schoolhouse lane; the moment when he held her hands in the drawing-room, standing by the piano, would have been their one eternal moment (MO. p.340).

It is the argument of the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', a plea for non-consummation which it is impossible to overlook.

However, since Mary has no existence, there can be no valid attempt to search for a 'real' or hidden motive. I would simply suggest that the structure of the text

presents sufficient evidence to suggest the presence of two constructions, one called Charlotte, who moves from fallen woman to madwoman, and one called Mary, who is blue stocking and old maid and who are placed in opposition to one another, and defined by that opposition, with the result that neither can escape the limits of the construction. Mary must survive, and in order to survive she must retain her difference and therefore deny that part of herself which is Aunt Charlotte.

V

The notion that apparently oppositional characters are intrinsically linked is given some support by a study of The Creators, published in 1910. The plot of the novel is too rambling for convenient summary but it recounts the love affairs of a loosely constituted group who share an interest in artistic activity. One of these, Nina Lempriere, is strongly reminiscent of the portrayal of Gwenda Carteret and yet contains within her the very elements which Gwenda so strongly resists.

It is a feature of Sinclair's style, a style which is very evident in this novel, that she attaches

particular words to particular characters, almost like a stage mask in a morality drama, and the word frequently attached to Nina is 'murky' or 'murkiness', by which Sinclair clearly implies sexual passion. However, it is important to note that the word first occurs within the consciousness of the utterly egocentric George Tanqueray, the central male character of the novel, when he meditates on the fact that Nina was once in love with him, 'To his mind there had always been something a little murky about Nina.'<sup>45</sup> Later, when Nina falls in love a second time, he observes:

There was (he came back to it again) something very murky about Nina. And Nina, with her murkiness, was manifestly in love with this spiritual, this mystical young man. So amazing was the part set her in the mortal comedy (C. p.179).

Tanqueray with his celebrated and selfish detachment is amused by the opposition between the two characters. It is an oppositional hierarchy which privileges the spiritual and leaves Nina described by a word suggestive of darkness and impurity. Darkness, as I have shown elsewhere is frequently associated with unconscious, usually sexual motivation in Sinclair's novels. The occurrence of animal imagery in the same connection is reflected in the portrayal

of Nina's character, for example, when she falls in love for a second time, this time with the poet Owen Prothero; for like all Sinclair's sexual women she has no romantic undying love for one man, which might have redeemed her in the eyes of Sinclair's pre-war readership: 'Her wild beast woke and tore her...The beast was falling now upon Laura's image and destroying it' (C. p.241). Here Nina's sexual passion is clearly conveyed by the image of the beast, arguably from within the character's own consciousness, and is conveyed as a destructive force. It suggests that Nina, within the grip of such passion is a much stronger character than either Alice or Aunt Charlotte, whose oppositional relationship to Gwenda and Mary, inevitably means that they are weak characters. Nina escapes from her passion, characterised as the beast, only with great difficulty. After Prothero's marriage to Laura, she remains unwillingly within its power, returning reluctantly to her former rooms:

It was the place where her beast had gone out and in with her. It still crouched in the corner where she had kicked it. It was an unhappy beast, but it was not cruel any more. It could have crawled to Laura's feet and licked them (C. p.391).

The language is reminiscent of a passage in Sinclair's 'Symbolism and Sublimation' describing the unconscious.<sup>46</sup> Here the imagery of the beast emphasises the fragmentation of Nina's character, so that she hardly represents a more coherent character than Gwenda-Alice or Mary-Charlotte.

As with Maggie, Alice and Aunt Charlotte there are hints of a pathological element within Nina's nature. The difference in Nina's case is that she is self-aware. She ruminates on the vision of her which the spiritual, all-seeing, almost God-like figure, Owen Prothero must have:

Did he, she wondered, really see what was in her, her hidden shames and insanities, the course of the wild blood that he knew must flow from all the Lemprieres to her? She lived, to be sure, the life of an ascetic and took it out in dreams. Yet he must see how her savage, solitary passion clung to him, and would not let him go. Did he see, and yet did he not condemn her?  
(C. p.183).

The fundamental opposition within Nina and between so many of Sinclair's oppositional characters is nowhere more succinctly stated. The notion of sexuality as an illness and the fear of hereditary taint, which Sinclair herself never seems entirely able to escape from, is made explicit but as always, it carries with

it the redeeming sense that the it is not to be condemned, at least by the truly wise and enlightened. Prothero, it should be remembered, is not only profoundly spiritual, apparently in mystical contact with God, but he is a physician. An earlier revelation of his view of Nina reveals also his pity:

He knew the Lemprieres, a family of untamed hereditary wildness. He knew Nina as the survival of a hereditary doom, a tragedy untiring, relentless, repeated year after year and foreseen with a terrible certainty (C. p.180).

The comment recalls once more Henry Maudsley's language (see above). Sinclair's treatment of such characters, for all its sympathy and pity, ultimately, perhaps because of her own fears, does them less than justice. They appear always as objects of pity. A momentary glimpse of a finer appreciation occurs in the following comment on Nina: 'she had let herself go, with the recklessness of a woman unaware of her genius for loving, with the superb innocence, too, of all spontaneous forces' (C. p.185). For once at least, the narrator is kinder to Nina than she is to herself. The comment conveys something of the other side of Nina's fragmented character, of her power and courage. So that in this instance, the sexual part of Nina appears as a positive force which it can never do in the case of those other characters who are only

fragments, Alice and Charlotte.

The other side of the fragmented character which is Nina, which the novel privileges, is inextricably linked with virginity, which in Nina's case is linked with strength and power:

"Never again. There must be no more George Tanquerays. If I see one coming, I'll put a knife into myself, not hard enough to kill, but hard enough to hurt..."

Her murky face cleared suddenly.

"Look here," she said. "I believe, if any woman is to do anything stupendous, it means virginity. But I know it means that for you and me" (p.104).

For fragmented Nina, there is another Tanqueray, in the shape of Prothero, although she is forced in spite of herself to remain loyal to her virgin path. Later, she reflects on her creative genius: 'It had not struggled in her against her passion. If it had, she knew that she would have swept it aside and crushed it' (C. p.313). Nevertheless in keeping with the hierarchical opposition within the novel she associates virginity with sanity:

It was in her hour of sanity and insight that she had said virginity was the law, the indispensable condition. Virginity - she had always seen it, not as a fragile, frustrate thing, but as a joyous, triumphing energy, the cold, wild sister of mountain winds and

leaping waters, subservient only to her genius, guarding the flame in its secret, unsundered heart. Her genius was the genius of wild earth, an immortal of divinely pitiful virgin heart and healing hand; clear-eyed, swift-footed, a huntress of the woods and the mountains, a runner in the earth's green depths, in the secret, enchanted ways. To follow it was to know joy and deliverance and peace. It was the one thing that had not betrayed her (C. p.313).

The description, with its evocation of Diana, anticipates Gwenda Carteret. The reference to the wild earth and the woods and mountains links this virgin Nina with the other wild and passionate Nina, two fragments of one being. The power implicit in the portrait recalls Auerbach on the energy of demonic women. Virginity within a patriarchal society carries highly ambiguous connotations. On one level it suggests passivity, an innocent state of preparedness for sexual experience, and on another level it suggests defiant denial of sexuality, and by implication refusal of sexual compliance, as it does here. The virgin Nina is thus an even greater rebel than the passionate Nina, refusing society's construction of womanhood. Her features are repeatedly described as masculine, Tanqueray attributing to her a 'Roman eagle kind of beauty' (C. p.58), and she herself underlines her distance from the contemporary ideal of womanhood when she comments to Prothero:



I've broken all the rules. A woman shouldn't come and tell a man she cares for him... I only know that I'm so much more like a man than a woman that the rules for women don't apply (C. p.243).

Nina, then, is a potentially whole character, strong, wild and energetic forced into two parts, exemplified by the oppositional images of beast and goddess. It is the age-old opposition of virgin and whore. Put another way, for Nina there is no compromise between the marriage-bed and the nunnery.

For Jane Holland, there is of sorts, in her marriage to Hugh Brodrick, but she experiences in the process a continuing fragmentation between two selves which is expressed most clearly in the following passage:

Then suddenly she was aware that she, Jane Brodrick, and this woman, Jane Holland, were inseparably and indestructibly one. For a moment her memory and her desire merged with this woman's desire and memory, so that the house and the garden and the figure of her husband became strange to her and empty of all significance. As for her own presence in the extraordinary scene, she had no longer her vague, delicious wonder at its reality. What she felt was a shock of surprise, of spiritual dislocation. She was positively asking herself, "What am I doing here?" (C. p.291).

It is analogous to the moment in Wuthering Heights

when Catherine Linton wakes from her dream of being Catherine Earnshaw to discover the reality of the last twelve years of her life.<sup>47</sup> For Jane it is a crisis of identity, expressed by the phrase, 'spiritual dislocation'. This fragmentation of Jane is most clearly observed by Nicky, one of her literary friends, who sees without really understanding:

She moved among them abstractedly, with mute, half-alienated eyes. She seemed to have suffered some spiritual disintegration that was pain. She gave herself to them no longer whole, but piecemeal. At times she seemed to hold out empty, supplicating hands, palms outward, showing that she could give no more. There was, she seemed to say, no more left of her (C. p.347).

Her marriage appears to have brought her fragmentation and impoverishment, to have all but destroyed the fragile self. Jane, like Nina, is torn between genius and passion. The concept of genius in this novel depends on a Romantic construction of the creative artist and makes the plight of Nina and Jane of a somewhat different order from that of Sinclair's other strong heroines. It is stated in its most extreme form in the following passage:

The garden, the house, Brodrick and his suits of clothes and the unchanged garment of his flesh and blood, the child's adorable, diminutive body, they had no place beside the perpetual, the

ungovernable resurgence of her vision. They became insubstantial, insignificant. The people of the vision were solid, they clothed themselves in flesh; they walked the earth; the light and the darkness and the weather knew them, and the grass was green under their feet (C. p.354).

This visionary power is nominated an existence separate from Jane, by a number of characters in the novel, including Jane herself, but initially by Tanqueray causing Jane to experience a revulsion against it:

She felt a sudden pang of jealousy, a hatred of her genius, this thing that had been tacked on to her. He cared for it and could be tender to it, but not to her (C. p.11).

The Jane that reflects thus is under the sway of passion, in this case for Tanqueray. Later, when her gift helps her to recover from the shock of his marriage, she feels very differently about it:

To love anything more than this thing was to lose it. You had to come to it clean from all desire, naked of all possession. Placable to the small, perishing affections, it abhorred the shining, dangerous powers, the rival immortalities. It could not be expected to endure such love as she had had for Tanqueray (C. pp.113-114).

The language of both these extracts emphasises the separateness of genius as well as its incompatibility

with other elements of the psyche such as passion. Jane's subsequent career as the wife of Brodrick involves the constant supplanting of the one force in her by the other. At an early stage in her marriage, 'the forms of imagination had withdrawn themselves' (C. p.283). The same experience follows the birth of her children, but at other times her genius reasserts itself, at one point even breaking her physical tie to Brodrick: 'One night, when he came to her, he found a creature that quivered at his touch and shrank from it, fatigued, averted' (C. p.355).

This temporary annihilation of sexuality, is an annihilation of a part of Jane. Her passion is not emphasised in the negative terms in which Nina's is described, and is perhaps therefore to be seen as less powerful and less destructive but it is powerful enough to startle Tanqueray: 'her voice had a long, profound and passionate vibration' (C. p.82), and her passion remains capable of being reawakened by Tanqueray at the end of the novel. Significantly her passion for Brodrick himself, at a moment when it is dominant over her genius, leads her, like Nina, to step outside the prevailing social code and to seat herself 'with audacity on his knees' (C. p.395). Thus the two predominating forces within Jane, the two Janes, each set her outside the parameters set for

Edwardian women.

Both within and without these parameters, cultural stereotypes influence the way Jane is seen and understood, by herself as well as others. The third paragraph of the novel reflects George Tanqueray's perception of Jane, or a fragment of Jane at a particular moment:

It was no longer she who presided at the feast, but her portrait by Gisborne, R.A...Gisborne, R.A. was a solemn egoist, and his picture represented, not Jane Holland, but Gisborne's limited idea of her (C. p.1).

The initials are sufficient to indicate that this is the official perception of Jane according to the artistic establishment, and like all perceptions, it is necessarily limited. The other side of Jane's character is more than once evoked by the description of her as a fawn. Significantly, it is again Tanqueray who is the observer on the following occasion: 'Of a sudden there died out of her face the fawn-like, woodland look, the maternal wildness, the red-blooded joy' (C. p.351). The passion of this Jane is thus framed and controlled within an ordered, neo-classical universe. It is Tanqueray who applies yet another artistic stereotype, this time not to Jane but to Gertrude, who helps to define Jane, by representing

what she is not. In response to his wife, Rose's comment that in Jane's place she would not leave her son to Gertrude, he exclaims, 'What? Not to the angel in the house?' (C. p.374). Jane, at least according to Tanqueray, is emphatically not to be defined according to the supremely acceptable artistic stereotype of post-Victorian culture, the title of Coventry Patmore's poem.

Tanqueray's role in defining Jane is important. As a realistic novelist he shares the egotism of Gisborne. Unlike other artists within the novel, most significantly Prothero, in offering a realistic portrait of the world, he seeks to control it and impose his own pattern upon it. The pattern he imposes upon Jane allows her only to exist within certain cultural constructions, which are sometimes mutually exclusive. Thus he dislikes the Gisborne Jane because his own needs at that moment are predominantly sexual. Once he has his own 'angel in the house' in the form of Rose, and Jane is about to be married to someone else, he resists her womanhood as destructive to her genius, telling her angrily that 'when this folly falls upon a woman, she thinks it's a divine folly' (C. p.275).

If realistic novelists are prone to impose their own

pattern on the world, so are medical men. Jane's brother-in-law, Henry Brodrick is the first and most interesting of a series of doctors in Sinclair's novels, anticipating in some respects Virginia Woolf's splendid creation of Bradshaw in Mrs Dalloway. At one point he is instrumental in seeking to impose a regime upon Jane which recalls the tyranny of The Yellow Wallpaper. She is prescribed breakfast in bed, initially at the suggestion of the angelic Gertrude. At the same period, she tells Tanqueray, 'they'll say, if I sit up, that that's what tires me' (C. p.367). The plural pronoun makes it clear that it is Henry rather than her more understanding husband who is the source of the advice.

His views on Jane make it clear that, despite the apparent objectivity of his profession, he views her according to his limited construction of the world, the construction of an affluent and successful Edwardian man, as his conversation with his brother before his marriage to Jane makes clear:

"I have had her," said he, "under very close observation."

"So have I," said Hugh. "You forget that she is an exceptional woman."

"On the contrary, I think her so very exceptional as to be quite abnormal. Geniuses generally are."

"I don't know. For a woman to live absolutely alone, as she does, and

thrive on it, and turn out the work she does - it's a pretty fair test of sanity."

"That she should have chosen to do so is itself abnormal" (C. p.267).

Nothing could more clearly state the prevailing view that to be different is to be a case for pathological medicine, and that for women to be independent is the most damning kind of difference. Just why independence for women is so inimical to Henry's view of the world is made clear later when he advises Jane, now his sister-in-law, to give up her writing:

"This is not the advice I should give you... if you were an unmarried woman. I urge my unmarried patients to work - to use their brains all they can - and married ones too when they have no children (C. p.404).

The function of women in relation to men thus clearly dictates even something as integral to the personality as the use made of one's brains.

Brodrick, however, is not the only doctor in the novel and his views are challenged, and revealed as only partial by the less medically orthodox Prothero, who has considerable experience as a doctor, although significantly in Africa and India, beyond the boundaries of Edwardian England. The novel displays Sinclair's constant preoccupation with heredity.



The concept itself is not challenged but Prothero challenges Brodrick's application of it to Jane, telling her that she is not responsible for the condition of her ailing son as it is the Brodricks themselves who suffer from 'weak nerves and weak stomachs' and, 'Jacky [the strong son] gets his constitution from you, and it was you who saved the little one' (C. p.419). Prothero's judgement implies that different judgements may be made about what constitutes weak nerves. This is later made more explicit when, at a dinner party, he argues with Henry Brodrick. Their different relationships to society have been clearly marked by Henry's arrival exactly on time as the clock chimes eight. Prothero arrives with the third course, 'innocent and unconscious of offence' (C. p.425), and argues his alternative view over coffee and cigarettes:

"Take...a genius with a pronounced neurosis. His body may be a precious poor medium for all ordinary purposes. But he couldn't have a more delicate, more lyrical, more perfectly adjusted instrument for his purposes than the nervous system you call diseased' (C. p.425).

Confronted with an exposition of the relative nature of medical opinion, Henry can only condemn Prothero, after he has gone, as 'A man who deliberately constructs his own scheme of the universe' (C. p.426),

apparently remaining unaware that his own judgements are trapped within his own scheme of the universe. Since the texts I have been discussing have a tendency to construct some female characters according to medical diagnosis, Prothero's argument for the subjectivity of such diagnoses is a useful demonstration of the way in which the alternative voices of a text may be used to question its own constructions.

Jane, like all the female characters I have been discussing, is also trapped, trapped within schemes of the universe created by male artists and physicians, who represent cultural manifestations of economic and social power. It is no wonder that Jane is labelled unstable for she moves, as on a switchback, from one construction to another, from Tanqueray's genius to Henry Brodrick's wife and mother, encompassing within one unhappy self, polarities which are in many ways similar to those encompassed by the early oppositions of Batchelor and Molly; and Lucia and Poppy and developed in the more obviously linked, and physically related opposites of Gwenda and Alice; and Mary and Charlotte. Nina is a similarly divided character but appears more coherently in the novel because events force her to choose one construction of herself. Both sides of Nina are in fact romantic constructions,

expressed in remarkably similar language. The 'wild beast' of her sexual desires becomes her virginity, 'clear-eyed, swift-footed, a huntress of the woods and mountains'. In spite of the negative references to the 'beast' and the recurrence of 'murkiness', Nina's sexuality is sometimes expressed in positive terms and this appears to distinguish her from Sinclair's other sexually motivated women. Phrases like 'untamed hereditary wildness' and 'superb innocence of all spontaneous forces' link the sexual Nina with her virgin counterpart, 'the cold, wild, sister of mountain winds and leaping waters' and suggest fleetingly the possibility of unconstructed womanhood, untamed and therefore whole.

## VI

Sinclair's construction of reality in her novels is inevitably influenced by her social and historical situation, including the prevailing cultural constructions of her time. The significance of this for the representation of women in her novels is most clearly emphasised by The Divine Fire, which uses women in a passive role as measures of the hero's progress. While none of Sinclair's other novels do this in quite such a formal way, and certainly none of

the ones discussed here, in any way at all, the structure of The Divine Fire does illuminate something about the way in which all the characters I have been discussing are constructed, for there is an element even in the strongest and most independent of them, which is constructed by their relationship to men. They fall, as I have shown, into three major groups, represented by the three females of The Divine Fire. Flossie and her later successor, Mary Carteret are the least interesting. They submit to what is required of them, remaining firmly within the boundaries of patriarchy.

Poppy, representing in The Divine Fire, the lowest level of womanhood, is the successor to Molly, whose passion comes close to being defined by her lack of brains, brains being represented by Miss Batchelor, as though passion and brains were in some way incompatible. Molly although dominated by her passion, is nevertheless a respectably married woman, whereas Poppy, the music hall performer, with her sexuality and knowledge of the world, is a version of the fallen woman and she too, for all her lack of worldly wisdom is characterised by her lack of intellect. Her successors, Maggie, Kitty and Violet, in varying degrees represent the transformation of the traditional literary figure of the fallen woman not

into madwoman, for they do not rage and storm in the traditional manner, but rather into psychiatric case study. The fact that these partial characters, defined chiefly by their passion for their male lovers, are culturally constructed is emphasised by the association of the first two with artistic representation, Molly being compared to a Botticelli painting and Polly herself representing an artistic role, that of the Edwardian music hall artiste; and of the other three with scientific discourse, medical men figuring in different ways in the representation of both Maggie and Violet.

Alice Carteret and Charlotte Olivier are clearly related to these earlier characters. Both are dominated by sexual passion and neither show a great deal of interest in anything else. Medical opinion plays a significant part in the representation of both characters. In the case of the first it is comparatively enlightened and redeems her from her fate of medical case into something which in a limited way represents fulfilment. In the second it is apparently less so, transforming medical case into madwoman. Nowhere is Sinclair's situation as a writer trying to transgress the limitations of contemporary culture, and at the same time bound by them, demonstrated more clearly than in her ambivalent

treatment of doctors. In spite of her undoubted respect for them, deducible from the references to scientific texts in the novels, all her medical men with the exception of Owen Prothero are represented to a greater or lesser extent as arrogant authority figures. Thus, although scientific assumptions are allowed to construct certain of her characters, there is, nevertheless, a level at which those assumptions are interrogated.

The sequence of strong characters in the novels I have been discussing is intrinsically linked to the sequence of weak ones, to which they are opposed. Miss Batchelor's significance in Mr and Mrs Nevill Tyson is chiefly that she is not Molly. Her brains and erudition exclude her from beauty and the fulfilment of passion as surely as Molly's qualities dictate that she cannot have brains. Both constellations of traits are summed up by the male-orientated definitions of spinster and wife, which in turn are cultural constructs, created in part by their opposition to one another. Similarly in The Divine Fire, Lucia lacks certain physical qualities, almost as though to be flat-chested were a natural consequence of learning Greek, while Poppy, much more attractive to the generality of men, lacks brains. These characters however, while their traits constitute culturally

defined opposites, also share certain characteristics, a capacity to love, and more importantly, a resistance to conventional roles.

Gwenda Carteret and Mary Olivier are created in the same tradition but developed more fully. Nevertheless they remain to some extent characters who, for all their strength, suggest a lack which is represented by their opposite numbers, Alice and Charlotte. Gwenda and Mary's affinity to the weaker characters is much more strongly indicated than the affinities between opposites in the earlier novels. In both cases they are blood relations and, in both cases, the stronger characters are aware that the weaker ones represent a path which they might choose but which they reject. Both manifest sexual passion, displaced, in Gwenda's case, on to her surroundings. In Mary's case her sexual hunger is quite explicitly represented, for example in her dream of her ideal man, but ultimately unfulfilled. The novels, as I have indicated, are often discussed in terms of choice. On this level, granted the common identity which I have argued for, of Gwenda and Alice on the one hand, and Mary and Charlotte on the other, one possible reading of the novels is that Gwenda and Mary reject a part of themselves. This interpretation, however, is dependent on the convention of character, analysing

Gwenda and Mary as though they were real people. Another interpretation may be offered at the level of discourse. The version of reality present in The Three Sisters offers four possible constructs of womanhood: fallen woman/psychiatric case, wife (represented by Mary), romantic heroine, and old maid/blue stocking. If one half of Gwenda-Alice is fallen woman, the other must either be romantic heroine or old maid. The particular construction of reality offers no choice. The limitations of possibility are, if anything, more obvious in Mary Olivier: A Life because patterns are foregrounded in the novel. The intelligent self-aware part of Mary-Charlotte must be 'like' someone else. If she cannot be like her sexually frustrated double, then she must be like her other aunt. Another way of defining her possible role is by measuring her against a range of suitors. For Jimmy Ponsonby and Maurice Jourdain, she is blue-stocking. For Lindley Vickers, at least according to her mother, she is sexually over eager, potential fallen woman. Ultimately the limitations of the version of reality which constructs the novel mean that its heroine remains, like Gwenda, blue-stocking/old maid.

The problem which this analysis reveals is of course, the problem of feminist realism, expressed succinctly



by Patricia Stubbs in the context of the subjective nature of women's writing, but equally applicable here, 'that of how to incorporate into a form whose essential characteristic is the exploration of existing realities, experiences and aspirations which go well beyond the possibilities afforded by that reality.'<sup>48</sup> The commonly advocated solution to this problem is non-realist narrative, and the rarified atmosphere of The Creators has some elements of such a narrative, presenting as it does, a range of characters who move in a socially discrete world, free of the demands of parents and society. Nina, alone among Sinclair's heroines, is presented in largely metaphoric terms: the wild beast, the virgin of the snows, while the metonymically presented Jane lacks the consistency and linear development which is the hallmark of characters in realist fiction.

Although Sinclair's novels, in their construction of reality, inevitably reflect the cultural assumptions of her own historical situation, they manifest, in their divided females, concerns peculiar to her own novels. The destructive possibility of 'the beast' seems to haunt Sinclair's novels of the early and middle period, manifested, not only in the recurring dualities but in the succession of ambivalently presented fallen women, Maggie, Kitty and Violet. Her

interpretation of contemporary psychology betrays a similar reluctant fascination, illustrated by her remark on Jung's 'Psychology of the Unconscious', 'Yet in all this [civilisation] nowhere can you get away from the eternal, indestructible libido.'<sup>49</sup> In a footnote she suggests that the word 'libido' is 'repulsive to the idealist' thus suggesting the two 'schemes of the universe', the Freudian and the Idealist which divide her as surely as constructions of womanhood divide her heroines.

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## CONCLUSION

Any study of Sinclair's novels implicitly raises the question of why she is no longer widely read. There are some fairly obvious answers. Towards the end of her career she wrote too many novels which did not live up to the expectations created by the work of her central period, novels which might justify Kaplan's description of her as 'a popularizer'.<sup>1</sup> Some of these later novels also justify the criticism that she is too preoccupied with psychology which according to Bullett, she expresses with 'doctrinal enthusiasm'.<sup>2</sup> Such criticism is however, I believe, unfair when it is applied to the novels of her central period. It is also very possible that her long illness which meant that she died almost twenty years after the publication of her last novel resulted in the customary surge of interest which surrounds a writer's death being muted. The world of 1946 was very different from that of 1927.

Sinclair's reputation shares with that of other women writers the disadvantage that her concerns have not coincided with those of the male-dominated critical and publishing establishment, but her work has not benefited to the same extent as that of many other

women writers from the increasing interest over the last twenty years in women's writing. The explanation for this may well lie in the fact that those attributes which made her popular in her own lifetime, the structured form she gave to her single consciousness novels and her ironic, sometimes comic, tone were not typical of the women's writing of the time, whose buried history feminist critics have attempted to reconstruct. This explanation is certainly suggested by Kaplan's slightly dismissive comment, 'it is as a popularizer of themes and techniques which belonged to the avant-garde that she maintains her interest and usefulness for this study of the feminine consciousness.' Kaplan, in her study of women writers is concerned with the establishment of a specifically female consciousness which, as she points out, was not one of Sinclair's aims, and therefore tends to underrate Sinclair.<sup>3</sup>

My own study has sought to examine Sinclair's novels in the light of her aim to 'be close to reality', a claim made at a time when the relationship of art and life was considered less problematic than it is now. However, I work from the premise that there is some relationship between art and life, even if it is expressed only in the denial of that relationship, as in certain forms of postmodern fiction. I would argue

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This last point brings me to the possibilities for further critical study of Sinclair's novels. The conflict within her writing between what I have earlier termed the 'Freudian/Jungian and neo-Platonic schemes of the universe' is worthy of further investigation. Her comic and satiric skills, manifest in novels such as A Cure of Souls and Mr Waddington of Wyck, and the social comment, particularly on lower middle class life, evident in a whole range of novels have received only passing attention. The question of publication is, of course crucial here, since widespread critical debate of out of print novels is clearly impossible. There is a strong case for the re-publication of The Helpmate, The Combined Maze, The Tree of Heaven, A Cure of Souls and Mr Waddington of Wyck. However, far from this being a possibility, at the present time of writing, Virago Press have allowed two of the three republished novels to go out of print for over a year. They intend to reprint The Three Sisters but have no plans to reprint Mary Olivier: a Life. Sinclair's novels deserve better from a publishing house dedicated to a re-evaluation of the contribution of women to the history of our culture.

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