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# Avenging Muse: Naomi Royde-Smith, 1875-1964

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# AVENGING MUSE

*Naomi Royde-Smith, 1875-1964*

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It has been my good fortune that Thomas M. Whitehead was director of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection in the Paley Library, Temple University, Philadelphia. In 1978 he had the foresight to acquire seventeen boxes of Royde-Smith correspondence, unpublished manuscripts and working papers, newspaper clippings, photographs, and more. Mr. Whitehead also secured the excellent work of Sharon Fitzpatrick, who compiled an unwieldy mass of Royde-Smith material. I respect his acuity and generosity. Another important location of Royde-Smith's papers is in the Ernest Milton Collection of thirty-three



uncatalogued boxes located in the Victoria and Albert Theatre and Performance archive, Blythe House, London. The Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin holds hundreds of Walter de la Mare's letters to Royde-Smith and some of hers to him. Royde-Smith's journal written in French, 1898 to 1904, is located in the Henry Spiess Collection in the *Bibliothèque publique et universitaire* in Geneva, along with Spiess's letters to her. Other archival sources include the Berg Collection in the New York Public Library and the Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. Crumbling issues of the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* may be found in the British Newspaper Archive now located in Boston Spa, North Yorkshire. Royde-Smith's correspondence with the Society of Authors is held in the Archives and Manuscripts room of the British Library, London. The Halifax Antiquarian Society provided historical monographs about the Smith family in Yorkshire. I am grateful to all. Thank you to the Society of Authors, as the literary representative of the estates of Rose Macaulay and Naomi Royde-Smith, for permission to quote from their published and unpublished works. Permission to quote from the published and unpublished works of Walter de la Mare has been granted by his Literary Trustees and the Society of Authors as their representative.

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# Introduction

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Naomi Royde-Smith was a distinguished literary muse during the first decades of the twentieth century and thereafter was a notable author in her own right. Educated by nineteenth-century feminists, she decidedly did not want to be remembered as a woman relegated to stimulating the creativity of others.<sup>1</sup> Royde-Smith had learned from experience: two poets had be-mused her to their gain. She pushed back, releasing herself from *fin de siècle* neo-romantic conscription—such as had enthralled the sought ideal in Edmond Rostand’s *La princesse lointaine* (1895). Between the wars she reversed the power of the gaze to create plays for her husband to perform; she also authored novels, some of which extoll the talents of recruited muses and rebuke those who plunder their gifts.

She achieved prominence in Great Britain as an influential literary editor and then as a writer. Today, few recognize her name. I did not know of her when editors of a biographical encyclopedia devoted to women in world history asked me to compose a sidebar on Naomi Royde-Smith to accompany my essay on the British writer Rose Macaulay.<sup>2</sup> To my surprise, she had once been a well-published author on both sides of the Atlantic; my own California college library in liaison with nearby universities shelved dozens of her books—most of them poetic, complex, and unexpectedly relevant.<sup>3</sup> Biographical information was scanty in the 1990s. Even the year and location of her birth muddled away in mystery. I was intrigued by three aspects of her life and began to consider writing a full biography. First, Royde-Smith edited an influential London literary weekly for over a decade; second, she maintained an enduring relationship with the Georgian poet

Walter de la Mare and inspired his most significant work; and, third, she bloomed as a prolific novelist in her fifties, sixties, and seventies, suggesting that some women may flower when released by menopause. It seemed to me that Naomi Royde-Smith was too important and too interesting to remain a “missing person” in literary history. In archives and in her writings, I was startled by what I found.

By calling Naomi Royde-Smith her “foe,” Virginia Woolf conceded rivalry, perhaps even equality, as well she might. Royde-Smith was a formidable cultural force in the 1920s. An eminent literary editor of the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, she was on the brink of riding a creative wave into forty of her own books—well-received novels, biographies, and plays, dystopian romances with satirical bite. In the habit of opening her home on Thursday evenings, she received Woolf in a spacious hall located in a Victorian townhouse off Exhibition Road. Here, middlebrow South Kensington and highbrow Bloomsbury crossed paths.

Middlebrow writers aimed their appeal at wide readerships rather than constricted coteries.<sup>4</sup> Many depended on their earnings to support themselves and those in their keep. Royde-Smith had to earn her living, and at times she helped support her sisters, parents, and eventually her husband. As literary editor of the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, she provided paid work for authors who were moonlighting as reviewers. Her Thursday evenings mingled writers with literary critics and editors—such as Lady Rhondda, editor of *Time and Tide*, who was also a guest the evening Virginia Woolf disparaged Royde-Smith and her salon, finding it “the marriage of conventionality & the Saturday Westminster” and proclaiming Naomi “the least attractive woman she had seen.”<sup>5</sup> It was a curious observation since Royde-Smith was widely acclaimed as both physically attractive and personally charismatic.

The poet Walter de la Mare was dazed by her beauty and acumen. He fell in love, calling her by the endearment “Ann” after they met in 1911, quipping:

Poor tired Ann tries all she can  
To dream like a child & work like a man:  
What *wonder* she’s weary, what wonder she’s wan!<sup>6</sup>

As a literary editor, Naomi Royde-Smith, indeed, was a working woman in a man’s world during the first decades of the twentieth

century. She had been educated to teach at Clapham High School, a day school for girls in London. Instead, beginning in 1903, she made her way in literary journalism, rising to the top of her profession before the First World War. Her books came later when, during the 1920s, she turned to writing mainly novels over the ensuing half century.

Her fictions tackle subjects that in her day were rarely put into print—such as descriptions of women in erotic intimacy with women and depictions of the British public schools as unwitting collaborators with the Nazi treatment of Jews. Stylistically, her novels are slow-moving descriptions of mundane lives that culminate in page-turning suspenseful finales. Some of her novels explore homosexual themes quite frankly. One that is particularly poignant is *The Island, a Love Story* (1930) about women loving women. In another, *Jake* (1935), she depicts men loving men while displaying her knowledge of musical aesthetics and a commercial industry that exploits genius artists. In *Skin-Deep* (1927) she analyzes the power of the journalistic medium to form mass opinion. Similarly with the Nazi youth movement in her Catholic novel *The Iniquity of Us All* (1949), she analyzes the power of cultural institutions to shape behavior. The most poetically graceful of her works, *The Lover* (1928), ruminates on art and desire posited as counterweight to mass culture.

This biography of Naomi Royde-Smith uncoils in fits and jerks, sometimes springing back to catch missed threads. Chapters are detached from strict chronological sequence so that life stories might spin to their conclusions. Her enmeshment with a Swiss poet starts in 1896 and terminates decades later with his death, and the chapter about them is punctuated by novels derived from her unhappy romantic experience as his muse. The chapter chronicling her rise to power as a literary editor begins before 1904 and ends in 1924. It includes discussion of novels rendered from her adventures in journalism and theater. Novels that are lesbian-themed are clustered in another chapter with beginnings in 1900; it is devoted to her romantic friendships with women. Another chapter delineates her clandestine liaison with the well-known poet Walter de la Mare; it begins in 1911 and ends with his death in 1956, which she does not rue. In *Melilot* (1955), a novel, she disparages a writer's use of the talents of his beloved. Another tale begins in 1926 when Royde-Smith marries the highly regarded if eccentric actor Ernest Milton and writes plays for his performance. Once they convert to Catholicism, she writes a cluster of controversial Catholic novels.

Her works are both sociological and poetic. In her novels she parses power devolving from systems of gender and class inequities. She was an astute analyst of the influence of cultural conditioning. Fiction and her lived experience are juxtaposed in this biography. Ardently loved by many, she loved a few in return, and these passions have been pressed like dried flowers into archives, hundreds of love letters, old-fashioned documentation for biographers.

My adventure writing this biography commenced in the Victoria and Albert Theatre and Performance archive, located in Blythe House near the Olympia train station in London. The building had been a savings and loan post office until the beginning of the twentieth century and now is a warren of spacious tiled rooms with high ceilings and tall, wide institutional windows filtering gray light through dirty panes reinforced with wire. Not yet a reading room in 1998, it was a chilly archive as vast as a rugby field with legions of towering metal shelves. Over half of the Ernest Milton Collection, thirty-three uncatalogued boxes, contained Naomi's manuscripts and papers and a variety of memorabilia.

I teetered up a wheeled ladder to reach the most elevated of several boxes on the topmost metal shelf. One held the contents of Ernest Milton's bedside table drawer in his last place of residence, a rest home for retired actors. It contained a silver cigarette case enclosing two stale unfiltered cigarettes plus one frugally preserved butt, a pair of wire-rimmed reading spectacles, and a yellowed cardboard box eight inches long, two inches wide and high, lidded. Inside rested a heavy, thick braid of corn blonde hair, the tresses of a once young Naomi Gwladys Royde-Smith. I hefted her hair in my hands and sniffed its mustiness, an unabashed biographer, a necromancer.

At least about her hair Naomi had written verifiable truth. In an unfinished autobiography she noted that all of her parents' eight children were either rosy and flaxen or dun and corn blonde, and that she was one of the latter. Her swatch of hair corroborates this claim and perhaps another: in her journal of 1897 she asserted that she could not enjoy dancing because her heavy hair was insecure. Indeed, this severed braid had heft and, quite probably, without the aid of hair spray, which would not have existed in the 1890s, her weighty tresses might have slipped their moorings. If so, desire to manage her hair rather than fling herself in dance is consistent with the self-determined person that emerges in her writings and in this biography.

# Library Archive Abbreviations

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Butts MSS. Mary Butts Collection. Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts. Yale University, New Haven.

Mare MSS. Walter de la Mare Collection. Harry Ransom Center, the University of Texas, Austin.

Milton MSS. Ernest Milton Collection. Victoria and Albert Theatre and Performance archive, Blythe House, London. In 2015 the author was informed by the Archivist and Conservation Manager that the entire Ernest Milton Collection is catalogued as THM/325 and that reference to individual boxes would no longer apply once the collection has been rehoused and catalogued, perhaps by 2017. As a result of this advice, the author has eliminated box references in documentation.

NRS MSS. Naomi Royde-Smith Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Paley Library, Temple University, Philadelphia.

Spiess MSS. Henry Spiess Collection. *Bibliothèque publique et universitaire*. Geneva.



# Chapter 1

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## Victorian Middleclass Girls’ Education, 1875–1895

She was a sweetly plump child capped with wispy blonde hair, eyes huge and lingering, an engaged, mildly lopsided smile conveying curiosity altogether pleasant and perspicuous: her gaze, not directed to the camera’s lens, dwelled on an adored other. This photograph must have been taken in the heat of a Yorkshire summer; she was flimsily attired in tissue-white linen—bare-armed, bare-legged, bare-footed, and on her own.



Naomi Gwladys Royde-Smith, age one and a half years, 1876.



Royde-Smith's earliest claimed memory was reserved for an even younger baby Gwladys (Welsh, *goo LAD is*), ten months old and not yet toddling, who crawled over the carpet onto the cold varnished boards of the floor in the drawing room. There was snow piled three feet high against bay windows and a majolica jar holding a large potted India rubber tree. The jar was green and cold to touch. She used it to heft herself upright to peer into its interior, discovering its pink luminescent lining, remembering: "That was early in 1876. I imagine it was the shock of contrasting colours—possibly even the first recognition of colour in an *object*—that fixed the moment in my consciousness."<sup>1</sup> Aesthetic surprises would always delight her.

Naomi Gwladys Royde Smith was born on April 30, 1875, in her family home, a row house, Craven Edge, located at the top of Hopwood Lane across from a small park in Halifax (NRS, "Nine Lives," 1). She was the first child of eight born to Anne, known as Daisy, née Williams, and Michael Holroyd Smith. Her mother insisted that all her children be surnamed Royde (without a hyphen), a prefix to Smith in order to differentiate them as "RoydeSmiths" within the Smith clan into which she had married.<sup>2</sup> According to family lore, she had also prevailed in shortening her husband's middle name Holroyd to "Royde," ostensibly for ease of pronunciation in the invented surname. Smith family roots plunged deep into Yorkshire's past; however, the mother's were Welsh.

Recorded Smith family history began in the early 1600s when a William Smith was keeper of the Monk Bar, making home for his wife and children in the loftiest city gate of York, with views from battlements overlooking what had been at that time the royal forest of Galtres. Some of his progeny took to the countryside, preaching Nonconformist religion, a dangerous vocation during the seventeenth century. His son was hounded, taking upon himself the territory of Mixenden and Warley, where "the civil magistrates were severe with such Non-conformists who held any public assemblies, so that he had to work secretly and 'hide himself from their resentment.'"<sup>3</sup> By the end of the century, there was more indulgence of Nonconformist beliefs, and that son's son was able to take up ministry in Warley by 1724, safely and ardently expressing his views in the theological disputes of the era. Both son and grandson became scholar-preachers, the son bravely publishing his opinions, some of which were considered heretical even by other Nonconformists.

In the late eighteenth century, one male offspring eschewed this scholarly family tradition to become a successful shoemaker in Halifax, thus producing “the beginnings of business acumen, which was to come out in all the future generations of the family” (G. Smith, 80). The shoemaker’s son became a card maker. Leather “cards” were used to produce wool yarn for the flourishing textile industry. The son of the card maker was Naomi Gwladys’s grandfather, Matthew Smith, a respected community leader who rode the wave of nineteenth century industrialism that rendered Halifax prosperous—and blighted.



Naomi’s father, Holroyd Smith, sitting at his father Matthew Smith’s feet surrounded by brothers, ca. 1870.

Naomi Gwladys’s great-uncle was the founder of Frederick Smith and Company, the Caledonia Works. Its first commercial order came from Glasgow for bonnet wire in 1860. Soon the company would produce fencing wire and later telegraph and telephone wire. By 1866 the works employed one hundred men and boys, producing 1,500 tons of wire a year and dumping lime and sulfuric acid into Hebble Brook. Her great-uncle partnered with his brother, Naomi’s grandfather (G. Smith, 85). When Great-Uncle Frederick died in 1868, Naomi’s grandfather Matthew became director of the family business and, politically ambitious, put himself up for the North Ward where he was elected as a

Liberal councillor in 1869. Alderman Smith was elected mayor of Halifax in 1879. “Wearing the black mayoral robe with its white ermine border,” he made an inaugural speech in which he claimed that Halifax was “a model for sanitary matters,” a patently false assertion (G. Smith, 87).

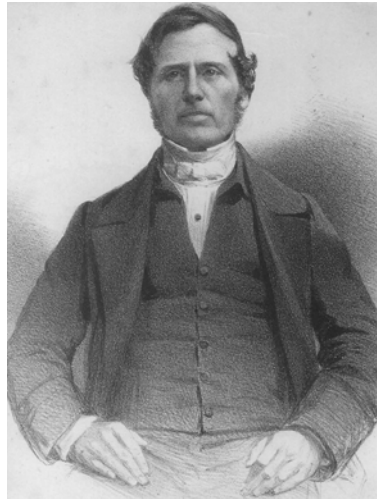
Frederick and Matthew Smiths’ wire works, pulling the copper wire used for the first trans-Atlantic cable, “added the smoke from its chimneys to the soot-laden fumes from Crossley’s carpet mills and the steam-driven looms of Illingworth, where the Calverts had woven flannel for three generations. Smoke abatement had not been thought of in the 1870s in the West Riding” (NRS, “Nine Lives,” 1). Naomi’s uncle George, now part owner of the family works, was soon elected mayor of Halifax in the family tradition. He, too, was an active member of the Liberal Party and was regarded highly enough to entertain the likes of the Duke and Duchess of York. Knighted in 1913 as Sir George Henry Fisher-Smith, he changed his surname to include his wife’s, honoring her public service as the first magistrate of the juvenile courts instituted in Halifax. She was Naomi’s aunt Hattie.

Smith family wealth enabled some members in Naomi’s father’s generation to expand beyond industrial manufacturing. Her father’s younger brother, Frederick, for instance, was drawn to the arts, composing a volume of Browningsque verse, playing the violin, associating with well-known European musicians, and collecting violins, including some crafted by Stradivarius. Frederick’s son, Sir Matthew Smith, Naomi’s cousin and lifelong friend, became a famous twentieth-century painter, knighted for his creativity, exhibiting his art in special venues at the Tate. Naomi’s father, Michael Holroyd, known as Holroyd, was not only an excellent draftsman, he, also, according to his daughter, “painted more than one quite successful landscape” and “he wrote good straight-forward verse.” From Geneva as a twenty-one-year-old, Naomi wrote her “dear Daddy”: “I have just been making a poem in consequence of thinking about you—I always do think of you when I write verses” (13 April 1896, Milton MSS). Naomi would become a twentieth-century culture-maker in her own right and also a prolific novelist.

Her father took advantage of opportunities for late nineteenth-century inventors that required “curiosity, ability, and money” and was renowned as the engineer who designed and constructed the first successful electric tramway in England.<sup>4</sup> In the twenty-first century, the tram is still running

along the promenade in Blackpool. Many of his inventions functioned more personally, as, for instance, a device for unhooking corsets.

Naomi emphatically turned her back on sooty, industrial Halifax and her extended family heritage, proclaiming to the world that she had been born in an altogether different place. In published biographical blurbs, including decades of entries in *Who's Who*, she claimed she was born in Llanwrst, a no-place, her fabrication making clever use of a Welsh orthographic boggle, for the word is similar to Llanrwrst [my emphases], a real place where her parents did finally reside as elders retiring to the countryside to live in Maenan Hall in the late 1920s. *Twentieth Century Authors* (1942) replicated the inaccuracy as did the *Dictionary of National Biography* (2004). Her obfuscation hid more than her birthplace. During her lifetime, no one could trace the date of her birth, and she successfully passed herself off as younger than she actually was. Hiding her date of birth was the kind of falsehood she referenced in a BBC program about whether a woman should tell her age when she said: "Lies, like murders, lead on to others" (16 October 1950). She gained even more with her lie. By claiming Welsh roots, she could slough aside industrial bourgeois entanglements while romanticizing her image as a girl from the West Country, an area eulogized by poets. She never corrected Walter de la Mare who sang of her: "But beauty vanishes; beauty passes:/ However rare—rare it be;/ And when I crumble, who will remember/ This lady of the West Country?" ("An Epitaph").



Naomi's maternal grandfather, Rev. Ebenezer Williams.



Naomi's maternal grandmother, Naomi Williams, known as "Gran."

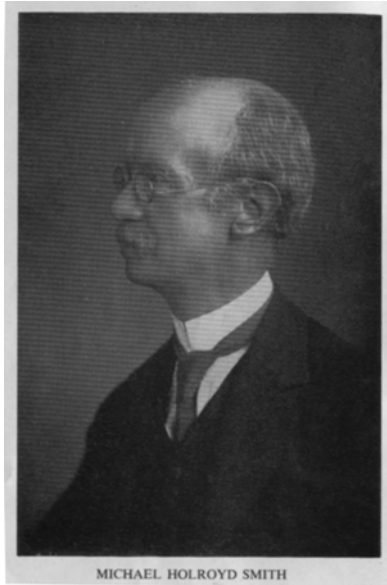
Her mother, Anne Williams, known as Daisy, unlike her daughter, actually had been born in the West Country of North Wales. She was the only daughter of the Reverend Ebenezer Williams, who claimed kinship as great-nephew of William Williams of Pantycelyn, the famed Welsh poet, hymn writer, and leader of the eighteenth-century Welsh Methodist revival. Rev. Williams ministered in Towyn in Wales at the English Presbyterian Chapel called Machynlleth (Bond, 151). His wife, Naomi, née Wilde, "Gran" to Naomi Gwladys, considered herself a Calvinistic Sabbatarian. She advocated education for girls, establishing after her husband's death a boarding school in Merionethshire that specialized in the teaching of French language and social polish to young women. Before marriage, Naomi's mother, Daisy, helped Gran by teaching English and music in her school. Daisy rejected some aspects of her parents' religious practices. According to Naomi, her mother became a "practicing eclectic" in married maturity, determined to lighten the theological burden for her children, protecting them from the God of Calvinistic vengeance, and, like the mother character in Royde-Smith's self-avowedly autobiographical novel, *In the Wood* (1928), she and Naomi's father agreed "[. . .] not to blacken and fetter the first years of any children they might have, with penance and punishment in this world and threats of hell in the world to come." Daisy intellectually repudiated the doctrine of eternal punishment just as she repudiated the mundane and legalized action of the law that

took a life for a life. “But in her secret heart she could not escape from the beliefs implanted there. Every now and again in her way with her children, this early tyranny bore its consequences” (17).

In the main, her parents protected Naomi Gwladys from bleak religious prognostications; nevertheless, she attended chapel every Sunday in Warley, where her family “had a square, high-walled pew with red cushioned seats round three sides of it and red baize covered box-footstools in which hymn books were kept.”<sup>5</sup>

Naomi associated the Welsh countryside with a green world: the seashore and days playing in warm sand, the woods, streams and skies, clouds, the remembered environment of multiple holidays with Gran, some of which were prolonged stints while her mother was giving birth to ensuing sisters. Her childhood fantasies retained as memories were vivid: she encountered, for instance, a fairy in Wales when she was summoned as a reluctant playmate for a lonely neighboring boy. The fairy’s house was eighteen inches high and had black smooth walls and a green door flanked by red geraniums in window boxes: “Round the corner of the house a girl came running. She had bare feet and stretched out both hands before her as she ran. Her hair was tied at the nape of her neck and streamed out behind her. She still remains for me the loveliest type of beauty, and I knew her age; she was, and still is, eternally fifteen (“Nine Lives,” 11).” Naomi recalled the utter boredom of the childhood hour in the company of that poor boy, who, unwittingly, competed for her attention with a winsome fairy girl.

Naomi’s mother was lovely, lithe, well-educated, and witty. An accomplished pianist, she played Beethoven for her husband in the evenings, sitting “slim above the white muslin flounces of her skirt, playing on the ivory keys of her Broadwood cottage piano in the drawing-room below” (“Nine Lives,” ii). Her father was full of hope and ambition. She remembered him flapping around his garden on a pair of large wings made of bamboo and oiled paper, seeking the secret to flight, impressing his two-year-old daughter in his polo cap and blue serge suit “as young like the milk boy” (“Nine Lives,” 2). He and Daisy produced eight living children in rapid succession: Naomi Gwladys in 1875, Maud in 1877, Dorothy Eunice Gwenllian in 1878, Daisy in 1880, Graham in 1882, Leslie Eleanor in 1884, Owen Stanley in 1887, a still-born boy in 1889, and Erica Juliet in 1890.



Naomi's father, Michael "Holroyd" Smith, from booklet about his Blackpool tram.



Naomi's mother, Anne "Daisy" Smith.

Before marriage Holroyd Smith had completed his apprenticeship as a machine tool maker in Sowerby Bridge and had taken charge of the machinery in his father's wire works, Frederick Smith and

Co., of Halifax. However, “his capacity for trying new ideas, when translated into practice, proved more expensive than parental tolerance could stand, and Holroyd Smith moved on” (Bond, 133). Halifax city councilors rejected his proposal to build an experimental tramway in 1882; subsequently, city fathers rued the day they missed an opportunity to build the first successful electric tramway in England. Holroyd had stepped to the forefront of new ideas about using electricity as a motive force, solving the problem of transferring electricity from a stationary dynamo to a moving tram by using a conduit system, a third rail under the car. He was aided in his investigations—not by his extended family—but by Louis John Crossley, a Halifax mill owner who had a private electrical laboratory at his home in Moorside and also a large garden in which Holroyd was invited to lay his rails. Holroyd took out patents on his inventions and delivered explanatory lectures all over the region. Lecture tours took him as far away as Canada. He displayed a Blackpool-like track at the Inventions Exhibition at South Kensington, London, in May 1885; the car carried up to two thousand passengers each day along a 230-yard line, and he won a silver medal for his invention. The Blackpool tram opened to hoopla on September 29, 1885, commencing with a procession of police, local rifle volunteers, fire brigade and horses, lifeboats with crews, open carriages containing mayors and guests, mace bearers, circus animals, professional organizations, and so on. “The procession formed up in Talbot Square and proceeded to the South Pier, where waiting to receive them were three paddle steamers and tramcar No. 5 in the charge of Holroyd Smith (Bond, 141).”

The new tramline was a financial success. Naomi’s father earned an engineer’s commission for work done plus £500 for assigning his patent rights to Blackpool and 150 £10 shares that brought him an annual income of £150 for most years until the corporation sold out in 1892 (Bond, 142 and 148).

At this time in his life, Holroyd Smith was confident he would be able to support a growing family. After leaving his father’s mill, he became a partner in Smith, Baker and Co. in Manchester. “He practiced as a consultant, designing mills, applying water power, testing engines, investigating the causes of industrial accidents, and experimenting with the problems of flight” (Bond, 133). He was known as a clever and scientifically astute engineer.





Naomi Gwladys, ca. 1882.

By 1880 he moved his wife, first four daughters, a Swiss nanny, a cook, a housemaid, and a parlor maid to Fern Hill located near the town of Warley in the hills above Sowerby Bridge west of Halifax. He kept a horse to carry him to Sowerby Bridge where he connected with public transportation for his commute to work. For travel his family relied on requesting from Warley a horse-drawn cab dank with the smell of mouse. During times of snow and ice, it was an arduous trip for the cab's horse: "so slippery the steep roads up which it plodded with clanging, scratching roughed shoes that struck sparks from the stone setts underfoot wherever the snow had not muffled the way" (NRS, *In the Wood*, 23).

Fern Hill was commodious and awkwardly charming. The extensive gardens—shared with John Naylor, their landlord—were Naomi's favored habitats. The high rows of rhododendrons, a croquet lawn, fountains, structured waterfalls and pools, rock fences and steps to different levels, the pastures nearby, all promoted her lifelong taste for play alfresco. She lingered page after nostalgic page composing descriptions of both Fern Hill and its gardens in her unfinished autobiography, as she had in her autobiographical novel, *In the Wood*. This Warley suburb of Halifax was moorland, lacking woods, although it was spotted with stands of sycamore trees. The fictive woods of fairies

and imaginative projections so important in her novels were actually found west of the great rock promontory shadowing Llandudno on the coast of North Wales.

The Fern Hill structure was a seventeenth-century farmhouse enlarged by the addition of a mid-Victorian villa, with a bay-windowed drawing room and a high sash-windowed dining room. “The large farm-house kitchen was lit by four small mullioned windows and a single gas-jet at night.” There was a day nursery and a night nursery with cots for infants, beds for older children, and a small bedroom for Dooly, Naomi’s beloved nanny. There was one bathroom located in a large bedroom over the kitchen where the children had their baths two at a time in order to conserve hot water. Upstairs was a warren of bedrooms for servants and a raftered playroom with one cobwebbed window where bundled children would be sent to play on inclement winter afternoons. The attic lacked both heat and toys, nor was there a dressing-up box, for there was no playacting at Fern Hill. Instead, the attic provided storage for hams, soaps, and three large wooden cases of consumables, half-yearly supplies of biscuits, teas, and groceries (“Nine Lives,” 17–19). There were weekly handwashing of undergarments. Soiled household linens and larger garments would be piled into huge baskets in the attic, saved for fortnightly washdays—monthly during the rainy season—with boiling cauldrons, sheets set to dry flapping from rows of ropes arranged above the grass portion of the garden.

The garden was a site for Naomi’s experimentation and mischief. She adored the fragrance of a thriving sweet briar tree and a flowering currant bush, “taking deep long breaths of scent from the pink tassels of its flowers, pulling the higher branches down to [her] face” (“Nine Lives,” 21). The garden, contiguous with neighboring pastures, was a place of remembered rejuvenation and delight:

The stream that flowed down the Upper Field broadened into little pools in the Lower Field, alive with the flicker of minnows under the broad leaves of marsh-mallows in the spring. It flowed under a stone wall and fed a horse trough in the lane and then poured down to the pond, a central feature of our life outside the garden. The pond in its turn let its water escape through the underground channel beneath a plantation of sycamore trees, to break into its most romantic

phase as a waterfall that splashed down into a little rocky gully, fenced quite inadequately by a low stone wall. Flat stone flags, fixed into the hillside and called the waterfall steps, led down to the Brewery owned by our Landlord. ("Nine Lives," 21)

The lyrical cadences of Naomi's prose capture the importance of her childhood green world in her emotive inner life. In adulthood, once she could afford it, Naomi rented a cottage in the London countryside where she could recapture the freedom and sensuality she experienced in her Fern Hill garden.

In her personal writings, Naomi insisted that she had disliked her mother until the age of fourteen, claiming to have received undeservedly harsh punishment as a child. Once, as a small girl, she pushed a great-great-uncle into a bush to find out if it was true that he had lost the power to smell things. Naomi maintained it was a misunderstanding, but her mother, nonetheless, required that she stand in a corner with her face to the wall. Neither her mother nor her Gran put up with "any nonsense about sparing the rod." It was not until she was "too big to be whipped, often for the misdeeds of her younger sisters," that Naomi began to feel affection for either one of them.<sup>6</sup>

Naomi saved her most biting condemnation of her mother for her fiction, suggesting in a 1942 biographical essay that readers might look to her novel *In the Wood* (USA), *Children in the Wood* (England), for a depiction of her childhood experiences. Her fictional mother lacked wisdom. While portrayed as well-meaning and loving, the mother, nevertheless, was inattentive, and she disregarded the feelings of children. In the same novel, one character wondered why Providence had made her a childless spinster while Mildred Vynning had been put in control of the sensibilities of children. In another of Royde-Smith's novels, *The Mother* (1931), the maternal avatar at least had the good sense to turn over to a spinster aunt the intellectual training of her precocious first son who was a wordsmith, punster, and rhymer.

In a draft manuscript of her unpublished, incomplete autobiography, Naomi described a situation in which the landlord's coachman was spied by her brother as he slaughtered geese for dinner. This incident was transformed in *In the Wood* into a mother-instigated killing of pet ducks thoughtlessly served for lunch to their young and nauseated duckling caretakers from whom they had been wrenched in maturity

as punishment for upending a flowerbed. The fictional mother explained to her spinster friend when they reached the drawing room after lunch that “seeing that the children had not had anything to do with the ducks for several weeks, she had not dreamt they’d mind eating them” (156). Narrative judgment is vaguely compassionate but unrelentingly judgmental: “Mildred Vynning was an intelligent woman and sympathetic without being either a sensitive or a sensible woman” (116).

Closely replicating events in Naomi’s early life, the fictional mother was also home-teaching her children. Naomi’s mother home-taught her brood, and to no better end. Naomi, aged seven—even then a wordsmith, playful with rhymes and puns—experienced difficulty learning to read. She was being taught from a picture book entitled *Reading without Tears*. The book baffled her: “I shed tears daily over this misnamed primer and suffered punishment for rendering: R-A-T, mouse; C-A-T, kitten; M-A-T, hearthrug, because of the pictures which came between the letters and the words they spelt.” Her frustrated mother said that she wasn’t really “stupid,” implying that she might be, and that she was just being “naughty.” It wasn’t until Naomi witnessed her younger cousin reading aloud from a book without any pictures that it dawned on her how it was done. Alone, she pulled Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* from a shelf, made sure it was not illustrated, and then “the alphabet arranged its letters into words she knew,” although she kept her accomplishment secret until she had tested it on the *Seven Champions of Christendom* (NRS, “Character”).

Naomi reserved her heartfelt love for the nurturing Swiss nanny Julia Hess, sent by Naomi’s mother’s school friend Camille Vidart. For fifteen years, Dooly was “the idol in the shrine of our home,” exuding tenderhearted care: “Sometimes we cried with her, sometimes we watched her cry, knowing she was moved for our sorrows or by our pain. We all adored her; for many years I preferred her to my mother” (“Nine Lives,” 5). From Dooly she learned to speak the German of Neuchatel and even to knit, which became a lifelong comfort.



“Dooly,” nanny to Naomi Gwladys, who is holding an umbrella, ca. 1879.

It was Dooly’s Neuchatel-accented English that whispered in Naomi’s elderly recollection of one of the most important books in her life, *Little Estella and Other Fairy Tales* (1860), written by an anonymous author. Dooly read it aloud to her while she snuggled. By the time Naomi finally learned to read, she had more or less memorized every story; even then, she read and reread the tales. Estella, in her estimation, was a girl hero, more enchanted than any princess and wiser than any godmother. Her favorite story, “Viola,” was about a girl slave who adventured forth into the dangerous world in order to save her princess. In retrospect, Naomi was absolutely certain that this book must have been written by a woman and that the stories were not derivative but existed in a completely realized reality of their own: “There is no Cinderella story in *Little Estella* and no Sleeping Beauty.” Lacking rescue from charming princes, these fables favored woman-to-woman commitments. Naomi speculated that the experience of imbibing *Little Estella* “may have befallen more than one infant mind before it reached its own creative years.” Her internalized ideal self was “of a fairy with wings who floated about” giving pennies to the poor and lame, a “benevolent creature.” In

maturity, she judged her fantasy, disapproving of it as a “form of vanity” (“Nine Lives,” 83–6).

There was one early attempt at schooling outside the home when Naomi was sent to kindergarten for a few weeks one spring. The experiment ended when she contracted scarlet fever. Maud and Dolly, her only sisters at the time, and Dooly were sent to Gran’s in North Wales to escape the infection. Her mother nursed Naomi back to health, tucking her firstborn into the spare room next to her own where any cry in the night could be heard. Usually crowded out by her younger siblings, Naomi craved her mother’s care and attention; she thoroughly enjoyed her illness.

Naomi’s iterated insistence that, as a child, she had disliked her mother was ameliorated by her evident adoration of her mother’s wit and beauty. Both Holroyd and Daisy “were young and amusing and dined out or went to charade parties.” Daisy entertained her daughters the next day with stories of spelling bees and guessing games. She reported dinner conversations with exalted guests, “Bishops and Members of Parliament, and, highest of all, the Marquis of Ripon who was known to stipulate that [Naomi’s] mother should sit on one side of him when he dined on the Moors. Whether this preference was due to her beauty or her wit [Naomi did] not know, but the Vicar of Halifax, Dean Pigou, enjoyed her conversation” (“Nine Lives,” 26).

To her delight Naomi was allowed to sit up to see her mother arrayed for parties before embarking in the four-wheeled, horse-drawn cab to be driven across the dark moor to one of the neighboring “mansions.” She vividly remembered an evening before her seventh birthday in front of the dining room sideboard with a looking glass in which crystal decanters were reflected:

The room was lit by gas, a branched chandelier hung from the middle of the ceiling and the flame in each of its globes was burning when I was sent down in my dressing-gown to see my mother’s gown. Its name I knew was bengaline, a beautiful word, but I had not seen it and I did not know that it was ribbed silk of a golden colour that turned almost rose by gaslight. My mother’s skin was very soft and smooth and like new ivory. She had eyes the colour of mountain pools (my father often told us this) and a beautiful small straight

nose. Her hair, once famous as being golden as a sovereign, had darkened till it matched the light brown of her delicate eyebrows. Her neck and shoulders rose out of the golden silk of the dress cut much lower than any I had seen before and the lace tucker in her bosom was held in place by a brooch in the form of a dragon-fly with a ruby and diamond head and wings each made of a single opal. She stood in her rose-coloured dress in front of the polished yellow glistening wood of the sideboard, looking at her own reflection in the glass behind, doubled in reflection and stained with light from the separate globes of the chandelier behind her. ("Nine Lives," 28–29)

This, Naomi's idolatrous paean to her mother's image, was penned in the mid-1950s—long after she had undergone an abrupt about-face at age fourteen when she began to experience a deep emotional attachment and identification with her mother.

Fern Hill was a magnet for friends and family. Since travel in those days was so arduous, when people came to visit, they tended to stay at least a fortnight, usually longer, in order to justify the trip. It would take Gran over fourteen hours to come by slow train from North Wales to Halifax; the cars lacked toilet facilities and so the train had to make frequent stops.<sup>7</sup> Stay-over visitors included Gran; Walter Crane's sister Lucy, with her gift of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*; another young woman who read the whole of Anstey's *Vice Versa* to Naomi's mother; and a Professor Barker, who took a fancy to Naomi, requiring her to sit near him on a sofa, his arm around her shoulders, kissing her cheek from time to time as he sipped tea—a man altogether loathsome to the little girl. Daisy Smith offered regular Wednesday at-homes that were popular with undergraduate men who had learned that she was an attentive listener. On other days, she was regularly sought out by neighbors who shared their sorrows and secrets with her.

Professor Barker, who taught at Leeds and gave erudite lectures in neighboring towns, convinced Naomi's parents to send her to school in London. Impressed by her reference to Judas Maccabeus in whose life she was taking a detailed interest at the time, he sent Naomi a gift of Samuel Johnson's *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, prefaced by Boswell's *Life of Dr. Johnson*. On his next visit, he wanted to know if she had read it, to which she confidently answered: "Oh,

yes! And I like the first part about Dr. Johnson best; it is like Kings and Chronicles, but *Rasselas* is like Psalms and Proverbs” (“Nine Lives,” 43). She considered disastrous the ultimate effect of her “precocious essay in literary criticism,” for Professor Barker persuaded her parents to send Naomi to London to live with her Calvinistic Gran who was now retired from running her school in Wales.

They enrolled Naomi in the North London Collegiate School under the directorship of Francis Buss, the famous pioneer of women’s education. Francis Buss had established her ground-breaking school in 1850 to educate the daughters of “professional gentlemen” of “limited means”; it charged only so much as was needed to cover expenses.<sup>8</sup> The curriculum included courses that matched those offered to boys and served as a model for girls’ education.

During 1887 and spring 1888, prepubescent, twelve going on thirteen years of age, Naomi lived comfortably but not happily with her grandmother and her mother’s brother in northern London. She was taken to the English Presbyterian church twice on Sundays and once during the week, where she was terrorized by a minister, who, in the heat of his oratory, would address two tall white globed gas lamps as “Almighty God and Satan.”

Naomi had trouble sleeping, beset by nightmares that she staved off with romantic reverie about one of her schoolmates, whom she imagined as a fairy: “Aline ran or danced, her long hair streaming out behind her, through woodland lanes or by the edge of the sea where the foam of little waves broke round her ankles and she found large beautiful shells and watched sea-anemones in pools.” Naomi continued: “It is odd that I, who knew Grimm and Hans Anderson by heart [ . . . ] should not have invented a knight or a prince to rescue her from a dragon” (“Nine Lives,” 48). In her draft autobiography, written as an elderly woman, she pondered this early manifestation of her rejection of heterosexual romance.

Her mother, terribly weak, recovered slowly from the birth of a second brother. Not even affectionate letters from Dooly about her sisters and brother could comfort Naomi. Wrote Dooly: “My own dear Gwladys! [ . . . ] Mother wants me to tell you, that if you take your Cod Liver oil, Port and Eggs regularly there would be a great anxiety off her mind. I am sure you will do it, if you know that mother is anxious about it.”<sup>9</sup>



Each day she traveled by train with schoolmates to school in Camden Town where she had been placed in the lower fourth form. She owed it to Dooly that she could read, write, and speak German fairly well. Her French, taught by her mother, was not so accomplished. She did well in composition, except for her handwriting, “bad in an inky way,” and she was not able to give the correct answer to seven times eight, for she could not master her sums. Hopeless in arithmetic, she was reported to the august Miss Buss for scolding, who “then in late middle age, was of visibly uncorsetted stoutness. Her aspect was like that of Queen Victoria. She wore a black dress with white collar and cuffs and a white cap, smaller and less ornate than my grandmother’s lace and flower trimmed ones.” Abjectly, Naomi stood before her, a culprit, dizzy with guilt and fear, only to be welcomed with wide open arms: “I ran to be clasped to an almost certainly virginal, but most comforting, deep bosom, and to be enfolded in a more healing embrace than I have ever known since that consoling hour” (“Nine Lives,” 49–50).

She came to think that Miss Buss must have warned her parents to let her off lightly because nothing was said when she returned to Fern Hill for the summer holiday. She luxuriated in happy afternoons teaching the latest baby how to walk and eating ripe gooseberries from bushes on the lower terrace. When it came time for her to crawl into the dank, mousy horse-drawn cab to be carried to the train and back to school, she fainted: “Six weeks later, when memory begins again, Dooly had taken the other children away somewhere, probably to an uncle’s house larger than ours, and I was alone at home with my mother.” Naomi had experienced what she called a “nervous breakdown” (“Nine Lives,” 51). Kept alive on nothing but milk for six weeks, abed, refusing to speak, once again she was nursed by her mother without sibling interference. It was another blissful illness. Nor was she sent back to school and “the tyranny of sums.” When memory began again, she was sitting in the gas-lit nursery peeling oranges while her mother read *Sesame and Lilies* and later *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* aloud in the cadences of her soft Welsh voice.

By now, Naomi was a voracious reader. After her breakdown, she was allowed to read as long as she wanted, and she poured over *Ivanhoe*, *The Talisman*, *The Seven Champions of Christendom*, and *The Heir of Redclyffe*, among other books. Parental censorship was not so much strict as odd. She was allowed to read bigoted diatribes against Catholicism

in Rider Haggard's *Jess* and the works of Emma Jane Worboise but forbidden to open Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* ("Nine Lives," 53–4).

In the spring she was sent to a boarding school in Shropshire kept by one of her mother's friends, and here she remained, content, until the summer holiday. In the schoolyard, a man stopped her on sight, querulously calling to her with her mother's maiden name, "Daisy Williams?" She learned from her mother, who choked back tears, that this man was a scholar of considerable reputation who had once wooed her. Although he was much older, she had been intellectually dazzled as well as physically attracted to him. He broke off the relationship when he learned that he was growing deaf, altruistically thinking it unfair to saddle a young woman with his handicap, and thereby bruising young Daisy's heart.

Naomi claimed that she fell "in love" with her mother upon learning about this youthful disappointment. If only her mother had married her deaf professor, Naomi lamented,

[. . .] she would have been in the intellectual circles with Ruskin around William Morris, and she would have had few if any children. But she married my father who called Ruskin an old bibble-babblers and disliked the Pre-Raphaelites. By the time she was thirty [in actuality, forty] she had produced five daughters and two sons. A sixth daughter arrived before we all moved to London and a third son was stillborn in the winter before I was fifteen. ("St. Leger III," Milton MSS)

Sad and no doubt exhausted, Daisy turned to her daughter, Naomi Gwladys, for companionship. They became confidants, their intimacy intensified by yet another tragedy.

Fourteen during the winter of 1889, Naomi was old enough to be told that her mother was pregnant and aware enough "to suffer the anguish of fear through the days of waiting for the arrival of a child who had not the strength to come to life." When the baby was born dead, her father was affectionate, chagrined, and devastated. Naomi reported that she was absolutely "NO comfort to him." He wanted her to sit with the fetal corpse after the nurse had laid it out. She refused. Instead, she went to the garden and gathered flowers for the body that had been placed in a locked bathroom awaiting its coffin. She left the flowers at the door, and her father took them into the child, tears rolling

down his cheeks. He tried to hug Naomi. She violently pushed him away, blaming him for her mother's mortal physical distress and for the horror of the lifeless babe.<sup>10</sup>

This traumatic experience would inform an obsession in her fiction with the dangers of parturition and the imagery of dead fetuses. In a novel published in 1948, the sight of a row of "ten jars illustrating the growth of the foetus from a small fish-like object with one eye, to the folded, sleeping creature waiting to be born," left the protagonist "dizzy with emotion and revulsion," as had a bottled stomach and liver of an alcoholic person (*Love in Mildensee*, 96).

Naomi helped to nurse her mother through the dangerous days that followed, and much later in life she speculated that it was during this time that her love for her mother became protective. In long letters to her second sister, Maud, who had gone to live with Gran, now blind, Naomi fretted, full of anxiety about her mother's wellbeing. Once Daisy regained her strength, she often took Naomi to London for plays, concerts, and art exhibitions. According to Naomi, their mutual absorption increased and formed a barrier around them. With Maud away, the younger children were left in the charge of a French nursery governess.

A year later in April at Fern Hill, one last child, Erica, was born, and late in the same year, 1890, Holroyd Smith moved his family to 161 Trinity Road in Upper Tooting near Clapham Junction in southwest London. Their new domicile had ten rooms; they kept four indoor servants. Holroyd, having quarreled with his Halifax brothers, set up in London first in an engineering firm and, subsequently, as a consulting engineer on his own.

Daisy and Holroyd chose their London neighborhood for its school, electing to establish their home in Clapham Junction. Clapham High School for girls was receiving joyous publicity in 1890. The daughter of the suffragette Millicent Fawcett, who had founded Newnham College in Cambridge, had just become the first woman to score the highest mark of all candidates for the prestigious mathematical Tripos at the University of Cambridge. Philippa Fawcett topped her masculine cohorts by scoring 13 percent above the male-ranked Senior Wrangler (and, moreover, did it again the next year in the second part of the Tripos). At the time, "[t]his famous examination result occasioned the greatest celebration which the women's movement had ever known."<sup>11</sup>

National and western international newspapers were twittering—after all, this was mathematics, that bastion of masculine superiority. Philippa had been educated at Clapham High School. Naomi was enrolled there in the fifth form at age fifteen.

Clapham High was started in 1882 by the Girls' Public Day School Company that founded schools throughout England built on a model initiated by Francis Buss's North London Collegiate School, shades of Naomi's ill-fated school experience when she was younger. The Girls' Public Day School movement was a direct consequence of feminist interest in designing education for girls that would be equal to that offered to boys. "In order to attract those parents who could not afford the high charges of many private schools, fees were placed as low as was compatible with the schools being self-supporting (Purvis, 81). Naomi's parents paid less than £16 each year for her tuition. Clapham High emphasized training women for careers, not just the home, and specialized in producing "teachers of a very high order who were in great demand in secondary schools and training colleges throughout the country."<sup>12</sup> Women who became teachers at that time were forced to leave their profession if they married, perhaps fostering a tendency at Clapham High to question the benefits of marriage.

By the time Naomi left Clapham High, she was querying conventional gender expectations, especially those that required women to be weak and submissive:

Why is not all weakness nauseating? It ought to be—and yet one hears such a great deal of the fascinating power of weakness, absolute infantine feebleness, in women. I can understand the fascination of the helplessness of a child, but why a grownup woman, with health, strength, and even experience should be more fascinating to a man because she affects a ridiculous impotence is more than I can grasp.<sup>13</sup>

During the 1890s, Clapham High was housed in a large brown brick early nineteenth-century mansion, standing like a fortress between the Common and its own lawns and gardens. "These had been encroached on by utilitarian structures in the form of a long corridor, an assembly hall, two class-rooms and a science laboratory, but tennis courts and a cedar tree were left, and a lawn near the house large enough for quite a crowded garden-party before strawberries were over each summer

term” (NRS, “Nine Lives,” 60). Although Naomi found the structure “rambling and inconvenient,” she flourished in its social world over the next four years.<sup>14</sup>

Academically, she considered her triumphs few. She scored 99 percent in literature which was offset by 20 percent in arithmetic, with humiliating reports read out from the platform every Monday morning. She won the Scripture Prize one year and was asked to choose a book as reward. She requested a small portable Reference Bible with the Apocrypha bound between the Old and New Testaments, having coveted Gran’s huge Doré Bible that was complete in this way. She was denied her desire by the Lutheran headmistress, Miss O’Connor, who associated the Apocrypha with Catholicism; instead, Naomi was awarded the complete works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Her father mitigated her disappointment with an Apocrypha separately bound in biblical-looking crushed morocco (“Nine Lives,” 61).

Naomi blamed Miss O’Connor’s Lutheran puritanism for her heavy-handed censorship of dramatic productions. Naomi may not have understood that Miss O’Connor was not an anomaly and that all headmistresses of the Girls’ Public Day Schools strove to moderate the educational images of their schools by insisting on ladylike behavior from their students, mindful of the need to be morally above reproach in order to safely promulgate male academic standards (Purvis, 81–2). Academic classes were scheduled during the morning; classes in the arts and feminine deportment during the afternoons.

Naomi wrote and produced a play based on the myth of Cupid and Psyche. Cupid was played by her tall and admired friend Winifred Austin, and Naomi herself played Psyche. They were left to themselves, finally performing in front of parents and friends, brothers and fathers included. The next day Miss O’Connor was beside herself in tears, denouncing the production as indecent and immoral. That fathers and brothers should have been asked to see girls in the upper school tied up in sheets was outrage enough, Naomi jested, tongue in cheek: “but the scene in which I, as Psyche, dropped oil from a bronze lamp brought back by my father from Athens, and regarded as the high-water mark in stage properties, was so improper that no words of hers could denounce it sufficiently” (“Nine Lives,” 61). The fifth and sixth form girls were mystified by the attack on the lamp, and Miss O’Connor did

not elucidate feminine cooptation of phallic gestures in the face of their innocence.

The following year the Oxford and Cambridge Joint Board that oversaw the Girls' Public School Company selected *The Merchant of Venice*, and, once bowdlerized of "Elizabethanisms," deemed it modest enough for performance. Naomi was stage manager and also acted the part of Portia. At dress rehearsal all was going smoothly: "The carefully watered down business of those rings in Act V tripped from our girlish tongues without offence." Nevertheless, after they took their practice bows, the head mistress spoke against Portia's intention of retiring to a convent to pray for happy wedlock. It was most indelicate, she said, and must come out. It did.

Naomi edited the Clapham school magazine and ran the successful Literary and Debating Society that met every Wednesday afternoon. The girls debated such subjects as: "Is an advocate justified in defending a murderer whom he knows to be guilty?" Forty years later, she met an old Clapham High School companion who said she had never forgotten Naomi's opening lines of her speech, which ran, "Thou shalt not kill; clear and concise are the words" ("Nine Lives," 62).

One of the distinctive features of Francis Buss's North Collegiate School influence on the Girls' Public Day School was its attempt to create a schoolgirl community with its own lifestyle. Judging by the intimacy and flow of correspondence that followed Naomi after she left high school, Clapham had worked its communal magic. Of these relationships, two were of lasting importance.

There was her gifted cousin, Theodora Smith, also living in Upper Tooting, who did not study for examinations "because she had other things to think about." In the Debate Club venue, when given lines from *Measure for Measure* proclaiming that in death a beetle suffers as much as a giant, she huffed that it was "stuff and nonsense." She proved her point by drawing on the blackboard a map of a beetle's nervous system and a small section of a girl's hand. On another occasion, she brought a blindworm to class in her lunch box; it escaped "to the disorganizing terror of the Geography mistress, who fainted in her chair." Theodora persuaded Naomi that it would be "instructive and up-lifting" to dissect a sheep and that the slate slab and sink of the cellar laundry was just the place. They went so far as to inquire of the family butcher about the price of a complete carcass of mutton; the butcher notified Naomi's

mother and the scheme collapsed, making for a good story and laugh among aunts and uncles.<sup>15</sup>

Another feature of the Girls' Day School movement was its emphasis on social service to the community (Purvis, 79). Naomi's beloved friend from Clapham High, Ethel Winifred Austin ["EWA" in diaries] would come to exemplify this ideal. Winnie made brief appearances in Naomi's autobiography as her "tall, beautiful sixth form friend [...] who had very curly, very black hair" and as the girl who played the part of cupid in Naomi's ill-fated "indecent" original production of "Eros and Psyche" and as the skin-blackened youth who played the part of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice* ("Nine Lives," 65). In maturity, Winnie pioneered the formation of the National Library for the Blind.<sup>16</sup>

Naomi, herself, was imbued with desire to help the unfortunate. She reveled in cold weather, good for ice skating, then berated her pleasure, finding it callow, bemoaning the cold's terrible effect on the poor. She was an active participant in the Christian Endeavor movement designed to attract youths to Protestantism by encouraging them to express themselves while participating in useful tasks. She initiated a committee to provide soup, cocoa, and bread for families living in warm shelters for those out of work. Naomi and her friends gathered to figure out how to collect funds and to portion out hours of each day for members of the committee to take charge. Then her father "turned crusty and disapproved of the whole plan and thereupon forbade his offspring to have anything to do with it all." Stubbornly, Naomi had her way and trudged to Zennor Hall three times during the week; she could think of nothing but this hall, which was overrun with men out of work, one hundred each day.<sup>17</sup> She ruminated, characteristically self-critical: "Unless I see suffering I do not believe in it. On the contrary, I find it either tiresome or amusing. A man with a flesh wound would arouse all my pity; a man in a mental agony would probably only excite my laughter."<sup>18</sup> She was introspective and self-judgmental, severe in self-scrutiny.

Winnie and Naomi abandoned studies at Clapham High before attaining their degrees and, perhaps, for the same reason: the tuition had become too difficult to manage. Winnie's father had died leaving eight children, and Naomi's father was struggling financially. Daisy decided to help out by using contacts among her old school friends in Zurich and Geneva in order to secure Swiss girls of good family who wished

to talk English, see London, and would pay fees for the experience. It was a successful venture: “My mother gave them lessons in literature & composition for an hour in the mornings and in the afternoons we all went to matinees—and quite often to the Crystal Palace. My mother read aloud to us in the drawing room after dinner.”<sup>19</sup>

Winnie and Naomi were old enough for marriage; however, neither was having anything to do with matrimony. Winnie preferred tutoring children to wedlock; she despaired “of not being interested in any man for more than four meetings.”<sup>20</sup> Naomi was beginning to see the relationship between marriage and livelihood. In her 1894 journal she wrote:

I will *never* marry a clergyman. If I do marry I should like a doctor or policeman for a husband. Policeman by preference. They are so sensible and are always tall & strong & would be out all day. But if I could have £300 a year of my own I would take a vow of celibacy & be as happy as the day is long. Money may be the root of all evil, but it is the means of most good.<sup>21</sup>

As an eligible and attractive young woman, Naomi soon came under siege: one of the young men who still sought her mother’s solicitude had been persuaded “that he was actually in love with her daughter.” Naomi refused his offer of marriage—to her mother’s consternation, for he was considered a good match, a Balliol scholar, “one of several who left Oxford with the reputation of being Benjamin Jowett’s favorite pupil and at the outset of what was to be a steady upward progress in the Home Office” (“Nine Lives,” 72).

She was hustled off to Zurich for six months in order to think matters over. Daisy had school friends all over Switzerland who welcomed her daughter. Naomi was initially guided and protected by Maria Burton and her radiant partner Erica Lagier, “a portrait painter who had studied in Paris under Corot and had in her girlhood known and drawn a book full of portraits of the aged Liszt.” With their help, she conjured a scheme to avoid returning to London. She was intent on furthering her education and supporting herself, writing her mother from Zurich: “I want to stay here as long as possible—only that there is not the remotest chance of my finding anything to do here, and Mlle Lagier seems to think it likely if I go to Geneva.”<sup>22</sup> In late 1894, not yet twenty years



old, she returned home, escorting, as propitiation, a very pretty, pleasant German girl who wished to live in London and learn English under her mother's wing. Naomi wanted to assist the family, especially her mother. She managed to acquire reluctant parental permission for her Swiss ploy. In March 1895, Naomi once again crossed the channel to board a train to Geneva, where, except for August holidays in London with her family, she would spend "four unforgotten years" ("Nine Lives," 68).

# Chapter 2

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## Be-Mused by a *Poète* *Genevois*, 1895–1904

Gwladys, not yet “Naomi,” now twenty years of age, stepped off the train in Geneva, freed from her London circumstances, still unworldly, dressed for Victorian travel, corseted, skirts to her ankles, demure to her neck-top, but fortified with schemes for managing her own education and upkeep.

Geneva in 1895 was an international city, culturally cosmopolitan, yet sternly puritanical in accord with its Calvinistic history. Gwladys was charmed by its intellectual and aesthetic culture, nostalgic for that milieu until the day she died. It was there, as a young woman, she was wounded by Geneva’s entrenched social order, self-righteously Protestant to its patriarchal core. She would invite a *poète genevois* to her heart, and he would break it. Of course, she knew none of this future on that bright morning in October when she alighted from the train. Gwladys breathed the pure, fresh air of Geneva, bordered by its expansive lake, nestled between the Alps southward and backed by the Jura Mountains. It was springtime.

Naomi Gwladys chronicled her years in Geneva, 1895 to 1899, in journals written in French and now archived in the *Bibliothèque publique et universitaire* in Geneva. More of her experiences and impressions are located in several handwritten notebooks plus a typed draft of her unfinished autobiography written in English—some of which are archived in the Paley Library at Temple University in Philadelphia,

some in a collection in the Victoria and Albert Theatre and Performance archive in London. She shifted her name, to her father's befuddlement, from Gwladys to Naomi while living in Geneva.

She had chosen Geneva for her experiment in self-education because her mother's school friend, Camille Vidart, resided there. Her mother had met Camille in the school for foreign girls managed by Naomi's grandmother in Merionethshire, Wales, where Naomi's mother taught English and music. Subsequently, Daisy and Camille had opened a school of their own, a project cut short by the successful courtship of Holroyd Smith. Camille returned to Geneva where she initiated yet another educational enterprise together with the "chosen partner of her life," Mademoiselle Vancher, reputed to have what was called "a man's mind" by Naomi's parents. Naomi's mother asked Camille to be the godmother of her first child.

Camille Vidart was the first woman appointed to a professorship at the *Université de Genève* and was counted in the first ranks of international suffragettes, among the founding mothers of the Alliance of Swiss Female Companies, organizing its first congress in 1896, a convention devoted to improving vocational training and the legal status of women. She asked Naomi to call her "Uncle Kam."

In the course of their first meeting, Naomi remembered sobbing on Uncle Kam's shoulder, her distress provoked by the older woman's lament regarding the unfortunate marital fate of Naomi's mother. Naomi summarized the moment, paraphrasing Uncle Kam, who had referred to her mother's wit, as well as "[...] her courage and the heavy burden she bore with so many children to bring up in the face of such sad disappointments over my father's wonderful inventions. My mother, said my mother's friend, should either have married a rich man or remained single and carried out a career for herself." Naomi was already suffering from homesickness in the intervals of delight with her new foreign experiences. After ten minutes, she was in tears: "Mademoiselle Vidart drew my head on her manly shoulder and encouraged me to cry there and my hair came down. Mademoiselle Vidart helped me twist it up again. She said my hair was longer & thicker than my mother's had been when she was my age but not so wonderfully golden."<sup>1</sup>

Eventually, Naomi privately confessed that she did not really like Camille Vidart; she had become increasingly uncomfortable with her masculine manner and costume. Later, in 1913, at the height of the

suffragette movement, Naomi utilized her aversion to her godmother in confession to Walter le la Mare, an attempt to explain her discomfort with speaking publicly for women's rights. Her mother had brought Camille Vidart to visit, prompting Naomi to write: "[S]he has a reputation as a *feministi*. She addresses massed meetings in whatever language they understand best. I *don't really* [her emphasis] like her and I'm a most unworthy god-child."<sup>2</sup> Naomi reserved affectionate admiration for Uncle Kam's partner, Mademoiselle Vancher, who had "the power of giving and arousing love."<sup>3</sup>

Naomi did not live with Uncle Kam in Geneva. Instead, she settled into the Pension Burton-Lagier located on picturesque Rue St. Léger in the Old Town. The pension was a cross between a conventional boarding house and a *pensionnat de demoiselles*, a finishing school for adolescent girls. Her choice secured just a modicum of liberty, allowing her to come and go at will during brief periods of free time. *Pensionnats* were educational establishments usually managed by two women living together who arranged to board girls from neighboring countries. Naomi became a supervisor of strictly regulated girls, allowed, for instance, daily walks for health so long as they marched two by two in regimented rows, "crocodiles." They promenaded to market, church, music venues, and the theater in chaperoned lines.

Once a year each *pensionnat* would sponsor *un bal*, inviting well-vetted adolescent boys who were expected to obey strict rules of decorum at the festivity and then afterward on the street. For instance, a fellow on the street could tip his hat to a young woman who had been his dance companion. She might either acknowledge the greeting with a nod or not. At all costs exchanging names was prohibited. Scandal must be avoided. Educating wealthy, protected *jeunes filles* was a lucrative, flourishing industry in French-speaking Geneva at the turn into the last century.

In the Pension Burton-Lagier, Mademoiselle Lagier provided instruction in portrait painting, and Miss Burton, another of Naomi's mother's school friends, taught English language and literature. In the case of this establishment, none of the pension's residents were expected to enroll in courses, although some did. The ladies mainly filled their classes with day students from the community in addition to girls from abroad. For friends and families of their pupils, they gave lively parties

every couple of weeks, and this hospitality was reciprocated, gatherings that provided the bulk of Naomi's social life.

It was quite usual in Geneva for single women to teach young girls, and at the same time for some young women both to teach and to take classes. Naomi studied French and, in return, helped to chaperone the girls, lunching with them and also supervising their crocodile walks. For a year she studied French language and literature with university professors brought to the *pensionnat*. Additionally, by 1897, she enrolled in a course of study at the university. By teaching *pensionnat* classes in English language and literature supplemented by private tutoring, she earned enough money to support herself without help from home. Enterprising, she even found work for her younger sister, Dolly, third in birth order, and for her enduring friend from Clapham High School, Winnie Austin. Nevertheless, money was always in short supply. Buying paper and stamps for writing her mother every week was "spending vast sums," entailing cramped cursive in purple ink marching in horizontal lines down the page, which were then turned for interlinear composition.

Naomi was hired as an English instructor at the *Bois de Fey*, a *pensionnat*, where she disliked teaching the advanced literature class because of one lively, exhausting Italian girl. In yet another class, a young girl made "overtures of love" to Naomi, for which reason she feared she was "let go" in 1897.<sup>4</sup>

Anticipating her sister Dolly's arrival in Geneva to teach kindergarten and reside with her, Naomi reassured her mother: "I will take her to every sermon and lecture in Geneva and make her read aloud every day [in French]." Naomi had tried to raise money to help bring Dolly to Switzerland. She described attempting to pawn her dressing bag: "It was *horrid* [her emphasis] trying to do those things and I feel that if I had been less snobbish I might have succeeded [. . .]. Well, you see mother. If you can manage to get together £5 we can do it after all. £4 even. I can manage £1 and perhaps Dolly herself has a little and daddy might contribute. Why, not so much. 105 francs."<sup>5</sup> As it happened, Naomi did actually end up shouldering most of the expense of Dolly's room and board because an exchange plan with another student had fallen through with Naomi's mother, who, in order to make domestic ends meet, was continuing to provide something like a *pensionnat* for foreign girls in London. At one point, there was also an attempt to bring another

sister, Maud, to Geneva, but it fell through, to Naomi's relief, for she was "feeling like a camel before the last straw."

While taking classes at the university, Naomi moved from the Pension Burton-Lagier to the Pension Dupuis, a *pension en famille*, where, although she continued to share meals with foreign women university students, having secured a room with a private entrance, she was now almost completely unmonitored, free to take advantage of Geneva's cultural offerings, its lectures, concerts, and theater productions. This rich aesthetic and intellectual mix—peopled with young, talented performers, their teachers and patrons—provided grist for several of her novels, including *Jake* (1935), *Mildensee* (1943), and *Love in Mildensee* (1948).

Naomi thrived in Geneva, always excited to return from dutiful August holidays where she was bound to her parents' shrinking home in grimy London. In Geneva, she resuscitated, inhaling the scents of early autumn, "fresh at dawn with the chill of distant snow new fallen in the mountains, and golden with clear sunlight at midday and through the shortening afternoons (NRS, *Love in Mildensee*, 70).

In her early twenties (and thereafter), Naomi was spiritually open, emotionally and aesthetically impressionable. At an evening function in 1896, a locally famed reader of verse declaimed from Edmund Rostand's play *La princesse lointaine* (1895), a drama dedicated to Sarah Bernhardt, who was also its chief performer when it was staged; Rostand composed *La princesse lointaine* just before *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Both works explored themes of renunciation. In *La princesse lointaine*, the heroine, Mélissande, inspired the love of the troubadour, Joffroy Rudel, who, mortally ill, sailed across the sea to woo his ideal, albeit distant, princess. Upon arrival he died in her arms. Mélissande, tears sloughing over Joffrey's dying face, declared: "Our love was pure. Oh! Music, add to it/ A chaste delight of rapture physical!" (101). If ever a work of art successfully embossed a soft, young heart, it was this, and that heart was Naomi's.

Declamation of Rostand's verse was not enough for the nascent poet. She could not capture all she needed in one hearing, remembering that she had been especially dazzled by the famous last passages: "... and going without *petits gâteaux* for a week was no sort of sacrifice to have made for possession of the *stanzas* [her emphasis]." She kept all references to Mélissande out of her letters to her mother, who would

have confiscated the dramatic poem as unsuitable for an innocent young woman's delectation. Nor did Naomi share the Méli ssande experience with the young man her mother had advanced as her future mate, who, according to Naomi, would not have been interested in "[u]ne amour incertaine/ Et plus noble d' être vaine" (an uncertain love! And more noble by being vain)."<sup>6</sup>

She immersed herself in intellectual and cultural endeavors, imbibing music and the arts. Essentially, she taught herself, an education hard-earned as witnessed in her commonplace books crowded with laboriously copied passages from admired literary works in French and English, including American writers, and poetry in English, French, and German. In a letter to her mother her aesthetic ferment was palpable:

I have been seized with Shakespeare's sonnets. Of course, I had read them many times, but it was last Monday that they suddenly became alive for me and I have thought of little else since. I can hardly write for lines which come running out of my pen and nearly on to the paper, and apart from poetry which is unspeakable, there is a mystery of the stories which hide behind the rhymes and show themselves now and again so vividly for a moment that you think you have them in your grasp and while you stop to fill in the details you lose the clue and in trying to find it come to a line that makes you forget everything but itself.  
(n.d., Milton MSS)

Naomi never forgot her initial excitement. On her deathbed over sixty years later, she bequeathed a personally annotated volume of Shakespeare's sonnets, bound in soft green velvet, to her husband, Ernest Milton, the man whose art had given voice to the "mystery of the stories" behind the verse.

She was also writing poetry for herself, mainly in English. At the same time, she was becoming proficient in reading, writing, and speaking French. By 1898 she was confident enough of her linguistic skills to write the Swiss author Isabelle Kaiser, asking if she could translate her novel *Sorcière!* (1896) into English. This project could not be arranged, nor was the novel ever translated.

Coincidentally, during the summer of 1898, Naomi was hired to translate from French to English the memoirs of Ernest Gambart,

not an easy task, according to his biographer, because of his eccentric writing style. Nothing remains of her work because, apparently, his sister destroyed what she had translated. Gambart, a Belgian by birth, was a Victorian art dealer credited with transforming the London art world by developing a system for promotion and distribution of paintings in the international market. By the time they met, he was eighty-five years of age and had suffered several strokes. Naomi experienced his various spoken languages muddled together, although he was sound enough to have just decorated the royal apartments in Nice once again for Queen Victoria and to have been the queen's guest during the ensuing weeks.

Gambart had discovered Naomi's translating services through a classified advertisement that sought a summer job, as he said, for "a young English lady, a school teacher [. . .] she is Miss Smith." He hired her to translate his autobiography, to teach English to his servant, and to play with his St. Bernard "shaved to look like a poodle."<sup>7</sup> There in his country residence in the region of Schwyz in central Switzerland, the two formed a mutual admiration society that culminated both in Naomi's abrupt dismissal—she having alarmed the jealous sensibilities of Gambart's sister—and in anecdotal fodder for Naomi's future as raconteur and creative writer. In 1915 over dinners in wartime London, she amused Sir Grimwood Mears, the acting legal assistant on the Dardanelles Commission, with fantastic tales about nineteenth-century artists.<sup>8</sup> In her 1943 novel *Mildensee*, she used Gambart as model for the character of Sir Lewis Quorn, a rich octogenarian patron of the arts who enjoyed the company of young and talented women.

Gambart, on his side, wrote to a friend and fellow critic in London seeking an introduction for Naomi to the London literary world:

. . . she has had a very good education, is a lively young girl of very independent mood & roving disposition, though only 23 or thereabouts & this work has opened her eyes to still bettering herself—she dreams of employing her talents in this new line—if I understand her right, she might return home, but likes independence & fight (sic) the world & make a living for herself, and though tolerably good looking does not wish marriage & the slavery of a husband—a rather queer girl . . .<sup>9</sup>



Naomi had not told Gambart that she had already jilted one suitor and was vexing another.

Back when Naomi had stepped off the train in Geneva in 1895, she had been fending off a marriage her mother was pressing. Naomi claimed she had been sent to Geneva to come to her senses, which meant she was expected to accept the marriage proposal of Arthur John Eagleton, a successful London barrister, and to her senses she came one year later in August 1896. While on summer break in London before returning to Geneva, she told him she would become his wife. As his fiancée, she visited his family and began to prepare her trousseau. Girlfriends wrote letters of congratulations, which she preserved. Yet Naomi, herself, seemed to have no special feeling for Eagleton, ridiculing him in her English journal, her words redolent with ennui and depression:

Here I am again in Geneva—engaged to be married—to whom? To the Bird Rock. Polygamist. Ghost—anything else that I may have called him & I am quite contented. *Quite contented* [her emphasis]. And that is enough. I think after all that it is much better to look at every detail and accept the whole in the spirit of reasonable contentment, than to be so delirious over the whole that the details attract no attention. Delirium passes and leaves exhaustion. (20 October 1896, Milton MSS)

Arthur Eagleton and his father crossed the English Channel to visit Naomi in Geneva during March, 1897. Naomi reported that she flaunted her fiancé in the streets, proudly flashing her engagement ring. In a strange turn of events, she was simultaneously being observed, perhaps shadowed, by a law student and aspiring poet, a native of Geneva, who seemed obsessed with her. Indeed, as it turned out, he was writing poems about the young woman he was trailing. Unbeknownst to her, Naomi was his *princesse lointaine*, his acknowledged muse: “Dated November 1896 I read here another poem about the murky and rainy autumn that I will show you one day for it was inspired by you who were frequenting my dreams at that time.”<sup>10</sup>

Here, then, is the story of Naomi and Henry Spiess, his English name of “Henry” rather than Henri an exoticism in French-speaking Geneva. It was an important passage in Naomi’s life and anticipated an emerging pattern that would structure her art as well as her lived

and reiterated emotional responses to men. Naomi yearned in the old tradition of medieval romance quest. She adventured through metaphorical brambles, coming to recognize herself as her own enemy, not vanquished but transcended. Her quirk: she almost always stopped short of conventional fulfillment (for instance, marriage) and, instead, created another last word, her desires displaced into art. It is a queer, sad story, the romance of Naomi Royde-Smith and Henry Spiess.

In her unfinished autobiography she made just one reference to an admirer from her years in Geneva. It came in the midst of her voiced nostalgia for that city, memory of which sustained her during her reluctant final return to London at the end of her studies: “[. . .] I broke down under the triple strain of school-work, family life, and a secret engagement to a Genovese poet and barrister whose mother considered a girl who worked for her living utterly unsuitable to be allied with her family.” In a notebook written many decades later, she described in a lengthy essay the first year of their courtship. There are also entries about Spiess in her 1898 English journal. In addition, there are several letters between 1900 and 1940 from her woman friend Edmée Roberts, who functioned as her Genovese intermediary. The main part of this very odd love story, however, is locked away in the Henry Spiess Collection housed in the *Bibliothèque publique et universitaire* in Geneva. Spiess did become a famous poet. A Swiss literary association was devoted to his works; academic essays have been written about his poetry. After Naomi died in 1964, her letters from Spiess between 1899 and 1920 and her journals composed in French between 1899 and 1904, along with two photographs and several of his manuscript poems, were transferred to Geneva. Spiess wrote his letters in French, naturally, and she composed her journal in French, less naturally, sometimes clumsily. None of her letters to him have surfaced. As a result, we have a lopsided record that favors Spiess’s opinions—actual letters written to a living person—balanced against her very secretive, unedited musings written as if to him but meant for herself. This Genovese collection is anthropologically thick, a trove of *fin de siècle* aesthetic ruminations between two very earnest young poets, neo-romanticists, who thought they were in love.

Naomi explained why she broke, “shamefully” according to self-judgment, her engagement with Arthur Eagleton in favor of Henry Spiess:

... [a mutual friend] told me that Henri [her spelling] Spiess had been in love with me since that day a year last October when he met me in the Rue de Jardines; and that when I flaunted my fiancé before his eyes he resolved to see me no more, upon which he gradually made himself ill and went to Berne. For two days and three nights I fought with myself. And then I wrote and took off my engagement ring. I have told everyone I did it because I did not love him enough to marry him, which was true, and I have tried to forget Beamish. (journal, 29 March 1898, Milton MSS)

“Beamish” was a nickname devised between Naomi and Edmée to refer to Spiess, since he had not been formally introduced to Naomi, which tabooed uttering his actual name. Sometimes they called him “Fleury.” Once Naomi had been reciting the “Jabberwocky” when Spiess appeared in their vicinity, as he was wont to do, and Edmée, related to him through a cousin (which granted her family liberties) had noted, “He *is* a beamish boy today.”

Naomi had traded her engagement game of “mother-may-I” for a game of “hide-and-go seek” in empty streets lined by frost-rimed trees and garden railings. She described warming her hands in a muff made from her mother’s discarded sealskin coat: “I wore a heavy green winter suit and a long black woolen muffler. In the buttonhole of my coat I carried a bunch of violets bought for a penny at yesterday’s Flower Market. Such a bunch could be kept fresh & scented for several days & I was seldom without one.” Spiess, violating decorum, raised his “*casquette*” (cap) and made a “ceremonious bow,” causing Naomi to scamper away without responding, although experiencing pangs of regret. Thereafter, Spiess was waiting for her every day. They never greeted one another, nor did they smile: “Morning after morning he was there in the rain; under snowfall, when the wind blew the folds of his cape around him. Morning after morning I hurried up the street with downcast eyes [ . . . ].” She noted that at the time he was a timid, correct, and very elegant young man of twenty with “feminine charm.” “He was obviously very sensitive, gentle and compassionate. It was his

voice, strong, deep, and melodious that produced an unexpected effect of virility once he spoke.”<sup>11</sup> But Spiess was from the Genovese upper class, *la haute aristocratie*, with its entrenched and exclusive rituals, including what amounted to a system of arranged marriages. Few children from Spiess’s circumstances would have dreamed of marrying without parental approval.

Responding to Naomi’s broken engagement with Eagleton, her mother, distressed, descended during Easter week 1898, removing her wayward daughter to “an unfashionable little inn in a mountain village,” expressing disapproval in gloomy silences. Naomi lied to her about Spiess: “I had not kept my word to my mother that I would look the other way when I met him, and I did not tell her in this my next letter to her.”<sup>12</sup>

For nearly a year, the young people continued their silent, unacknowledged assignations in the streets. She penned but did not post a letter to Spiess dated 13 April 1898, testifying that he had been on her mind during the previous months. The encounters in *les rues* of Old Town persisted, unabated save for summer holidays. Naomi recommenced her French journal in February 1899. Finally, by April of that year, the two were at last speaking to each other, although quite stiffly. On the seventh of May, Spiess gave Naomi copies of some of his poetry, “*Prologue du 8 mars 1897*” and “*Sur le lac*,” the latter of which was composed during the period of hopelessness he had felt about her seeming indifference, “*sur le lac d’indifférence*” (on the lake of indifference) “*où tout s’annule*” (where all cancels itself), one stanza of which reads:

*Sur le lac de vos yeux pâles  
Voltigeaient des oiseaux bleus;  
Et j’ai rêvé tout joyeux  
D’aventures triomphales  
Sur le lac de vos yeux pâles . . .*

On the lake of your pale eyes  
Were flying blue birds;  
And I dreamed joyously  
Of triumphal adventures  
On the lake of your pale eyes . . .<sup>13</sup>

Throughout April and the beginning weeks of May, Naomi obsessed in her French journals about Spiess, uneasily speculating that she loved him only because he was a poet. He filled her daydreams: “Do you know, I prepare myself every day so that you can be mine? That my bedroom is arranged to receive you, that like my Princess, her Princess, I owe to you the whitening of my summer dresses [ . . .]” (9 April 1899, Spiess MSS). Her image of the princess and white dress were lifted straight from Rostand’s *La princesse lointaine*. She objectified the princess with confused possessives, first “my” then “her,” suggesting she first imagined herself as Mélissande then morphed to “her,” Bernhardt’s stage rendition of the character, which had been thrilling. She also recorded her sleeping dreams about the young poet. She did not yet imagine him as her interlocutor, speaking of him in the third person: “I dreamed of him tonight. I had given him a rendezvous in an old tower in the middle of a town [ . . .]” (April 1899, Spiess MSS). In another entry she telepathically called “come” to him. In yet another she yearned to break through barriers of decorous silence to share her feelings frankly.



Naomi in white muslin, ca. 1903.



Henry Spiess, signed, sent to Naomi in 1916.

If she was going to speak directly to Spiess about her feelings, she had to do it soon. Summoned home to help her parents who were in financial distress, she was scheduled to depart Geneva for England in June. Finally, on Monday, the twenty-second of May, she took the plunge and spoke from the depths of her heart during an encounter on the jetty into the lake. One wonders what she actually said. Here's what she wrote about it in her awkward French, translated:

I had my hour. During a little time—very little—I was myself. The courage of speaking came to me with the occasion. It is done. And Him. *Eh bien*. Such as I knew my heart, I could say. I have felt my dream come about, and it is the last word. Why did I think that he is ugly? I do not know. It was said to me. Someone has lied. Lied. *Voilà!*

Very few people get what they want; it is given to nobody to have and be happy. Also, me, I had all that I asked, and though I am happy I am not satisfied. I no longer have remorse. More the feeling of a fate unjust in brutality, but – ah! we said our '*adieu*.' Think—to meet finally only for that. And even though I had my desire, and the world now contains two people. He and me, and I know it with my

reason and with my heart. *Adieu*—sometimes we say *à demain* [see you later]—and one is not more certain than the other. The hand that he held I put under my cheek when I fall asleep. (23 May 1899, Spiess MSS)

After three years of circling one another in a maze of streets and alleys, Henry Spiess had actually touched Naomi's hand, a courting reticence that seems incredible even for nineteenth-century Geneva.

In the final entries of 1899 in her French journal, Naomi described farewells to the people she had come to know and cherish, and she bid farewell to her beloved Geneva. She inventoried her goodbyes several months later: “. . . *mon dernier jour de fleurs avec Edmée—comme je l'aime cette enfant qui est si sage et si piquante* [. . .] (my last day of flowers with Edmée—I so love this child who is so wise and pithy).” Through all her leave-taking, she was mindful of Spiess, whom she now addressed in her journal as if she were writing to him directly, using the “vous” form and not the intimate “toi”: “*Depuis ma pensée ne vous lâche pas un seul instant* (Since then my thought has not left you for a single instant.)” In Geneva the “vous” was conventionally a form of address between equals; very few used the familiar form of address. She also read *Daniel Cortis* (1896), as did Spiess, during these last days, consoling herself in Latin as did the novel's hero, renouncing his incestuous love for his sister: “*Hieme et aestate, et prope et procul, usque dum vivam et ultra* (In winter and summer, near and far, as long as we live and beyond).”<sup>14</sup> Naomi eschewed the temporal in favor of spiritual eternity or some version of life after death. This solemn Latin vow punctuated her journals over the next four years, sometimes shortened to simply “*usque dum vivam et ultra* (as long as we live and beyond).”

Spiess did manage to send a goodbye letter before she departed. In it he quoted two stanzas from Act I of Rostand's *La princesse lointaine*, the stanzas wherein the troubadour, Rudel, sings: “*Car c'est chose suprême/d'aimer sans qu'on vous aime. . .* (“But 'tis a thing supreme/ To love, though not beloved . . .),” and so on, terminating with “*Et j'aime la lointaine Princesse!* (I love the faraway Princess!)” and again, ambiguously, with “*Et j'aime La Princesse Lointaine!* (And I love the Princess Faraway!).” The princess in the last phrase might be desired precisely *because* she was faraway [my emphasis]. Spiess asked her to remember him and signed off: “*Adieu et, du fond du cœur, merci* (Goodbye and, from the bottom of my heart, thank you)” (14 June

1899, Milton MSS). This, then, was his give-and-take-back response to her frank overture on the jetty, such as it had been.

Another whole year passed. In June 1900 Henry Spiess finally made an effort to contact Naomi, who was living at home with her family in London while teaching at Clapham High School. Her family was experiencing what she called “straightened means” in her unpublished autobiography:

Little by little our home lost its comfort. When we settled in London we lived in a ten-roomed house and kept four indoor servants. When I returned from Geneva it was to a smaller, less well-found house in a narrower street, serviced by one cook-general. I went back to Clapham High School as a pupil-teacher to teach French to the Lower School and to work for my Higher Certificate. This I never obtained. (“Nine Lives,” 70)

In the face of her workaday existence, Naomi pined in her French journals, dredging up recollections of Geneva, mining her 1899 journal for objects and events to commemorate: the jetty jutting into Lake Geneva, the last Sunday in church, Spiess’s mouth, and so on, including the day he inspired her to compose a sonnet in English eschewing her British fiancé. It was titled in French, “*Mon âme est un jardin clair* (My spirit is a garden bright)”:

Hidden between close walls my garden lies  
Fulfilled of light and sweetness; therein stand  
Lines of slim lilies, while on every hand  
Great roses greet the moon-winged butterflies.

There like white sentinels the foxgloves rise  
And there pale poppies dream by low winds fanned,  
There is mute music in my Silent Land,  
There are strange secrets in my Paradise.

And thou wouldst enter with me, Stranger? Stay!  
There is no path. Perchance thine eager feet  
Might crush the flowers that bruised, can bloom no more;



Thy voice might hush the voiceless music. Nay!  
I have but this my garden: it is meet  
That I alone should know it: as before.<sup>15</sup>

Royde-Smith's poetic garden, her inner self, displayed images both masculine (white sentinels) and feminine (roses and poppies), all were "strange secrets," and she emphatically preferred to keep them to herself, shunning the stranger, who might stamp out her "voiceless music."

Spiess's June letter, tardy by a full year, was, without ambiguity, a love letter, chiding Naomi for thinking he would ever forget the day on the jetty when she had spoken to him, and they had shared their souls: "*My princesse lointaine!* Always this is how I called you in the secrecy of my heart; before having spoken of the same with you [on May 22]" (4 June 1900, Spiess MSS). He regretted his inability to make up his mind or to act forcefully. He lamented how he had prepared for a legal career to please his mother, finding that he now despised his work. He did not blame his mother. In a letter a couple of weeks later he praised her and disparaged himself: "... my mother, always ill, is nevertheless a magnificent example of superhuman energy. And me, what am I?" Again encouraged, in her journals Naomi began to make plans to return to Geneva. She must have asked his opinion in correspondence, for he responded in a subsequent letter: "I cannot hide from you that I tremble with joy at the thought of seeing you" (17 July 1900, Spiess MSS). In August he sent another sonnet, titled "*Princesse*," which concluded with adoration of a princess who had "*le cœur égal* (the equal heart)." The poem's speaker worshiped an image of inaccessible, ideal beauty.

During the summer of 1900, they scribbled long missives to each other almost every week, documented by his saved letters. At the same time, Naomi scrawled voluminously in her French journals, exposing typical qualities of her temperament. She demonstrated a tendency to trace a curve of rational objectivity and religious commitment into creative ferment. She frankly analyzed her scanty relationship with Spiess: "I never knew you intimately. I have spoken to you five times in my life, and three times only for really speaking, and yet I know you better than anybody. I don't have any illusions about you. I realize that you have a weakness for the incomplete" (3 July 1900). She wrote essays on the abstract experiences of happiness, joy, and ecstasy. In yet another meditation, she described her faith in a God and the value of hard work. She wrote a poem in French to Spiess as if he was a masculine muse,

drolly playing with the word *lointaine* (faraway), and she sent it to him. Then, abruptly, she stopped composing poetry and declared to herself that she was going to write a novel about their relationship.

Naomi's poetic ferment came to a precipitous halt in August, coincident with receiving a letter from Spiess in which he declared that he was afraid to continue accepting letters from her. He lacked nerve to ask his mother's permission for the correspondence, and their exchange of letters was a guilty secret he could not maintain. He was also worried about Naomi's reputation with his cousin, a friend of Naomi's, for she might recognize Naomi's handwriting on envelopes. Please, he enjoined, don't write. Then, contradicting himself, he wrote again two weeks later querying why he had not heard from her. In her journal she vowed to withhold communication, and although she drafted several letters over subsequent months, she posted none. Silence again reigned between the estranged would-be lovers until he resumed courtship once again in May 1901.

The nine months that had passed left Naomi drained and depressed. Nobody else in England was aware of her secret romance or its lapses; she had no confidants. She felt exploited by Spiess: "Yes, I understand. You have wanted a dream. A beautiful blond dream—with eyes vague and pale—a princess far away, very far away" (Fr. Journal, 5 August 1900). She reasoned that Spiess had taken responsibility for her as a person, and not as mere ideal, the minute he had permitted his friend in Geneva to tell about his illness caused by her engagement to Eagleton in 1898. Mindful of the three years that had flowed under the bridge, she wailed bitterly: "I have missed my life. I have missed my life—the fault is mine—I *know*, but I don't yet feel it" (Fr. Journal, 8 August 1900). She felt she had also lost her dignity, having, in her own mind, sacrificed her womanly modesty; in her estimation, spiritual decency was the same as bodily decency: "I have given you my naked heart—and you find that *bad*." For weeks she vented her anger, and then, typically, she began to temporize. Perhaps a mother's love was greater than a lover's? Perhaps he needed the approval of his entourage, just as she did hers. By the end of August she could write in English: "If I loved only what were worth my love/ Love were pure gain and wholly good for me." By September she returned once again, typically, to her memories of Henry Spiess and Geneva—an overflow of feelings recollected in tranquility and thus into art. She comforted herself with unpublished words from

Coleridge: “And what if joy passes quite away? Long is the track of Hope before—long to the track of recollection after.”<sup>16</sup> By the end of the year, Naomi noted that, although she sometimes presented differing public personalities, at least her French journal recorded her private, authentic self: “*Ce carnet c’est moi*” (This notebook is me).”

At home, matters had not been going well for her family. Her father was less and less successful. His inventions seemed only to bring difficulty and not prosperity; a trusted colleague cheated him of thousands of pounds by filing patents in the United States for inventions that were stolen from him. Her mother was forced to sell her jewelry. In her daily diary Naomi noted in shame, employing parenthetical whispered emphasis: “(pawnshop).” She continued to teach at Clapham High School under the regulation of Mrs. Woodhouse, and despite the amusement of participating in a production of *As You Like It*, began to experience what she characterized as a nervous breakdown.

During this period of emotional distress, her diaries revealed that she changed her living arrangements to Dulverton, the country estate location of Sir Frederick Wills of cigarette fortune. She was hired as a companion for his adolescent daughter. Naomi was also beginning to make good on journalistic ambitions of the sort confessed to Gambart while translating for him in 1898. She reached out to a family friend in the publishing world. Starting in January 1900, her diaries recorded frequent visits to Wildcroft, the Putney home of Sir George Newnes, a rich publishing magnate and owner of the influential *Westminster Gazette* and several other popular publications.

Naomi ceased blaming Spiess and began to pick at her own character, self-flagellating, detesting her behavior, which, in her estimation, was debased, disappointing the ideal to which she had been held by her poet. She disparaged her expressions of anger, slips from the pedestal, even when warranted. She even tried to censor her charm and wit: “[In Cambridge] I was frivolous cynical—fashionable—a mocker—and I am so tired of the buffoon’s role. They like to see me there because I make them laugh—because I tell funny stories—piquant [. . .]” (Fr. journal, 3 March 1901, Spiess MSS).

In the midst of these self-critical reflections, she betrayed her secret reason for affiancing herself to Arthur Eagleton. It turned out that she had loved someone, a “being” of unidentified gender (almost certainly a woman). Physical and spiritual love for this “being” had

frightened her into accepting Eagleton's proposal as a "cure": "There was someone whose physical aspect pleased me, whose wit was congenial, who preoccupied me for a certain time. Only once I believed myself amorous, and to cure myself I resolved to become engaged to somebody who I hardly tolerated. Ah, it was a quite confused moment—quite sad—and then you came—slowly imperceptibly—surely [. . .] (Fr. journal, 3 March 1901, Spiess MSS). She continued, rationalizing that her painful, attenuated relationship with Spiess had been for the best because it had been good to suffer, to forget the self, to avoid intellectual pride, to find interior peace in healthy, consoling work, to prepare for later life. Even so, she claimed to be attracted to yet another man: blond, serious, handsome, rich, vigorous: "*il m'est très sympathique* [. . .] (he is very appealing to me)." Naomi was despondent, taking medication for her nerves and to induce sleep.

Henry Spiess interrupted her life once more just as Naomi had begun to accept and move on from her disappointed hopes. On the third anniversary of their May moment on the jetty, again taking up his pen, he announced that he had overcome the obstacle he had described in August of the previous year and had informed his mother about their exchange of letters. He went on to urge Naomi to visit Geneva, answering her entreaty of the previous year. Naomi's journal response in French was bewildered, outraged, wondering how he could correspond so naturally, as though all those months had not gone by. Stewing, she determined to tell him about her suffering during this time: "This evening I would like above all to see and speak to you. It will be necessary that I write to you, and what I have to say will be too difficult for a letter. I feel that we approach a new crisis in our interior life. I feel that I will suffer from new anguishes of indecision [. . .]" (6 June 1901). She posted some sort of confrontation and then endured sleep nightmares that featured his mother. He responded in July, stung and confused; nevertheless, he recognized that they had begun to talk of marriage. He expressed anxiety because he was financially dependent on his mother.

Typically, in his letter of July 31, 1901, Henry Spiess ducked away from actually proposing marriage, composing several paragraphs about his poetry, entreating her responses to his creative offerings, and then finally adding a postscript, pleading that she tell him what to do. So she did, or one thinks she did, given his next letter in which he agreed

to give her more time to make up her mind and to keep their potential engagement secret. To protect his “*amour propre* (self-respect),” which was her expression, nobody in either of their families would be informed of his proposal and her indecisiveness.

Spiess was clearly relieved by this clandestine arrangement. They continued to write one another until summer’s end. He enclosed poems, including one in which he acknowledged his selfishness while she was suffering and another regretting his youthful optimism. He wrote: “It is still necessary that I tell you how much I admire you when you tell me what you earn and that you are completely independent and you even help your family; there’s the difference between you and me [. . .]” (20 August 1901, Spiess MSS). During this period, she was also sharing her poems, which he said he admired. Yet, more and more he clamored for her critique of his work. He wanted her insights; she was his best, his most intelligent audience, said he. He sought her permission to share intimate poems about her in the public forum of the *Semaine Litteraire*: “. . . I ask you whether you would be hurt that I give (I do not know when) the song: On the lake? made for you in such a serious moment” (6 September 1901, Spiess MSS). Letter tumbled after letter, a veritable flood. In this game of hide-and-seek that had begun on the cobbled streets of Geneva, it was her turn to hide.

In September, while on holiday with the Newnes family, an entourage that included their unmarried son Frank, Naomi wrote, asking Spiess to cease writing until after Christmas. His letters, she claimed, were compromising her at home. After Christmas, she would give him her answer. In her French journal she recorded a dream in which both Frank Newnes and Henry Spiess appeared, and for the time being she stopped keeping her notebook.

Inexplicably, she traveled to Geneva in December and refrained from letting Spiess know that she would be there for a short visit. He learned of it from a newspaper account naming her attendance at a concert. “Now,” she opined in her journal, “he will know my decision.” To make certain that he understood her decision, she wrote something to him to which he responded on December 30, puzzled that she had not been feeling the yearning anticipation that he was experiencing.

She and Spiess resumed once-monthly letter exchanges, his full of observations about Schumann, Chopin, Heine, Charles Lamb, Samuel Cornut, Maurice Maeterlinck, the symbolist poets, and so on. One

assumes she answered in kind, for he wrote retorts. He shared more of his poems and suggested she comment about them in English so that she could be more nuanced than in French. He urged her to write even more than she had about his poems. Of her poetry he noted: “I admire your poem; I find it poignant, of simple sorrow, and sincere like a Psalm of penitence [. . .]” (17 March 1902, Spiess MSS). She, continuing the literary give and take, accused him of didacticism; he defended dramatic allegory.

Impetuously, in spring 1902, she again journeyed to Geneva, intent this time upon seeing Spiess face to face. Having not laid eyes on one another for three years, they tellingly arranged their week of *tête-à-tête* in public spaces. He refused to call on her at Edmée’s as their so-called engagement was still secret. Naomi had not given him any sort of definite answer to his marriage proposal. Nor had he pressed her. Not once during their moments alone together did they approach physical intimacy. This time he did not even touch her hand, and Naomi wailed in her French journals: “And yet you never had the weakness to take my hand, you never have kissed me. [. . .] You love in an ethereal manner” (7 May 1902, Spiess MSS). Such lack of ardor was cold water on her fantasies and the beginning of the end to this curious romance.

One week after returning to London she wrote in her French journal:

I love you—you have only friendship tender and poetic for me. It is strange as I note that coldly. I admit it. I almost do not suffer from it but I know that the future reserves bitter tears because of you. However it is thus—and now I know what I must expect. Only I can’t decide if I will write to you—in any case not for the present—and if I do not write truthfully it would still be necessary to write to you more truthfully in my notebook. (20 April 1902, Spiess MSS)

She took up her journal often during May and June, then paused once again. She imagined what married life would be like with him in Geneva: she would completely devote herself to helping him produce poetry; they would live in a modest apartment; she would care for his needs; he would be free to visit his mother for tea every day. There was nothing sexual and certainly nothing of babies in her daydreams. She

wrote a remorseful poem in English commemorating the moment with him on the jetty on May 22, 1899, a portion of which included:

Grey shrouds of mist shift ever on the hill,  
Over the fields falls the relentless rain,  
And as the twilight slowly gathers still  
Rings in my heart the echo of your pain.  
[ . . . ]  
Was it common chance that fell to us!  
Are we light men to lose and love again?  
Nay, having seen heaven manifested thus  
Let my life perish; this will still remain! (22 May 1902,  
Spiess MSS)

This grey, shivering poem expressed resignation to her plight, couched in the voice of a masculine speaker uttering to a masculine counterpart: “Are we light men to lose and love again?” In her French journal she went on with typical self-honesty and optimism to inventory gains from failure: 1) without Spiess she would have been the woman (*la femme*) of a man she detested and perhaps be the mother of his children; 2) she would never have understood love; 3) she would not have had the courage to get through the terrible winter of 1899 when her engagement shipwrecked. Plaintively, she queried where he was now when she was in need of courage to face life. She comforted herself: “*usque dum vivam et ultra* (as long as we live and after).”

Meanwhile, Spiess was hardly writing her at all, and what he did put in the mail was frigidly impersonal. She complained. In late May, he defended himself, unable to see what their letters of today have to do with their future plans for marriage. His solution: he suggested they exchange letters less frequently in order to avoid needless torment if there happened to be an accidental lapse. In Geneva, Edmée intervened on Naomi’s behalf, taking Spiess aside to describe Naomi’s suffering, and he reacted by admitting that he had, indeed, begun to think of her as a “sister” in his dreams. In a letter to Naomi, he temporized; he had no control over feelings, loves, and affections, and in this domain, he mused, one must promise nothing and must not become engaged. Love for him was a “strange bird in a cage.” Naomi understood correctly that he was withdrawing his marriage proposal. In the domain of

the affections, she wrote in her French journal, it wasn't necessary to promise if a promise had not been requested: "You don't love me. When one loves one doesn't think of promises. One knows that it is forever. Also you have lied to me—the poetry is for me—for you—for the 22<sup>nd</sup>—it is going to be necessary for me to leave you, I fear" (26 July 1902, Spiess MSS). She reminded herself: she had not lost her honor because their relationship had been kept secret.

She began to anticipate with pleasure her holiday in Lynton, the month with the Newnes family when she thought anything might happen. This July entry is the last word in her French journal for 1902. Nevertheless, she and Spiess continued to correspond about literary matters. Naomi sent him a short story she had written. He dwelt on his own poetry.

In this desultory vein they finished 1902 and continued through 1903. He begged her more than once to help him name the volume of poetry that would come out in 1904. She refrained. Busy, she was now beginning to work a couple of days a week on the staff of *The Saturday Westminster Gazette*.

Pathetically, Naomi was not yet free of Henry Spiess, although interesting for the purposes of this biography because it reveals so much about her. In December 1903, she joined Lady Newnes and Lady White for a holiday in Caux, a resort town on the edge of Lake Geneva. She made appointments with Spiess in the city. According to her daily diary, she met with him twice on December 29 and then again on the evening of the thirtieth. He told her at one of these encounters that his mother would not allow him to marry her. Before returning to her opulent life in Caux, she recorded the venue of an evening concert in her English daily diary: "*Concert d'abonnement* (subscription) Bastard. Ondriczek violin, Mendelssohn, Schumann." Perhaps, he had stood her up or misunderstood an agreement they had made, or so she rationalized in a draft letter scrawled in French on Caux-Palace-Hôtel stationary. It was unlikely that she dispatched it. In this letter, a substitute for her French journal, she claimed companionship with Spiess on grounds of shared asceticism: "[. . .] the ascetic woman loves with difficulty but once she gives herself she will not be able to begin again. I know that I am a little ascetic—and you? I would like to speak to you about so many things. I manage to believe that these are confidences and not confessions—the experience of the other realized through the imagination" (1 January



1904, Spiess MSS). In this rumination about love and relationship, Naomi's flash of insight suggested she had come to recognize her capacity to eschew the physical in favor of platonic communion.

Apparently, the only time those two ever pressed skin to skin was back on that jetty on May 22, 1899, when Henry Spiess touched Gwladys Smith's hand. This single touch was such an unusual event for each that they celebrated it for years.<sup>17</sup>

On Valentine's Day 1904, Naomi made one last entry in her French journal. Spiess had not written since she had left Geneva three weeks before. She bid adieu to her poet, who, she hastened to add, would lose her love, her body, her beautiful long supple hair, her long hands admired by all the world, her adored voice, her soul that knew his soul by heart, her spirit that understood his, her help washing the soils and contaminations from his life, her strength, her submission, all this: "You are cowardly—cruel, selfish dreamer—false. Cowardly. Cruel. You never thought of me—nor my suffering [. . .] and you did not come to say good-bye and you did not do anything and finally I despise you [. . .]." In this her incantatory curse, Naomi dismissed Spiess from her sight, terminating their romance—finally.

They continued occasionally to correspond, but the nature of their exchange shifted and thinned. She sent a letter of condolence when Spiess's brother died in September, to which he replied, offering an apology for not coming to the train when she left Geneva in January and then clamoring for her reactions to his volume of poetry, *Le silence des heures*, which had just been published. Nothing broke her silence, not even his revelation that many of the volume's poems had been written about her during 1896 and that one of the best received, "*Le silence*," had been written for her, although he had not shown it to her. One poem in the volume was titled "*Usque Dum Vivum et Ultra*," the last stanza of which translates as: "Will I see you again one day? What imports! From hour to hour/ my thought is united with yours and follows you/ and your death is not what one laments/ in spite of space and in a thousand years like today!" Her retort to his offerings was yet more silence and then, towards the end of the year, she sent a few copies of the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, where she was now working as editorial progenitor of the successful problems and puzzles page.

Naomi moved out of her crowded family home in Upper Tooting to a small flat in Chelsea. Her sister Daisy, fourth in birth order,

accompanied her. Soon Naomi declared to herself that she no longer loved Spiess, that her love of many years belonged in the “tomb of her youth” and had been essentially produced by nostalgia for Geneva. By July of 1904 she had finished writing a novel set in Geneva and based on her disappointing relationship with Henry Spiess, poet thinly disguised as composer. Although at the time she did not find a publisher for *The Irresolutes*, forty years later and after Spiess’s death she incorporated this early work into a larger novel, *Mildensee* (1943). He was not the only one making artistic hay of their association.

By 1907 Naomi’s position on the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* gave her authority to offer work to Spiess as a translator. Now dwelling in Paris, no longer practicing law, he thanked her for paying him for his work. His letters over subsequent years were focused on his poems; he was always pleading for attention to his works, never satisfied, and sometimes quarreling with articles in the *Gazette* that critiqued his poetry. Naomi, nevertheless, helped him in his quest for recognition. She published a translation by Lord Curzon of his poem “*Les mains* (The Hands)” in the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* in 1907 and also included it in the compilation she produced in 1908 of the best poetry and verse published on the Problems page.<sup>18</sup> In 1911 she arranged for Rupert Brooke to translate Spiess’s poetry for the *Gazette*, including “The Children of the Moon” and “The Tramp” from poetry in *Chansons Captives* (1910).<sup>19</sup> Naomi generously attempted to promote Spiess’s works beyond Switzerland and France into the English-speaking world.

Spiess was not so generous with her when over a decade later she asked his response to her very first published fiction, a short story, “Proof” (1919), which appeared in the periodical *Land and Water* before being anthologized by Dorothy L. Sayers in 1929 along with stories by Joseph Conrad, Walter de la Mare, Saki, and others.<sup>20</sup> Two weeks after he received “Proof,” Spiess unapologetically noted that he had not yet read it; instead, he was writing to secure literary favors for himself and a friend. Two months passed before he got around to commenting on her story’s plot-turn on the expression “*hieme et aestate, et prope et procul, usque dum vivam et ultra.*” He attributed the Latin phrase to a novel by Antonio Fogazzaro, *Daniel Cortis*, as if it had not also been the title of one of his own poems about a poet’s certainty that his unification with a distant loved one would continue through time and space unchanged by death. Speaking of *Daniel Cortis*, he approved the hero’s choice of

duty over love for his sister and vowed that he, Spiess, believed psychic manifestations in the material world depended on the “unconscious and subconscious of the medium,” which is to say that he thought psychic communications were psychological projections of the creator. After two decades of colloquy, this was either his last word or the last that she saved. On that note, their correspondence ceased—this time, for all time.

Royde-Smith’s short story “Proof” depicted conflict between shallow and deep relationships, between banal chatter and silence derived from profound psychic connection, the poles embodied in a shallow social wife and a clandestine “lover,” a young woman who dressed to meld with birds in the natural environment. The integrity of the adulterous lover, the male protagonist, hinged on his determination to remain loyal to his mistress once they both were dead. Would he return from the spiritual beyond to satisfy his worldly, loquacious wife, or, exercising discretion, stay behind with the woman who had shared his natural, spiritual happiness? Before dying, his mistress had given him the Latin phrase, translated, “In winter and summer, near and far, as long as we live and beyond.” Royde-Smith’s story posited the potential of psychical phenomenon in the material world, and the horror of the story derived from the possibility that the callous and callow temporal world might win over the depths of the spiritual afterlife.

Finally, Royde-Smith did have the last avenging word. In her novel, *Mildensee*, she ridiculed a fictionalized Henry Spiess and his mother, both of whom were no longer living when this book, her thirtieth, was published in 1943. The character who channeled Spiess was a coward who shamed himself in public drunkenness and who cruelly reneged on his promise to elope. His mother had hands that were “yellow and wrinkled and fat”; self-serving, she prevented her son from eloping by telling him that he was illegitimate and that, dutifully, he must protect her honor and status in their closed social order.

Only a handful of intimates—Edmée Roberts, Walter de la Mare, Kathleen (née Wills) Rees-Mogg, and Ernest Milton—ever knew about Naomi’s strange clandestine “affair” with Henry Spiess.

Inspired by her Genevan experience, *Mildensee* was a serious novel of ideas. It juxtaposed observations about the spiritual source of creative genius with the blighting materialism of Europe’s early twentieth-century entertainment industry. The novel begins and ends

in 1939, its narrative frame. The events of the novel-within-a-novel, once *The Irresolutes* composed in 1904, occurred in the fictional town of Mildensee perched on the side of a lake; the time period, *fin de siècle*. A young blonde English girl, Gillian, was a virtuoso violinist-in-training. Aloys was a native-born youth, a composer. Naomi infused herself into Gillian's character, an opportunity for characteristic self-objectification and criticism. The composer, Aloys, with origins in the *haute aristocratie*, was given traits drawn from Henry Spiess. Even his last message to Gillian was a quotation from the Spiess poem *Le silence des heures*.<sup>21</sup> The international suffragette, Mademoiselle Carrola, "Carl," drew upon Camille Vidart; Edmée was prototype for the lively, lovely Ariane; and qualities of a rich elderly patron were based on Gambart, the art entrepreneur who had employed Naomi in the Swiss mountains. The streets, the lighthouse, the jetty, the markets, the sweet cakes, the music, and the stagnant social order based on "an impervious respectability": Geneva itself (195). The sleeves of Gillian's starched white muslins hung limp in summer heat, as had Naomi's. Aloys exploited Gillian as his muse, apologizing, asking if she was angry that he had taken her from his life and put her into his music, having stolen her personal melody, the Welsh "Dyffryn Clwyd," for the final movements of his musical masterpiece (210).

Likewise, Gillian's awakening love for Aloys evoked her own inner music and a providential revelation:

She was alive, alone, the waking center of a sleeping world. From her living consciousness radiated cords that bound her to the unconscious lives that slept and, in the shining silence of the morning, they were all tuned to so delicate a pitch that her thoughts, playing to them, made audible music. Then there fell upon her with a certainty that was almost physical the knowledge that a way had opened before her in which every step she took would lead her to some revelation that had waited for her since the beginning of time. (200)

Her violin performance of his musical composition that he stole from her Welsh folk song tightened the cord binding his heart and hers, or so she speculated. She experienced the miracle of separate and divided minds uniting to understand the mystery of knowing they were going to die, ". . . the sorrow and the sacrifice; the forbearance;

the forgiveness and the suffering; the patience of spirit and the denial of the flesh that are the earthly companions of the divinity within us, without whose aid it can make no abiding in our frail mortality” (257). Royde-Smith’s character discovered that art and “denial of the flesh” accompanied inner divinity and shared understanding. Selfish though Aloys was as a person, he was also a creative genius, weaving melody from his sorrow, raising altars to abstract beauty, “. . . sacrificing other lives to his; breaking other hearts that the work may be richer for their blood” (259). Gillian was the sacrifice.

Gillian, the artist, was discarded, left to make her way in the material, nonspiritual world of the industry surrounding art. She married an impresario who came to her rescue and then sold her musical abilities. She became both his main mode of financial support and a trophy hostess of an elderly patron who doted on her image but not on her for herself. Her personal daemon had once thrummed to that of Aloys, and “[s]he had, for a whole lifetime, put the thought of [him], who had denied and deserted her, out of mind because she could not bear the burden of resentment” (276). Although she had been well-enough received as a woman violinist, although she had turned her wealth and training generously to supporting impecunious musicians, she was artistically stunted. At novel’s end, now an elderly woman, she stumbled, hitting her head, and died: her head had banged on the steps leading to the Temple of Muses, a central edifice in the landscaped garden of her patron.

In 1948 Royde-Smith produced another novel about those years in Geneva. *Love in Mildensee* was an exposé of the *pensionat* system of education. It focused on the formation of sexual relationships between women.

In *Love in Mildensee* Royde-Smith, again avenging, split traits derived from Henry Spiess into two brothers, upper-class inhabitants of Geneva, who courted two young women, both English and both aspects of Royde-Smith herself. The younger brother, a poet, mooned after his girl, stalking her to her countryside retreat, where he roused her in the night to hear his declarations. She responded from her balcony station by loosening her long blonde hair and allowing him to stroke it from the garden below. Her generous gesture, for which he had begged, repelled him, and he abandoned her. He had preferred her distance. Nevertheless, he was still dreaming of her as he died on

the battlefield during the First World War. The character of the older brother discovered that he loved a girl that he had met in Mildensee, now middle-aged. He promised to meet her, vowing in Latin, which she translated: “In winter, in summer,” she whispered to herself, “with you—away from you—always while I live and after.” A year later, when they were to begin their life together, he almost lost nerve, and then corrected his instinct to flee from intimacy when she alighted from a train, looked for him momentarily without distress, clearly ready to resume life on her own:

There was in the Aubert blood an inheritance of reaction from emotional experience of which he had long been aware [. . .]. [H]e thought he had conquered this tendency in himself. Just so, though Max did not know it, his younger brother Pierre had lost for an hour the enchantment of first love and regained it to cherish, because it was hopeless, until the hour of his death [. . .]. Nothing but his long held knowledge of his own nature stood against the panic impulse to turn away from the consequences of the decision his own sustained impulse had driven him to take. (277)

Here, Royde-Smith, age seventy-two, was writing as much about herself as she was about Henry Spiess. A half century after flirtatiously dodging Spiess in the streets of Geneva, she recorded her earned recognitions: some people—perhaps even herself—flee from “emotional experience” and can only be saved by self-knowledge that may curb their “panic impulse,” thus allowing the development of mature love and mutual caretaking.

# Chapter 3

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## Working Muse, 1904–1925

- Cub
- Editor
- Princes-s
- Queen
- Author

In 1900, Naomi reluctantly returned from Geneva to her parents' Upper Tooting home in southwest London where she shared space with six siblings, a father facing failure, and a despondent, exhausted mother managing her domicile with one remaining servant. Naomi, aged twenty-five, arranged to complete her degree at Clapham High School in exchange for teaching English literature, especially Tennyson, and also French conversation. It was in the midst of these inauspicious circumstances that she nurtured those secret hopes for escape into marriage with Henry Spiess and yearned to return to Geneva. Just three years later, Naomi would embark on a journalistic career during which she became one of London's most influential literary gatekeepers. A coalescence of persons and circumstances provided Naomi with a unique opportunity to make her way to achieving prominence in an occupation that was usually reserved for men.

Naomi would meet her future in the drawing rooms of Putney and Lynton, where she was welcomed as a marriageable daughter from a reputable, religiously Nonconformist family. The Smith and the Newnes clans had worshipped together in the small village of Warley on the

outskirts of Halifax. During the 1860s, George Newnes's father, Thomas Mold Newnes, had been the Congregational minister in the chapel down the road from Fern Hill.<sup>1</sup> Religious affiliations trumped widening class status separating the ensuing younger generations, as the now London-based Holroyd Smith slipped into penury while the entrepreneurial publishing magnate George Newnes rose in status and wealth.

Wealth aside, the two families shared similar cultural and religious values. George Newnes was ready to offer a helping hand to the Smith children. As early as 1900, the *Westminster Gazette* published Naomi's seventeen-year-old brother's sonnet "Here, There, and Everywhere," in which Graham discovered "God's message" in field and tree, "a world re clothed, most strange, most fair" (29 January 1900).

Sir George Newnes and his wife, Priscilla, doted on their one surviving son, Frank, who was a year older than Naomi. The parents turned over Wildcroft, their home in Putney, to young people on weekends, with Naomi one of their numbers, her schedule meticulously kept in her daily diary for 1900.<sup>2</sup> At Putney she socialized with Frank and his married cousin Brame Hillyard; she was also social companion to another Newnes cousin, the adolescent Jessie Hillyard. Although Naomi's home situation was increasingly grim, she did not find her life "an unlit journey through darkness": "We were young, we were quite merry, and we were rather pathetically wise, as the children of parents worried about their fortunes must be at times" ("Nine Lives," 73).

For the entire month of September 1901, the Newneses invited Naomi and her lovely younger sister Dolly to holiday with them at Hollerday House, high above Lynton, overlooking the sea. Subsequently, Naomi was welcomed for extended September holidays in 1902 and 1903, and again during August 1904. The Newnes' pleasure abode, a scene of "rare grandeur and loveliness," was approached by a winding road that had been hewn from rock and "planted on either side with a magnificent variety of trees, flowering shrubs, and rock plants, which thrive so well in the soft pure air of North Devon that after a few years the approach to Hollerday House became famous far and wide for its wondrous beauty" (Friederichs, 106). George Newnes had raised this mansion, planted its garden, and masterminded the construction of the Lynton-Barnstable railway to service it, just as he had built his fortune: out of intelligent persistence and imaginative whim. He was awarded a baronetcy for his contribution to "the cause of healthy



popular literature” as well as for his political service to the Liberal Party” (Friederichs, 55).

Naomi, still considering herself secretly engaged to Henry Spiess, wrote furiously and profusely to him in her French journals throughout her Lynton retreats. Nevertheless, a possible liaison with Frank Newnes might have been in the air. On May 29 in her 1902 French journal, she recorded a dream in which she was somewhere at the seaside attempting to see Henry Spiess before breakfast, only to be stymied by Frank Newnes, with whom she felt compelled to walk, Henry on one side, Frank on the other; the dream ended on that note. A year later, among notations about activities at Hollerday House—church attendance, tennis, charades, chess, whist, music, croquet, ballroom dancing, treading the famous North Walk along the coastal cliff—she remarked: “F. H. N. North Walk discussion marriage” (diary, 6 September 1903, NRS MSS). Probably this was not a marriage proposal. Nor was she particularly attracted to him, and nothing more of marriage in association with Frank was noted in her diaries. Thereafter their friendship waxed and then waned over the years.

The art publisher Ernest Gambart candidly assessed Naomi in 1898 when she spent a summer translating his memoirs. She was clearly ambitious, having solicited introductions to his contacts in London’s literary world. Nevertheless, it was not Gambart but rather Sir George Newnes who gave her a helping hand by offering her a cub position on the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, his newly invented publication that would see the first light of day in early 1904.

## Cub

The *Saturday Westminster Gazette* began publication a decade after the daily *Westminster Gazette* had been established by George Newnes. The original *Westminster Gazette* was his response to the *Liberal Pall Mall Gazette* turning Conservative under new ownership, causing both its editor E. T. Cook and assistant editor J. A. Spender to resign on political principle. Newnes, then a Liberal member of Parliament, recognized the Liberal Party’s significant need for an organ to express its ideology, a conventional nineteenth-century arrangement between journalism and politics. He wove the *Westminster Gazette* out of whole cloth: purchasing new machinery, building a new edifice for its operation on Tudor Street,

hiring both E. T. Cook and J. A. Spender, and employing the entire jubilant staff of the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

Unlike his previous successful publications—such as *Tit-Bits* that provided light reading for men and *The Strand* that continued to introduce the Sherlock Holmes stories of Conan Doyle—under Newnes’s proprietorship the *Westminster Gazette* was neither popular nor remunerative, although he tried his best by giving it its hallmark green newsprint for advertising effect and, to his mind, ease on eyes for reading. Newnes subsidized this newspaper with £10,000 each year so long as he was owner. It never achieved circulation of more than 20,000, this compared to the 800,000 of his first venture, *Tit-Bits*, in its heyday. Yet, the *Westminster Gazette*, like *The Times*, was considered to be among publications with “resounding reputations.”<sup>3</sup> Coming out every evening in London, J. A. Spender’s editorial on the front page was read by influential members of both political parties, and the *Gazette* was regarded as “an integral part of political society” (Koss, 2).

Naomi was paying scant attention to national party politics when she began her pedagogical toil at Clapham High School, although in her 1900 diary she had followed closely the vicissitudes of the Boer War in South Africa and reported in her autobiography that she was passionate in support of the exoneration of Alfred Dreyfus. Her immediate attention was captivated by the turmoil of family life. She was keenly aware of her parents’ declining circumstances. She reported visiting pawnbrokers in her daily diary and noted in her autobiography that “much of my mother’s jewelry was sold, including the opal and ruby dragon-fly brooch, and an admired (but I thought it ugly) bracelet of green cat’s eye agate set in gold” (“Nine Lives,” 72).

She quit teaching at Clapham High School after a year or so. In her autobiography Naomi wrote as if her severance had been abrupt, provoked by nervous strain. It appears that she did take an extended leave in 1902. Her daily diaries for 1901 and 1902 were not saved, if, indeed, they were ever kept. Documented by letters, between December and September 1902 she was a paid companion to a person named “Kathleen” whose family lived at Northmoor in Dulverton and was headed by Sir Frederick Wills of tobacco fortune. In her 1900 daily diary she made daily notations, “*l’ école*,” which she kept until July before going silent, and there were no *l’ école* references when her diaries resumed at the beginning of 1903, although she wrote “C. H. S.” or

“conversation” or “magazine committee” once a week through June, picking up again in October, suggesting a continuing association with the high school after returning from living with the Wills family.

In her biography of Sir George Newnes, Hulda Friederichs described chess, charades, tennis, dancing, all sorts of activities at the Newnes residence, Wildcroft, in Putney, inaugurated once Frank Newnes returned to live at home after he finished his education and was admitted to the bar: “From that time informal dances, for which the covered tennis-court made an excellent room, were frequent enough at Wildcroft, for both Sir George and Lady Newnes were very fond of the society of young people” (Friederichs, 97). Naomi recalled singing drawing-room ballads and playing charades in Putney, often in the company of Winnie and her brother, plus Graham and his friend Courtenay. Frank was a reoccurring presence in her daily diaries for several years. They enjoyed motoring over the countryside together, and the Newnes and Wills families were well enough acquainted for casual visitations: “F. H. N., we motored to Dulverton.”

Naomi began her association with the *Westminster Gazette* in 1903, indicated by fragmentary diary references to “Sir George.” Throughout the autumn of 1903, Naomi worked in her office at the Gazette on Tudor Street, where she met with “Miss F.,” Hulda Friederichs. Despite a thirty-year difference in age, they began an affectionate and loyal relationship. Originally, Hulda had been on the staff of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, transferring to the daily *Westminster Gazette* when it was created in the early 1890s. In addition to her duties on the daily *Westminster Gazette*, she had been editor of the weekly *Westminster Budget* until it folded. Subsequently, she transferred to the newly formed *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, for which she wrote a weekly column, “Idle Moments” (Friederichs, 86–7). She was an old hand at making her way as a rare woman in professional journalism, and she was eager to advise Naomi, witnessed in copious letters.

On November 13, 1903, Naomi scribbled “Westminster office,” and on December 17, “*adieux* C. H. S.” [i.e., Clapham High School]. The *Saturday Westminster Gazette* began publication in February 1904. During January, Naomi holidayed in Caux, Switzerland, with Sir George and Lady Newnes. Under Hulda Friederichs’s tutelage, Naomi was onboard when the newspaper was launched.

Among her other duties, Naomi was Hulda's assistant for the Christmas Fund sponsored by the older daily publication, the *Westminster Gazette*. The Fund provided weekly pensions of half a crown for a number of old people who qualified by being over age sixty, earning less than ten shillings a week, too feeble to work, and without supportive friends. According to Hulda, Newnes was ready and willing to let a staff member "devote three months entirely to this work, and to pay all expenses connected with the Fund" (257–8).

Just as soon as Naomi secured a job on the fledgling *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, an enlarged extension of the daily publication, and acquired a desk in its new office on Salisbury Square, she flew from her parents' overcrowded nest. Together with her sister Daisy, who would soon marry, she rented rooms in Adair House on Oakley Street in Chelsea, and there she resided in first one flat and then another until after the onset of the First World War.

Busy as she was at the *Gazette*, Naomi finished writing a novel, *The Irresolutes*. It was rejected by Methuen in 1904 and Fisher Unwin in 1905, not to be published until 1943 as the center portion of a framing novel, *Mildensee*. In *Una and the Red Cross Knight* (1905), she rewrote for the edification of children many of the chapters of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*. For a couple of years she contributed to Sylvester Horne's *The Whitefield Signal*, notably "A Year at a Glance" in January 1906. Determined to support herself, Naomi maintained a full, if not frantic, work schedule.

She was alert to possibilities for making money in the book industry. Methuen published Naomi's first anthology *The Pillow Book, a Garner of Many Moods* (1906), in which she grouped texts according to themes, such as time, patience, solitariness, damnation, renunciation, and so on, with poetry and epigraphs partially quoted. She should have taken Hulda Friederichs's advice: "When you have the Methuen book quite off your hands, you ought to do some good original work & in that way prepare the way for that which is not journalism, for something that is more an expression of yourself."<sup>4</sup> Naomi did not heed Hulda's urgings, nor, supporting herself, could she afford to do so. Methuen published another of her anthologies, *Poets of Our Day* (1908), which included poems by late nineteenth-century authors and some new to the scene, such as those by Walter de la Mare. She included many women poets. In this anthology she classified poems according to nationality and

style: English in the “classical tradition,” Irish in the French *symbolistes* tradition, and American verse following from Walt Whitman’s spirit.

Naomi shared office space with Hulda. According to J. D. Beresford, Hulda was nominally the editor of the Saturday edition of the *Westminster Gazette*, which was comprised of reprints of all the reviews of the week, one or two special articles, and Naomi’s columns, “the famous literary competition.”<sup>5</sup> Even during holidays, Naomi received work from Hulda posted for weekly turn-around from Wales or Germany or France or Switzerland, wherever she happened to be. Hulda gossiped with her “Gosling” about the office homefront: “The weather is gruesome; I am working under the lamp, & the air in this room is thick with fumes from the hot water pipes & the fog coming in through the open window above your table” (13 January 1909, NRS MSS). She was quick with instruction for Naomi: her “April Girl,” “Gosling,” “April Peacock” should know that a newspaper needed an “Idle Moments” column such as hers to expand when space went void of remunerative advertising, that Naomi should part her hair on the side and bundle her hair on her neck, that Naomi should eschew “clever repartee & expression,” that Naomi should submit poetry for newspaper publication as it earned more per line than reviews, that Naomi should not take holidays in solitude when she might better seek the society of the Newneses at Hollerday House, and so on in chatty, detailed letters penned between 1904 and 1920. Hulda was motherly: “I hate to think of you working on, with purple lines under those big, grave, eyes & impatient finger turning over review-copies of deadly dull books.” Sometimes her news was urgent, as it was in 1908 when Newnes sold his interest in the *Westminster Gazette* to a syndicate of wealthy Liberals: “The only thing about the paper she [Lady Newnes] told me, that will interest you, is this, that the new people don’t take over the paper until the end of August. So you see, there is no fear that anything might happen which would necessitate the presence of the whole staff & you can make your arrangements for this month & rest in perfect peace” (16 July 1908, NRS MSS). The new Liberal syndicate of proprietors included Frank Newnes, who was elected as member of Parliament for one term between 1906 and 1910. The syndicate held together until 1912 when the *Westminster Gazette* again changed ownership. The newspaper staff was always on edge, unsure the paper would survive.

Naomi's influence increased through her management of the Problems competition, which was centrally located in the Saturday paper. Each week she would set literary exercises, soliciting submissions, which she would judge for guinea awards and published either with a byline or anonymously, according to the submitter's discretion. Her literary acumen and aesthetic sensibilities found an apt audience. Naomi was becoming an important culture-maker in prewar England.

Her competitions were aimed at what was then considered erudite readers, much to the amusement and, perhaps, befuddlement of Spender's political clientele, whose tastes may have been different. Naomi had followed an established competition in the daily *Gazette* that called for best versions of a set passage of English poetry into some Greek or Latin meter. However, it was Naomi's literary competitions, three set for each Saturday—the results generally filling two pages—that won widespread popularity for the paper and fame for her, as was fully acknowledged by J. A. Spender in his autobiography:

It seems to me still, as I look back on it, the cleverest thing of the kind ever produced from a newspaper office. All the banalities common to such things were avoided; the editor took her competitors over steeper and steeper fences, and they followed undaunted wherever she led. They poured out prose and poetry to any model and in any metre; they were as ready with parodies as with epitaphs, and gave equally when she asked for pathos and for bathos. She snubbed and cuffed them, and they took it lying down, and only promised to do better next time [...]. [T]he impression I got was there never could in any country at any time have been a cleverer group of young people than for twenty years or so were deployed on this page.<sup>6</sup>

Spender boasted that several of these zealous young people went on to make great reputations. He habitually raided Naomi's Problems page for fresh young reviewing talent and added that "a good many seniors chopped in from time to time." But the sub-editor, Naomi, "was no respecter of persons," whether that of Lord Curzon or of Spender's own literary friends. Lovat Dickson, publisher and playwright, extolled: "Many of the great names we remember as writers in the twenties published their first contributions in the columns [of 'the enormously

important and influential' *Westminster Gazette*]. They were the nursery school for budding writers and amateurs of the pen."<sup>7</sup>

Naomi's Problems page announced itself mildly enough in the first issue of the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, 6 February 1904: "This column will, every Saturday, be devoted to literary problems, and we propose to offer prizes which, if they will not stimulate the kind of zeal of the modern treasure hunters will add a little zest to pleasing and amusing occupations." The competition was a resounding success. On February 20, the *Westminster* announced that "nearly 2,000 readers have entered for the various prizes offered in our issue of Saturday, February 6." It was a fruitful ploy for snagging new subscribers.

An example of an announced competition looked like this: 1) "We offer a prize of Three Guineas for the best rendering into English of the following poem, *Über Verganglichkeit* by Hugo Von Hofmannsthal;" 2) "We offer a prize of One Guinea for the best 500 words of Advice to a Wedding Guest;" 3) "A Prize of Three Guineas for the best Ballade of Omens." It was then usual in the next week's pages for Naomi to write a commentary on the submissions, an essay redolent of literary criticism and pedagogy. For instance, responding to the translation into English verse of the German poem, her essay scolded: "No one who read von Hofmannsthal's poems with an understanding ear could suppose that the interweaving of weak and strong rhymes is accidental or to be neglected by the translator. It is manifestly a device by which the rather stark *terzinen* are softened into something akin to the music of the Italian from which this verse is borrowed" (6 January 1912). She preened her knowledge of poetics.

In his memoir, J. D. Beresford, a novelist who reviewed for the *Westminster*, admired Naomi: "to me she was one of those wonderful people of whom I was always slightly in awe, and whose tactful hints about the misuse of English, I accepted with the docility of the good pupil." He goes on to hint about a more private relationship with Naomi, too personal to advertise in public, concluding: "I have always felt for her a great admiration and affection, and she was one of the influences that helped me determine my attitude toward literature" (200-1).





Naomi was the first to publish Rupert Brooke's poetry. In the summer of 1905, intrigued by her competition page, he posted an entry using the pseudonym "Sandro." The result was the publication of a few lines of his poetry beginning with "An Evil Time came down with fateful feet." Subsequently, the *Westminster* frequently enabled Brooke to earn welcome money for practicing his craft. He often won competitions. Brooke noted in 1908 that Naomi's recent compilation of winning pieces from the Problems page included many of his offerings: "'It is horrible to find forgotten things knocked off in a hurry, solemnly resuscitated in cold blood,' he wrote to his mother. 'I hate it, in spite of the pleasant fact it is almost entirely written by Rose Macaulay, Lord Curzon, and myself!'"<sup>8</sup> Two collections of winning texts from the Naomi's *Westminster* competitions were published: *Westminster Problems Book*, Compiled by N. G. R. Smith from 1904 to 1907 (1908) and *Second Problems Book, Prizes and Proximes from the Westminster Gazette 1905–1909*, edited by N. G. Royde Smith (1909), no hyphenation.

During these early professional years, Naomi widened her social life considerably and expanded her European travel. When she was not with her brother Graham and some of her sisters—Daisy, Leslie, and Erica—her mother, and grandmother, and when she was not with Winnie Austin, Margie Hamilton Fellows, and Margie's younger sister Kathleen, Naomi was enjoying her patrons, both the Newneses and their friends, including the Tomalins, as well as the Spenders and their friends. As often as two and three times a week during 1906 and 1907, she could be found at Carlton House Terrace, the London home base for both Frank Newnes and his father. There she would meet Ida Lie, a young woman befriended by the Newnes clan, and Jessie Hillyard, a Newnes niece. While Frank was a member of Parliament, he occasionally invited Naomi to the House of Commons. In letters, Hulda Friederichs disapproved of Frank's mode of socializing and wished Naomi away from "Carlton House Terrace & all other parties," although she noted that Naomi "liked such things & makes them enjoyable for others" (6 July 1906, NRS MSS).



Sir George Newnes and Naomi on yacht, 1907, cruising the French and Italian Riviera.

Naomi was part of an entourage entertained by Sir George and Lady Newnes on their yacht on a tour of the French and Italian Riviera during March and April of 1907. Frank was also a member of the party, as was Jessie, Sir Martin and Lady Conway, and the Reeds. Dipping in and out of Monte Carlo, Marseilles, Toulon, Cannes, and such, Naomi earned her keep with witty badinage, feeling herself equal to Sir George, a notable raconteur: “Sir George *et moi comme* ‘entertainers’” (diary, 9 April 1907, NRS MSS). Sir Grimwood Mears recalled meeting Naomi. He expressed the “esteem and admiration” he had always felt since that day when Lady Newnes introduced him and his wife to her at a garden party: “We inevitably caught the infection from her in a few sentences. Before the introduction she told us how fond she was of you and how she and Sir George admired you.”<sup>9</sup> Mears fell in love with her.

Mysteriously, Naomi retreated to Bonn, Germany, between September and November 1907. She recorded that she was in “*misère*.” Hulda had been fretting about her, probing unsuccessfully for an explanation for her “anxious & worried & puzzled looks”: “The

‘ba-health’ explanation never quite satisfied me. I do not want you to tell me anything but what you would like to tell me, for I know full well how impossible words are, & how they vilify some things. But sometimes they ease the burden” (26 July 1907, NRS MSS).

Naomi ran off to Bonn with no sure date of return and little money. For some three months, she supplemented her meager *Westminster* income, the Problems work posted weekly by Hulda, by giving lessons in English in exchange for instruction in German. For a while, she was anchored there by her relationship with Maggie and Richard Hughes, who seem to have accompanied her. Mainly, however, she was left to her own devices, more and more often walking and sharing tea with “S.,” who finally materialized as “Siegfried” in her diaries and who showered her with roses when she departed in November.

A few years later, she returned to Poppelsdorf-Bonn for several weeks in April 1910, once again to associate with Siegfried [Cohn, according to her address book], his friends and family. The relationship did not endure. The night before her leave-taking, he told “his grief *le soir*” and then “moved his belongings” (diary, 20 and 25 July 1910, NRS MSS). This disappointing interlude with the mysterious Siegfried was a murky passage in Naomi’s life.

By 1906, she had initiated a ritual “at-home,” recorded as “*le soir*” in her daily diaries. Her Thursday evening at-homes were somewhat erratic in their genesis and in the beginning mainly attended by Graham and other family members, including her Gran. The evenings picked up steam and by 1908 were a regular weekly feature, frequented by family (her brother Graham and sister Daisy Toms, now married) and an expanding loyal coterie, including Brame Hillyard, Miss Harrison and Alice Conway (both neighbors in Adair House), Mr. and Mrs. G. R. Menzies, Ralph Hodgson (poet), Lizzie Costello, Mary Goodman, (Goodie), and Frank Sidgwick (poet and soon publisher), who was introduced to the *Westminster* as Naomi’s Problems page stand-in during her holiday in 1909. He covered for her again in 1910. Whenever she kept diaries thereafter, she tended to list those who came to her Thursday *les soirs*, until the crowd was too large to enumerate. One of her novels described the duties associated with running an expected at-home and the difficulties of cancellation: “[s]he used to say it would take her a week to write everyone who *might* come, and then have overlooked the only person who had planned to arrive on any given Friday.”<sup>10</sup>

Much of Naomi's more and more active, crowded life was keyed to her journalistic endeavors, including her workaday luncheons and her Thursday "*les soirs*." She reserved private moments with intimates for long walks in the Surrey countryside. Starting in 1911, she rented a cottage retreat located at Holmbury St. Mary's near Dorking. The White House was nestled in a network of walking paths that wound through woods to Peaslake and over to Gomshall on the London train line. Here she invited her closest friends. Walter de la Mare, with whom she would become intimately twined, visited often on day trips, usually in the company of others, as on a Sunday in January: "Five of us at The White House. On the way home from Pitch Hill we tried to talk about the limit for recording experience. I think you may tell all you see but not all you feel. You must indicate or show feeling but you can't talk about your own and live. But the woods were too beautiful for [the discussion] to prosper" (diary, 7 January 1911, NRS MSS).

Her brother, Graham, was always a welcome companion at her Thursdays, as was Margie Hamilton Fellows, Agnes Conway, sister Leslie, and high school friend Winnie Austin. On November 10, 1912, several swarmed into her small room. One was the Cambridge based classical scholar Jane Harrison, who "talked of Psychical Research," and walked with Naomi, causing her to dream "a message about Dante & Verona." That evening Helen de Gaudrion Verrall, Eddie Marsh, and Jane Harrison stayed over for dinner and "talked of personal beauty."

By 1912, Naomi's Thursdays were well-established features of the London literary landscape. She was often exhausted by her obligations as hostess because the *Westminster* was finalized every Friday for Saturday publication, predictably entailing a long, arduous day of work. Mindful of needing her rest in anticipation of Friday toil, she tried to shoo her guests out at a decent hour.

Her evenings inspired intellectual gamesmanship, her guests enjoying witty gambits sitting in a small circle. On occasion, there are records of repartee. On January 4, 1912, for instance, the conversation started with Hugh Rawlinson's observation that the Scottish artist Muirhead Bone's drawings that now fetched £45 would reach four times that value "before they're done." Naomi preferred the Welsh artist John Macallan Swan's "Orpheus" to any modern picture. She would hang any painting by the artist Swan in her rooms.

Frank Newnes caused a gust of joy by asking suddenly in the middle of prophecies, ‘Who the deuce is Augustus John?’ It was after Miss Goodman [E. Mary Goodman, Goodie] had said she’d rather be A. J. if she could have a second time on earth. F. H. N. made a splendid composite second man for himself. The physique of Kitchener, the mind of Gladstone, and the position of King George V.

To which de la Mare quipped privately: “I expect he wants a thorough change.” That evening, after de la Mare’s early leave-taking, the discussion turned to how conditioning of girls encouraged dishonesty, an assertion that Rawlinson understood and Newnes did not. Goodie was “very sarcastic about having to try to look pretty,” an observation that provoked a conversation about how *The English Review* [started by Ford Madox Ford in 1908 and carried forward by Austin Harrison in 1912] was “on its last legs”; Goodie, on the staff of the review, was “very dismal about the morals & finances of all papers.” The next day Naomi had to be reassured by de la Mare; he recalled that Heinemann’s manager had said that “all men know the W. G. as an upright & trustworthy paper” (diary, 1–5 January 1912, NRS MSS).

Mary Agnes (Molly) Hamilton, novelist and member of Parliament, avowed that Naomi’s Thursdays were the closest she had ever known to a “genuine salon.” Naomi was always “charmingly attired and most attractive to look upon (her dangling crystal earrings gave the note), receiving guests in a long succession of various abodes,” each given “the distinct accent of her own highly individual taste.” She nearly always presented some new object, often tiny, to be fondled and admired. There was excellent coffee, chocolates, cigarettes, and conversation. Molly Hamilton concluded: “It was enough; more than enough. Over a series of years, everybody in the literary world, the not yet arrived as well as the established, was to be met with there, at one time or another.” She credited Naomi with enormous patience, endless self-control, a quite unflagging interest in others, all necessary personal characteristics that generated success of the salon. Naomi would rise from her sickbed to entertain, remarked upon in her diaries. Year after year, she was in place, “gay, animated, entertaining,” no matter who came—or did not.<sup>11</sup>

Molly remembered that Naomi was “incessantly on the look-out for new and interesting people and those whom she could help by

bringing them fresh contacts. From this point of view, too, she was a wonderful editor; the discoveries of the *Westminster* were in her day endless." It was true. Naomi was a gate-opener for new talent; however, she eschewed politics and this propensity colored her gatherings, "the political were on the whole conspicuous by their absence; but there were lots of civil servants, male and female" (Hamilton, 139). Even William Beveridge—the economist, social reformer, and a regular participant—avoided political discussion.

Naomi simply showed no interest in politics, not even in the suffragette movement, excusing herself to de la Mare: "do you think you'd like me better if I were strong minded and clamoured for a voice and wanted to make speeches about redressing human *Wrongs!* I sometimes wonder whether 'with the talents and opportunities God has given . . .' you know. Well. I just simply couldn't—and what's more I'm not at all sure it's a right thing to do" (journal, Milton MSS). She seemed to agree with those who attributed educational opportunities to God rather than pioneering suffragettes, obviating need for gratitude to those who had created the very institutions that had educated her. Nevertheless, in her own way, Naomi added her voice to promulgate the raising of the status of women. Her first lecture series in the early 1900s, for instance, had been about six great late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century women novelists—Francis Burney, Jane Austen, the Brontës, George Eliot, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, although it was a lengthy narrative poem rather than a novel.

The Liberal Party syndicate that owned the *Westminster* began to fall apart in 1912. Sir George Newnes had died in 1910, and now his son, Sir Frank Newnes, wanted to dispose of his shares. Since his concerns were purely financial, he withdrew his resignation as soon as he was promised a loan for £2,500. About the same time, the syndicate's shareholders solicited subscriptions from Liberal Party loyalists in an endeavor to subsidize the paper. They raised almost £80,000, which enabled the *Westminster* to survive as a nightly feature for another decade. Although the key shareholders desired to control J. A. Spender's political opinions, they were hamstrung by internal discord. In fact, they even had trouble agreeing who would lend money to Frank Newnes, who was no longer a member of Parliament nor a respected political player (Koss, 191–2).

## Editor

The political infighting left Spender free to run his paper according to his own lights. Until 1912, the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* had been a weekend issue of the ordinary evening paper. In 1912 it became a totally separate publication.<sup>12</sup> Naomi was officially appointed literary editor of the new incarnation of the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, contracting work for less salary than her predecessor until she proved her worth. Lovat Dickson, her contemporary and friend, eulogized her rise in journalistic power in her *Times* obituary: “It was the first time in history that a girl from Clapham High School, or a girl from any school, however prominent, could have become the literary editor of a London newspaper. [. . .] Naomi Royde-Smith was then beautiful and young and romantic and clever” (30 July 1964). Actually, Naomi was not so young at age thirty-seven, nor did she earn a degree from Clapham High School. Of course, she could obfuscate her age perhaps because of her beauty, and no one imagined that she had so little formal education.

A typical edition of the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, say that of 6 January 1912, comprised sixteen pages: the first two devoted to national news in review and current events; pages three and four devoted to “Motley Notes” and letters from readers; page five essays, short stories, and poems; page six Problems and Prizes; page seven essays and poems; pages nine to eleven essays; pages twelve to fourteen reviews of books; page fifteen “Concerning Dress”; page sixteen recently published books categorized and briefly described—travel, history, philosophy, biography, and so on. During 1912, the *Gazette* published a great deal of literature: several short stories by Saki, Robert Graves, Katherine Mansfield, and others; essays with bylines by J. D. Beresford and Walter de la Mare, among others; poems by the likes of Walter de la Mare, D. H. Lawrence, and John Masefield. It was not the custom of the paper to include bylines for reviewers, although three pages had to be filled each week. Naomi distributed the mind-numbing routine job of reviewing regularly to Beresford and de la Mare, taking up the slack herself when necessary, and all wrote their reviews anonymously without attribution.

During 1912, she habitually shared Monday working luncheons at The Wayside with de la Mare and Beresford. (They were joined by Rose Macaulay twice during that year, on September 16 and October 14). Naomi recorded one of these Monday events: “I had lunch with

J. D. Beresford and W. de la M. and they talked about consciousness, each quoting or naming the other's works—though they haven't read them. De la Mare walked back to Salisbury Square with me afterwards and admitted it." Although they may have fudged about reading one another's works, Beresford and de la Mare were good friends, conversing hours on end and weeks at a time during summer holidays before the war.

On Thursdays Naomi was in the habit of lunching with de la Mare and Helen de Gaudrion Verrall, who wrote for the *Gazette*, although she would eventually make her reputation in research and writings about parapsychology. They were joined by Rose Macaulay on May 2 and November 7. Helen was a close friend of Naomi's, as was de la Mare. Rose was new to Naomi's cadre of writers.

Almost two decades later, Royde-Smith wrote a perceptive, sympathetic biography, *The Double Heart, a Study of Julie de Lespinasse* (1931), in which she explained how Lespinasse—lacking money, established position in society, and beauty—attracted the best minds of her milieu, the Encyclopedists of the Enlightenment, and inspired them. Royde-Smith admired Lespinasse's powers of empathy, her ability to submerge her personality in waves of pity and admiration for the plight of others, becoming "the eager, intelligent, and influential friend every young author desires to attach himself" (165). According to Royde-Smith, Lespinasse's wit, intelligence, and commonsense rendered her "pre-eminent among women as the friend and inspiration of the writers of her time" (165). In their unique ways, both Lespinasse and Royde-Smith were muses, earning the honor, such as it was, because of their intellectual acumen and profound familiarity with literary style. Royde-Smith presented Lespinasse as gifted in poetics:

Line by line and phrase by phrase she savoured [Comte du Guibert's] excellence: praising with discrimination, permitting herself detailed and enlightening criticism of passages where his genius had not quite done itself justice; discovering, as such a woman will, felicities and graces the author himself had not recognized until she pointed them out to his glowing and enraptured eye. Fed with such honey the appetite grows, ambition outsoars achievement. The man



who has tasted it will not rest until it sweetens his daily, his hourly meal. (184)

Naomi, like Lespinasse, fed her honeyed knowledge of poetics to authors, both men and women. Her gifts were not always acknowledged.

Naively, perhaps, D. H. Lawrence assumed he was speaking man to a man (as opposed to man-as-messenger to woman) when he funneled poems to that “Westminster man [Spender]” through de la Mare. De la Mare hardly had any connection with Spender. Nevertheless, he did not dispute Lawrence’s masculine assumption, although, of course, his link to the *Gazette* was Naomi, who was mainly responsible for decisions about publishing creative writers: “Binns [her nickname for de la Mare] at lunch with new poems from Lawrence” (diary, 11 March 1912, NRS MS). Several of these poems, gathered under the title of “The Schoolmaster,” appeared in the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* on May 25, about eight weeks after they had been privately passed to her. Lawrence wrote a proper thank you note to de la Mare, but not to Naomi.<sup>13</sup> No mention was made by either man of Naomi’s role as literary editor. Lawrence solicited de la Mare for more patronage, sending him four German sketches, all save one of which was published in the *Westminster* in August 1912. Naomi returned proofs of these sketches to de la Mare in mid-May; he tucked them into an envelope that he labeled: “D. H. Lawrence’s German Sketches. Please keep. That in MS has been refused by Spender as being too violently anti-German.”<sup>14</sup> Twice over in 1913, Lawrence reminded de la Mare to retrieve his unpublished manuscripts from the *Westminster*.<sup>15</sup> The last word on Lawrence was Naomi’s diary entry for 5 September 1913: “Mr. Watson objects to D. H. Lawrence.” (Sir Alfred Watson wrote occasional “leaders,” front page editorials, when Spender was on holiday or otherwise unable.) Although Naomi brought talent to the literary gate, Watson could veto Lawrence’s essays for political reasons, determined along with Spender to mitigate the rising tide of anti-Germanic rhetoric that was agitating Liberal politics.

Naomi was keen for de la Mare to read and appreciate the poetry of her protégé Rupert Brooke. Finally, in August 1912, de la Mare acquiesced. In a late night, rather garbled missive, he queried: “Did you read the Lit Supp [*Times Literary Supplement*] whole? The sonnet of Rupert Brooke is good. Was that the one you asked me to read & prejudice against his perfect beauty refused to?” (ca. August 1912, Mare MSS). Perhaps Naomi was also the person who introduced Brooke to

Walter de la Mare. If so, the relationship between the men was not noted in her diaries and journals at this time; it was not until 1914 that her diaries placed them together.

Meanwhile, Royde-Smith invented a writing project for herself and de la Mare, an excuse to render their secretive correspondence open. Between October 1913 and June 1914, they collaborated in composing an epistolary novel, *John Fanning's Legacy* (1927), which faltered when de la Mare recognized that he was writing about himself. A couple of months later, the war sealed the novel's fate until 1926.

London literati were circling simultaneously in several literary orbits, circles within circles, overlapping. As early as November 5, 1912, Naomi was attending readings at the Bloomsbury Poet's Club with "Henry Newbolt, Maurice Hewlett, W. de la Mare, E. Marsh, H. H. Munro & the other Munro, Ernest Rhys" (diary, 5 November 1912, NRS MSS). She was in the inner sanctum at the genesis of the Poetry Bookshop: "Ten at the Poets Bookshop with Mr. Munro & Maurice Hewlett" (diary, 18 November 1912, NRS MSS). Together with de la Mare and Helen de Gaudrion Verrall, she attended the Russian Ballet with Eddie Marsh, who promoted the so-called Georgian poets in anthologies published by Munro, five volumes altogether. The anthologies included works by both de la Mare and Rupert Brooke. Marsh was very keen to sponsor the charismatic Brooke, introducing him to artists and writers, providing him with London living quarters, a room in his own spacious flat at Gray's Inn, and inviting him to read his poems at the Poetry Bookshop

Hearing that Rupert Brooke was anxious to travel, Naomi arranged for him to tour the United States and Canada with "all expenses paid and the fee of four guineas for each of a series of articles giving his impressions."<sup>16</sup> Brooke's biographer noted that Naomi ran something of a risk because he had not yet published prose beyond his poetry entries for her competitions: "In fact, she only had his last year's article on Compton Mackenzie's *Carnival*, which had won him a second prize for the review of a novel, to show her editor J. A. Spender as evidence that the funds would not be wasted" (Hassell, 392). Spender backed Naomi's literary judgment. Two days before he sailed, Brooke met Spender briefly for the first time. Brooke's contract as correspondent, age twenty-six, was the only paid position he ever held. His published letters from abroad made good on Naomi's bet. Privately, he wrote her from Tahiti, his tone that of a loving friend who spoke candidly:

A parcel of mail from the States here, sent on. Four Westminsters and five packages or so from you—all October. And it's January! All's well. Some letters seem to have gone to Samoa and missed me. I'll find them in 'Frisco next month. [. . .] The W. G. likely will want to print my other Canadian articles (which are poor they say). And they even suggest a series on the South Seas! So I'm all right. (But I shan't do a series on the South Seas: and if I do any, I'll try the *Nation* first. I don't want to be monopolized by the W. G.) Another letter in three weeks and a half. With love, Rupert. (16 January 1914, NRS MSS)

Naomi was better able to advocate for her protégés than for herself. During January 1914, she chose solitude, huddling "*toute suele*" in her Holmbury White House. For one thing, she was overloaded with work and needed sustained quiet. For another, she was contemplating her worth, brooding while she piled rocks for a cairn in a hidden nook in the woods. She intended the cairn as a spiritual shrine for private meditation.

Hulda Friederichs, upon retiring in 1910, had split her work between Naomi and a Mr. Henry. Naomi's job description added Hulda's portion of work to her usual duties, those of managing reviewers and soliciting contributions, as well as judging and organizing the Problems page. Later in the same year, Mr. Henry fell ill permanently, leaving Naomi to handle his part of Hulda's job, so she was now doing the work of what had once been three. Hulda had been paid £650 plus £100 for managing the Christmas Fund, £750 altogether. Mr. Henry had earned between £190 and £250. Between the two of them, they had been paid approximately £950. As of January 1911, Naomi's salary was a paltry £350, nor was this figure amended with the assignment of her new position as editor with concomitant duties during 1912 and 1913. She felt exploited and decided to do something about it.

In February 1914, she petitioned Spender, requesting that he remind the Westminster directors that she "was to receive a rise of salary if my work proved satisfactory & also on account of the work I have done in Mr. Henry's place" (draft letters, 20 February, 2 and 10 March 1914, NRS MSS). She asked for £500, an amount two hundred pounds short of Hulda's salary alone, not counting Mr. Henry's salary. Spender tore up one of her letters and urged her to take back another. He talked

to her over tea, twice. Walking home along the Embankment, “very bitter,” she returned on Monday to urge him again to act on her behalf. Nevertheless, come the beginning of April her pay had not yet been changed. She wailed: “*The Wages were wrong again*” (diary, 4 April 1914, NRS MSS).

Her anger abated when Spender finally presented her case successfully to the directors. From this point forward, he and Naomi shared tea at least once a week, she noting his moods in the same way as she recorded the vicissitudes of weather; for example: “*Beau [weather]. Bureau. J. A. S. very cross and unreasonable. Kind at tea and a dear on the whole*” (diary, 17 September 1914, NRS MSS).

After nearly a year abroad, Rupert Brooke returned to London in June 1914. Rose Macaulay welcomed him with a small party, including Naomi and Walter de la Mare with his wife: “E. R. M.’s party: Mr. & Mrs. Binns & Rupert Brooke & Iolo Aneurin Williams [poet]” (diary, 30 June 1914, NRS MSS). Brooke had introduced Rose to Naomi; now it was Rose’s turn to bring Naomi’s special friend de la Mare to Brooke’s attention, with unforeseen financial good fortune for de la Mare.

Rose’s gathering was the first of three or perhaps four encounters that historians have discovered ever occurred between Rupert Brooke and de la Mare; a second occurred a few weeks later when Brooke and Eddie Marsh shared lunch with de la Mare at the Moulin d’Or, and at a third meeting de la Mare reciprocated with an invitation to his home.

Then in October, at the beginning of the First World War, Brooke deployed with the British navy to Antwerp, where the navy was routed by the Germans, and he experienced a marching retreat through lands devastated by war. From Bruges, he returned to Britain to prepare for deployment to the Dardanelles, accounting for his vivid presence in November with Rose Macaulay at one of Naomi’s Thursdays, he “in khaki with French mud on his boots” and “the sound of guns in his speech,” predicting from his recent experience “more German success” and verifying that “atrocities were true of the Saxons” (diary, 12 November 1914, NRS MSS). Brooke was mesmerizing, and the gathering did not disband until midnight, an unusually late hour for Naomi.

Rupert Brooke, age twenty-eight, died in the Aegean on April 23, 1915, of sepsis from an infected mosquito bite. A month before his death, he alerted Eddie Marsh to his intended legacy: “I’ve tried to

arrange that some money should go to Wilfred & Lascelles & de la Mare to help them write good stuff, instead of me.”<sup>17</sup> Brooke’s volume of poetry, *1914 & Other Poems*, first published in May after his death, ran through eleven impressions by year’s end, and by 1918 had reached its twenty-fourth. Revenues from Brooke’s royalties helped to support Walter de la Mare and his family for the rest of their lives.

The war brought another expansion in Naomi’s job responsibilities. Spender put her in charge of the Westminster’s Literary Emergency Fund. Her role was to ask for donations from the wealthier members of her social world. She kept records, perhaps partial, in memos in her diary: Agnes [Conway] £1, Elizabeth S[chwann] £1, Mrs. Joseph £3, Hugh Rawlinson £5, Kathleen H. D[outy] £100, NGRS [herself] £10, Henry James £5, Vaughan Nash £5, Hugh Walpole £10, Miss Jane Harrison £1, and so on, including some of the single ladies who lived in Adair House and who frequented her Thursdays. This new task took an emotional toll. Asking for money did not come easily and refusal was not uncommon. We will never know if she received money from her wealthy relatives in Halifax, although they were asked, nor, for that matter, from Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes or Harold Munro: “Saw H. Munro about the Fund and also an awful scoundrel who said he came from Mr. Harding Fox. Saw CT Baritt. Got nothing” (diary, 11 September 1914, NRS MSS). For her time and trouble in this endeavor, she brought down on her head the wrath of J. A. Spender: “Had a scene with J. A. S. who scolded me because my list of people wasn’t suitable for his Fund & was altogether silly & disingenuous & overstrained” (diary, 22 September 1914, NRS MSS). She plugged on, asking money from Arthur Balfour, among others, and receiving £10 from Frank Sidgwick, her once stand-in on the Problems page.

Throughout the war, Naomi stayed loyal to her reviewers, whose other venues for earning income were shrinking. Writers such as Walter de la Mare, John Middleton Murry, J. D. Beresford, and Helen de Gaudrion Verrall depended on her more than ever. They continued to convene for lunch, now on Fridays rather than Mondays and Thursdays, and at The Wellington rather than at The Wayside.

On April 25, Naomi heard of Rupert Brooke’s unexpected death. She was uniquely positioned to commission a thoughtful, appreciative article about Brooke’s poetry from Walter de la Mare for publication on May 8. From numerous discussions with de la Mare over the years,

she was thoroughly conversant with his opinions about Brooke's poetry; she also had private reason to believe he was protective of the man himself. A month before, after Naomi had fallen to a week of high fevers, de la Mare told Naomi of having dreamt about her and Brooke, among others, mixing his anxieties: "And last night I had an odd long wearisome dream. Rupert Brooke was in it & Eddie Marsh & H. V. [Helen de Gaudrion Verrall] & you & though I remember no unhappy or sinister detail, I woke up in a foreboding unease & hoped you were still better & wished I could find out & make sure" (24 March 1915, Mare MSS). He agreed to do his best on an article: "There's a wretched feeling that it will be a kind of sexton's work but I think he would understand in that it's the little one can do [. . .]" (28 April 1915, Mare MSS). The resulting essay, written in haste, became de la Mare's touchstone proclamation of his theory of the imagination, the poet as child or boy. He reworked it into a lecture delivered to students at Rugby in 1919, subsequently published as *Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination* (1920). Naomi found solace in de la Mare's *Westminster* essay: "I've read & re-read your Rupert Brooke article—and I like it better each time—and just now—*tremendously!* It's quite all right" (9 May 1915, Mare MSS).

The war gnawed through 1915 and 1916. London suffered Zeppelin attacks, making it seem unsafe, and for some it was. Naomi's regular lunches dwindled away. De la Mare took months to recover from acute appendicitis, lethargic and depressed by feelings of inutility during wartime. Beresford preferred to keep his family in Cornwall and thought he could now survive without revenues from the *Westminster* owing to successful book deals. The upshot: Naomi increased her own anonymous reviewing contributions to fill the *Westminster*, sometimes reading eleven books at a sweep and writing two or three reviews at a sitting.

Through it all, she kept up her Thursday *les soirs*. Her friends, mainly remarkable women, remained staunch, including Dora Bosanquet, Clara Smith, Agnes Conway, Molly Hamilton, Winnie Austin, Rose Macaulay, Elizabeth Schwann, Kathleen Douty, and Helen de Gaudrion Verrall, who married William Salter, adding to a handful of couples occasionally loyal to the evening: the Josephs, the Rivières, the Crusoes, the Sidgwicks, the Gayleys. Her sisters Leslie and Erica were often guests; Erica lived with her for several months during 1915. Naomi moved from Adair House in Chelsea to Longridge Road near Earl's

Court, only to retreat to another location in Chelsea five months later, to 35 Rossetti Garden Mansions close to work in Westminster. Frank Newnes had married in late 1913 and virtually disappeared from her social circuit. Her brother Graham and Courtenay Wright, a childhood playmate who also had worked at the *Westminster*, enlisted, as did Edgar Frere, who was killed in action in May 1916.

By 1917 the Monday regular lunches were reconstituted, now on Wednesdays; however, their character was quite different from those of 1912 and 1913. Naomi surrounded herself with political writers active in the emerging Labour Party. They were civil servants, creative writers, and journalists, and they were not dependent upon her for work at the *Gazette*. Together with J. Reeve Brooke, she gathered a group that met during Wednesday lunch hours in Brooke's rooms off of Fleet Street in The Temple near her *Saturday Westminster Gazette* office. She and "J. R. B." or "J. R." (her diary designations) had been close friends since 1913; that year he travelled often to Holmbury for moonlit walks in the woods (diary, 3 to 15 July 1915, NRS MSS). He even holidayed with her in Wales when she visited her parents, and he was also the object of one of de la Mare's fits of jealousy (letter, 19 September 1913, Mare MSS). Reeve was a civil servant working on unemployment issues; he was a modest person with "a rare gift for drawing people together and getting them to talk interestingly, about interesting things," these the words of Mary Agnes (Molly) Hamilton. Molly was then a novelist earning her living as a journalist writing for *The Economist* about women's suffrage and about reform of the poor law. She was a member of the Independent Labor Party, a pacifist, a powerful public speaker, and one of Naomi's constant companions throughout these years. Other members of the Lunch Club, as it was called, included Ronald C. Davison, another economist specializing in unemployment issues and a member of the Labor Party; and J. C. Squire, who at that time was a "Fabian Liberal" (on his way to more conservative politics) and the acting editor of the *New Statesman*. After the war, he would become the editor of the *London Mercury*, associated with promoting the Georgian poets, who were soon out of fashion. Later in 1917, Desmond McCarthy, the drama critic for the *New Statesman*, became a regular in the group, as did Rose Macaulay, who was at that time an author working as a secretary in the wartime Ministry of Information; Rose, according to Molly Hamilton, brought along her boss, Gerald O'Donovan.

Avoidance of politics must have been self-consciously constructed by those who came to Naomi's Thursdays, for as the war wore on many of the same people, Independent Labor Party cognoscenti who participated in the Lunch Club, also made their way to Naomi's small rooms in Chelsea and later in Westminster.

Inexplicably, Naomi moved her lodging to 13 Stafford Mansions in Battersea (October 1918), then more understandably to Prince's Gardens in Knightsbridge (March 1919). The changing sites of which, plus more to come, were the subject of her amusing nonfiction *Van Lords or the Sport of Removing* (1934) in which she claimed that her restlessness was caused by the war (28).

Perhaps it was the war that caused her "restlessness," or perhaps at this time in her life it was caused by increasing physical discomfort. More and more, she was suffering from debilitating menstrual pain, possibly endometriosis, which drove her to distraction, forcing her to huddle miserably "*au lit*" for days each month, culminating in a hysterectomy that totally put her out of commission from December 1917 until February 1918, weakening her for months thereafter.

Over the years, monthly diary entries sputtered, "*GR:*" and "*au lit,*" juxtaposed with frequent appointments with "Dr. Hebb." GR's disappear after an operation that left "21 stitches!" and laid her up in a hospital for three weeks under the care of Dr. Evans, a surgeon. It seems the word itself for her surgery was not in polite usage. Until slightly before the event, Walter de la Mare thought she was seeing physicians because of sore throats; Grimwood Mears wrote that he could never remember the name of her operation, just that it sounded like a flower's name. Spoken of or not, a hysterectomy was a dangerous event in those times. First there was the danger of going under chloroform, the same substance that would kill her dear friend Winnie a few months later. Second, there was danger of infection without recourse to penicillin or antibiotics, not yet discovered. Perhaps she had forewarning regarding the possible abrupt menopause that would come upon her at age thirty-eight. Naomi, as a single woman, had to plan carefully for postoperative care and colleagues to substitute for her at work.

Just as soon as she knew for certain that she was going to have a hysterectomy, she relocated away from the central district of Westminster to southwest London, best reached by bus rather than foot. Naomi asked her sister Erica to live with her once again. She made arrangements at



the *Westminster* and wound down her *les soirs* so that by the time of her hospitalization her Thursdays were attended, usually one person at a time, by Clara Smith, Agnes Conway, Mrs. Footner, and Helen de Gaudrion Verrall, now Salter, all in the know. When Naomi returned from her convalescence in February 1918 to take up her duties in London, her *les soirs* were vestigial. Given her subsequent exhaustion and frequent headaches, she may have been relieved to forego socializing for the timebeing.

Back at work, she arranged to publish more of de la Mare's poems, augmenting his income by running some under the pseudonym of Elmer Endsleigh. De la Mare solicited her judgment: "What to do about these three poems I don't know and can't decide. What do you think? The first might be Elmer's: it's little mine, isn't it? The other two are more mine than his, aren't they?" (21 January 1919, Mare MSS). Paying for his work caused accounting confusion reported by Naomi: "The cashier has had the enclosed cheque for Mr. Elmer Endsleigh waiting for an address to send it to. I must apologise for the confusion [. . .]" (21 March 1919, NRS MSS).

Some of the artists she helped were publicly grateful for her attention and tutelage as their professional muse. Edward ["Dick"] Shanks was. He had been her occasional companion at Holmbury, where they had hiked the wooded byways captured in his poem "On Holmbury Hill," and they read poetry aloud to one another into the small hours of the morning. Shanks dedicated *The Queen of China and other poems* to her: "to Naomi Royde-Smith this book is affectionately and gratefully dedicated." It won the Hawthornden Prize in 1919. Naomi received congratulations from Eddie Marsh for Shanks's dedication. She then drolly responded to him with allusions to the de la Mare "Elmer Endsleigh" caper: "I accepted his congratulations with an epistolary equivalent of a wave of the hand & drew his attention to another new poet. As you'll see. He'll have to look like Sister Ann again & again before he sees any more of Elmer" ("May Day" 1919, Mare MSS). She was passing off de la Mare as new talent, her joke.

Naomi considered herself responsible for the first sustained presentation to the larger public of the Sitwells' achievement. Edith Sitwell, with seeming gratitude, wrote a poem dedicated "to Naomi Royde-Smith" titled "Queen Venus and the Choir-Boy." It was self-published in *Wheels 1919, fourth cycle*, an annual poetic anthology

compiled together with her brothers Osbert and Sacheverell. The poem depicted Venus-cum-Naomi whose “voice was like a blue or pink/Glass window full of lollipops” promising reward of a kiss “like a golden wind,” culminating with “now she haunts my singing mind—.” All the Sitwell siblings contributed their fair share of haunting to Naomi’s Thursday *les soirs* until they disappeared from her life when she was no longer handing out favors as literary editor of the *Westminster*.

In years to come, Naomi, feelings hurt, endured the ingratitude of ambitious writers who she felt had once accepted her proffered friendship but were merely using her as a stepping stone to fame and fortune. In “Heigho, the Holly,” an article in *Time and Tide* (4 June 1949), she skewered the Sitwells, portraying them as fashion mongers, vapid users of people and religious relics, artists who would never have achieved commercial success if left to the “the ephemeral periodicals which bloomed and faded in the eclectically saturated air of Bloomsbury and the Café Royal.” Naomi took direct aim at highbrow culture, especially “ephemeral periodicals,” without mentioning by name Edith Sitwell’s *Wheels*.

Graham Greene, for one, never forgot Naomi’s early encouragement and adoption of his writings. He credited her as the first to recognize his nascent talent. They became acquainted when he was a sixteen-year-old living with Kenneth and Zoë Richmond in London, where he had been sent for care by his parents after several attempts to kill himself. Although lacking psychoanalytic credentials, Kenneth Richmond practiced dream analysis on the boy. Richmond and his wife were also close friends of Naomi’s and after the war she frequented their at-homes, which were shared with the J. D. Beresfords. Late in life Graham Greene recalled Naomi: “She was too kind to me, so that a year later I began to bombard her with sentimental fantasies in poetic prose (she even published some of them).”<sup>18</sup> At Oxford as an undergraduate, Greene made his way as the successful editor of the magazine *Oxford Outlook*, set apart by his friendship with the literary editor of the now renamed *Weekly Westminster Gazette* (West, 20). In 1923, Naomi agreed to fund his holiday in Ireland on the condition he produce something for her paper. “Greene’s report, ‘Impressions of Dublin,’ published as agreed in the *Weekly Westminster [Gazette]*, [was] already recognizably his, with its mixture of realistic description and acute description of character” (West, 22). In 1925, when Greene thought he would pursue a career

in journalism, Naomi arranged for him to meet Sir Charles Starmer, director of the entire Westminster Press group, which included many other national publications, including both the *Westminster Gazette* and the *Weekly Westminster* (West, 40–1). Greene’s biographer correctly noted that the *Weekly Westminster* was about to fold and therefore there was no job for Greene, but he wrongly asserted that this publication’s demise would cost Naomi her job. Not so: she had already separated from the *Westminster* the year before.<sup>19</sup>

## Princes-s

Naomi was at the height of her cultural influence in March 1919 when she moved into a new home for herself and her *les soirs*—an opulent Victorian townhouse located a couple of blocks south of Hyde Park just off of Exhibition Road at 44 Prince’s Gardens, the south side. In the late nineteenth century, these dwellings had been constructed to provide the necessary conveniences for a town residence required by a nobleman or gentleman, and by the turn of the century were generally inhabited by members of Parliament, wealthy entrepreneurs, and a few with titles. Even then, the mansions were coming to be viewed as too much trouble—too big, too difficult to maintain, and requiring too many servants, sometimes as many as thirty. Naomi’s flat at 44, or a portion of 44, was among the first of what would become a wave of conversions: “Increasingly unsuited to the needs of postwar society, several of the houses on the Freake estate were converted to high-class apartments or taken over by foreign legations.”<sup>20</sup> As Walter de la Mare chided: “Hand-painted walls & boots of royalty—we are not amused. And who’s the ‘we’—I thought you were very mysterious regarding your movements” (11 June 1919, Mare MSS).

A few years later, Royde-Smith used her drawing room at 44 Prince’s Gardens as fodder for description of a spacious setting for her protagonist’s Friday at-homes in a novel entitled *The Housemaid* (1926): “The three tall windows that looked out on the square gardens stood open and green streams of light fell on the parquet floor reflecting the colour of the trees that rose above the window frames and hid the sky with their branches from anyone at the further end of the long white-walled room” (188). Like her fictional protagonist Dorothea, Royde-Smith “continued to receive her friends in the vast drawing-room that covered the whole first

floor, sleeping austerely in a small dressing-room which opened off a bathroom on the half-landing above and using a little boudoir at the head of the stair as a dining-room [...]” (187). Unlike Dorothea, however, she did not live alone; Naomi filled some of the rooms above and below in her vast abode with friends and work associates.

The circumstances were grand. All the Prince’s Gate and Prince’s Gardens mansions were constructed three windows wide, fully stuccoed, with columned porticoes, reflecting the conservative taste of the mid-nineteenth century. They rose five stories over a basement. Most had similar floorplans: on the ground floor there was a dining room located at the front and facing, in the case of 44, the communal garden square, and another room that might be a morning or billiard room and a small third room under the main stone staircase (with back stone stairs for servants to use); on the first floor, there was a long double drawing room with a boudoir in the rear, “decorated ‘in a most elaborate style,’ and had ceiling ‘centre-flowers’ and covered cornices, gilded and coloured in ‘a good display of polychromatic art.’” “The floors of the drawing rooms and boudoirs had borders of inlaid parquetry made up of mahogany, walnut, sycamore and oak” (“Freak Estate,” 191–210). The upper stories were given over to bedrooms, and the basement was the downstairs for servants.

H. B. Usher, who wrote for the *Westminster*, lived at 44, as did Aldous Huxley, who worked as a second-string dramatic critic starting in 1920, morphing into concert critic with expenses paid to Salzburg by the paper. Of course he had other jobs while writing *Chrome Yellow*. He and his wife, Maria, moved into their good friend Naomi’s 44 at the beginning of 1923. They resided for a couple of months, according to Huxley’s biographer, who recounted a story told her by Maria about the turmoil of Huxley’s love affair with Nancy Cunard. He had come home late to Prince’s Gardens, ill and miserable. Maria concluded that they had to leave England by morning: “They packed all night. That is Maria packed; Aldous hovered, sat on the lids of trunks, tried to read, scribbled in a little book; when allowed gave a hand.” Exhausted, Maria ceased packing at daybreak, “opened a window and threw out every article that was still about.” That morning they went straight to Italy.<sup>21</sup> Naomi received a postcard from Maria and Aldous dated 4 March 1923 from Urbino: “I hope all our part of your house gives you no trouble & back some pleasure. Love, Maria” and “I hope your news has been good.

Love ALD” (NRS MSS). Aldous was worried about Naomi’s position at the ill-fated *Westminster*. Given the vagaries of her tenants, some leaving trunks and furniture hither and thither, it was easy to understand why early in her tenure at 44, Naomi confided in her diary that she was not enjoying her role as landlady. She wanted to give up being what she called “an amateur house agent.”

She might have been better at matchmaking. Her colleague at the *Westminster Gazette*, H. B. Usher, inhabited an upstairs room, and a friend, Grace Barker, a civil servant working on unemployment issues, abided below, all sharing enough of the general townhouse space so that, unfortunately, guests of one arriving late might awaken the others. In her 1921 diary endnotes, Naomi bantered:

Grace and Usher left alone  
Are without a chaperone  
Till they get one we must stay  
Not ceremonious but away.

Indeed, by September 1922, H. B. had proposed most successfully to Grace. Married, they continued to attend Naomi’s Thursdays.

H. B. Usher was present at a Thursday on July 14 described by Rose Macaulay in 1920. She wrote as if she and Naomi were both promoting group discussion, her “we” implying that they were in cahoots as hostesses. It was clear that the discussion was nuanced, extensive, and inclusive:

We had a rather nice and funny evening at 44 the last Thursday we were there. We had G. K. Chesterton and J. C. Squire and a young rationalist off *The Westminster* and other rationalists (e.g. the J. R. Brookes) and 2 parsons (one of whom was Arthur Duncan-Jones) and got them all discussing whether social progress and humanity were derived from Xianity or not. G. K. C. talked and talked—you may imagine on which side—and was backed by charmingly Xian utterances from J. C. Squire—but Mr. Usher, the young rationalist, pluckily held his end up, and Naomi sat on the floor and smoothed everyone down and drew them on and said ‘Of course he is’ when G. K. C. said

that man was the image of God and everyone else looked bewildered and as if they hoped not. It sounds an awful idea, certainly! G. K. enjoyed himself hugely, and broke the springs of the settee on which we had arranged he was not to sit; we kept him on a big arm-chair all the time except for 5 minutes, but in that 5 minutes the damage was done.<sup>22</sup>

At this time in their relationship, Rose admired Naomi's finesse and skill facilitating enjoyable social and intellectually animated gatherings.

Rose Macaulay and Naomi were cosponsors of the Thursdays as well as roommates at 44 Princes Gardens.<sup>23</sup> Rose, indeed, was one of many who shared the lodging, and all might be considered "roommates." As of September 1920, Rose was, at least, a loyal weekly Thursday presence and also an occasional roomer. In her diary, Naomi noted when Rose stayed to sleep, as if it were out of the ordinary (5 November 1920, NRS MSS). When Rose did begin to speak as if the Thursdays were a shared endeavor, she was probably referring to her moral support. Once (and only once) on November 26, 1921, Naomi, in capital letters, noted: "ROSE PAID ME HALF OUR PARTY 25/—." This transaction was unusual enough for Naomi to record it.

The Thursdays drew an increasing number of guests during Naomi's Prince's Gardens period between March 1919 and summer 1923. In the beginning, the evenings resembled the at-homes she had been promoting for more than a decade, where single people and a few couples had gathered around nine o'clock for colloquy—talk, games, and storytelling shared in something like a comfortable clutch. Now her Thursdays attracted more people, sometimes as many as sixty, the drawing room at 44 commodious; the crowds signaled that the evenings were considered fashionable. They were also less intimate. Dorothy Brooke, née Lamb, painted the scene in a positive light:

It is enchanting to see you in that spacious elegant room, adequately & decently (in the 18<sup>th</sup> century sense of the word) housed at last with a proper field for your social gifts to spread themselves. And the party went so well & there was room to maneuver & distances to put behind one when escaping! It was like the Buckingham Palace Garden party, as against a small garden tea fight! And you looked so lovely & so radiant & so delicious. Never have I seen more glamorous youth

& life. I'm not sure about the fur around your shoulder as a dead animal's fur is never equal to a live lady's, and I couldn't see your neck which is one of the things for which I steadily and wondrously visit 44 Princes Gardens!<sup>24</sup>

Not all who came to imbibe the modest offerings of sherry and nibble the chocolate appreciated Naomi's salon. Storm Jameson, a new novelist out of Yorkshire, came to a Thursday in December 1920, a grateful acolyte in the beginning. She found Naomi "a little formidable with her air of a younger more affable Queen Victoria." In her autobiography a half century later, she critiqued the event, which was "not a clique, not a restricted circle of close friends, but nevertheless caught between two waves," and according to Jameson, this trough between would not "leave even a ripple in literary history." She wrote: "The great figures who sometimes glided through were none of them rebels—Arnold Bennett but not D. H. Lawrence, Eddie Marsh, not T. S. Eliot, not even a young Raymond Mortimer."<sup>25</sup> Jameson spoke in hindsight, dismissing Naomi's generation of Edwardian and Georgian writers. At the time, some of the figures she encountered were formidable cultural figures and some became her treasured friends forever. Indeed, Jameson felt sufficiently comfortable on one occasion to introduce her hitherto secreted husband. The salon was middlebrow territory; she, herself, was a middlebrow author aiming to appeal to a wide audience rather than to an intimate "clique" of "rebels."

Jameson unwittingly trampled on personal terrain between Naomi and de la Mare. De la Mare's book *Memoirs of a Midget* (1921) had just come out, and everyone connected with the *Westminster Gazette* knew that Naomi had reviewed it, and most knew the two were also inseparable and loyal to one another. Naomi was pricked by what Jameson had said about de la Mare's disregard for most reviews of his book. She quoted Jameson back to him: "There is only one review which has really pleased him—by a Mary Agnes Hamilton in *Time & Tide*. He says none of the others have understood the book." Naomi did not welcome Jameson's exposure of de la Mare's opinion in front of Westminster cohorts: "Usher standingly [Naomi's punning phrase] did not miss & with silence & smile" (ca. July, 1919, Mare MSS). Naomi's note rubbed it in a bit. De la Mare, dancing a jig around Jameson's indiscretion, claimed she had misunderstood him.

In yet another instance, Naomi triggered Jameson's diffidence, crystallizing as resentment: at a Thursday Naomi had asked her to sit for conversation with a well-known critic and patron of young writers. Jameson, experiencing the exchange as unsuccessful, declared to Naomi that the critic "E." [probably Eddie Marsh who was attending that evening according to diary records] was "not interested in young women," prompting Naomi to scold, "Don't repeat foolish lying gossip." Her rebuke caused the young writer to suffer paroxysms of shy humiliation and to stay away from Naomi's Thursdays for several weeks, as Jameson recollected in her autobiography (161–2). Still, compared to Virginia Woolf, Jameson was mild in her criticism of Naomi.

Already at the apex of London's literary and cultural elites, Virginia Woolf seemed to imagine she and Naomi were engaged in some form of battle over literary souls. Woolf hinted as much, remarking in her private diary that she doubted Rose Macaulay—badly dressed, mystical, a "kind of faded moon of beauty"—would meet often with the Woolfs "for she lives with Royde Smith, & somehow won't come to grips with us."<sup>26</sup> She seemed to feel that Rose might be saved if only she could be persuaded to replace Naomi's South Kensington with Woolf's Bloomsbury.

Curiously, Woolf's diary recorded that she and Leonard did plan to visit Miss Royde-Smith's party later that month, on June 2, to discuss Irish-English hostilities. The Irish Question was coming to a head in 1921, the Irish Parliament having officially recognized in March that it was at war with England, as it actually had been for two years, and in time for a truce agreement in July. The subsequent treaty created the free Irish Republic and a road for Northern Ireland to demur from participation in secession. However, Ireland was not immediately on Naomi's agenda. Before this Thursday in June, Naomi had recently returned from two months in Switzerland where she had pondered theories of language and art, had written her review of *Memoirs of a Midget*, and had been concerned about her personal health, which was failing, and the shaky health of the *Westminster Gazette*. Her thoughts about the Irish Question were reserved until August after reading about Parnell's life written by his wife. Naomi concluded in a letter to de la Mare that the present state of things was hopeless; so much less had been wanted in 1882: "The story of Parnell is almost like the story of Christ in its presentment of the man who died to save a people who



would not be saved. And Mr. Gladstone! He comes out a miraculous devil, guile & charm, intellect & unscrupulousness, energy & hypocrisy all raised to the pitch of genius.” Virginia Woolf did not write what she discovered about Irish politics at Naomi’s party, nor did Naomi record who attended this *le soir* in her diary.

So Virginia confronted her “foe” in her Thursday den, where they locked gazes. Virginia, in the privacy of her journal, claimed victory in the stare-down, nevertheless admitting that Naomi “sat in complete command” of her room and world. In her ruminations, Woolf had the last word: “Never did I see a less attractive woman than Naomi. Her face might have been cut out of cardboard by blunt scissors.” She disparaged Naomi’s rooms: “Yes, I disliked it all a good deal—& the furniture & the pictures—the marriage of conventionality & the Saturday Westminster.” She disparaged Naomi’s fashion—slightly furred, á la 1860, swinging ear rings, skirt in balloons—“& a body that billows out but perfectly hard,” presumably a reference to Naomi’s breasts. She disparaged other guests—Lady Rhondda (from 1926 onward the editor of *Time and Tide*), Rose Macaulay, Duncan Jones (a clergyman), Robert Lynd (a journalist), among others: “It was a queer mixture of the intelligent & the respectable. [. . .] There’s no bite about these people. I tried to be elderly & broad minded. I thought of Bloomsbury. But then in Bloomsbury you would come up against something hard—a Maynard, or a Lynton, or even a Clive” (122–3). What a remarkable statement describing clash of class and aesthetic values, of highbrow and middlebrow. Did Virginia Woolf vie for power with Naomi as she says? Was it power over social possession of Rose or over the artistic marketplace, the highbrow offerings of the elite Hogarth Press against the relative mass distribution of a weekly newspaper? Or was it something else?

Both she and her husband may have been fixated on Naomi’s bosom. At a party at Harold Munro’s poetry bookshop a few months later, Leonard Woolf—together with T. S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, Muk Ray Anand, and D. H. Lawrence—was heard deep in conversation about “big-breasted” women. According to Leonard Woolf’s biographer, Leonard was an “aficionado” of big breasts, accounting for Morgan Forster’s letter to him about a certain woman at that literary gathering: “As for Naomi Royde-Smith, even my eyes could not leave her breasts, so I had no doubt as to the destination of yours.”<sup>27</sup>

Whatever the origin of Virginia Woolf's animus toward Naomi, it had marketplace consequences. During 1923, Naomi was very seriously and anxiously looking for work as an alternative to the faltering *Weekly Westminster Gazette*. Woolf gloated over "pulling wires" in order "to seat Tom [T. S. Eliot] at the Nation, & unseat my foe Miss Royde Smith. Had I time I could detail my activities, & glory in my own importance" (236). She was successful with both her overt and covert aims. T. S. Eliot was offered the position as she wished, although he declined the job when he could not exact a two-year guarantee. Subsequently, the literary editorship of the *Nation & Athenaeum* was offered to Leonard Woolf, who accepted it. According to Virginia, the Woolfs were in desperate need of income. Speaking of her domestic financial difficulties, she bemoaned: "poverty & the shifts it puts one to is unbecoming" (239). She certainly found poverty unbecoming in Eliot, giving as an example his willingness to consider sharing the *Nation's* editorship with Naomi—before he turned down the position altogether. Wrote Woolf: "He nibbles at cherries. True, the offer, to cooperate with Royde Smith is a wizened cherry" (238). Once again, Woolf was alluding to Naomi's physical appearance, "wizened," shriveled or wrinkled with age.

## Queen

The failure of the *Westminster Gazette* was not surprising given that its financial fortunes, never robust, were pinned to the rise and ultimate fall of the Liberal Party. The cohesion of the Liberal Party did not survive the pressures of war. The *Westminster Gazette* gave up its London-based political influence in late 1921 when it stopped evening publication to join the ranks of morning papers with national distribution, no longer an evening paper with political clout. Even this shift could not save the paper for long. It folded forever in 1928.

On summer holiday in 1921 as the paper was readied for national morning distribution, Naomi was on tenterhooks about the survival of her livelihood. J. A. Spender, the *Gazette's* revered political voice, resigned as editor at the end of the year, finalizing his exit in February 1922, essentially leaving Naomi to negotiate her own role as the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* changed its name to *The Weekly Westminster Gazette*. She began by asking for clarification of an agreement she had made with Spender before he left:

It therefore writes to say that I am working for the 'Westminster Press' on the same terms as I worked for the 'daily' and the 'weekly' Westminster Gazette. That is to say, I edit the 'Saturday Westminster', at the same salary as before, and have taken over Mr. Herbert's responsibility for the dramatic criticism of the daily 'Westminster' on the terms which he was working. Further, I understand that any contributions other than the articles or reviews directly concerned with dramatic criticism, which I may from time to time contribute to the daily 'Westminster', will be paid for at lineage rates.<sup>28</sup>

Although Watson, who replaced Spender, quibbled over these terms, Naomi retained her position as literary editor of the *Weekly Westminster Gazette* and in addition was now drama critic for the daily *Westminster* and given a coveted byline of attribution, "N. G. R. S.," which appeared for the first time February 18, 1922; her theater review was followed in the column by Katherine Masefield's "The Garden party." The physical size of the publication changed from broadsheet to tabloid.

Her job tenuous, Naomi was in the market for a new editorial position, not yet willing to hear Walter de la Mare's plea that she strike out on her own to fight free of the numbing journalistic humdrum that he considered deadly to creative efforts. She did compose a play, *David* (published as a novella in 1933), finishing it during a four-day holiday in Cornwall. Elated, she signed her missive to de la Mare, "Yours sincerely, The Author," an homage to Jane Austen (St. Marks Eve [15 April] 1922, Mare MSS). In the midst of her fret she had a provocatively optimistic dream that she shared with de la Mare. In it, she dreamt that J. A. Spender blessed her with spring flowers recalled in joyous images:

And before I get up I'll tell *you* about *my* dream. It wasn't about you, it was about J. A. S. who came to say 'goodbye's to me before going on a long journey. To Asia I think. He was very nice. And next morning I was awakened by a maid who brought me flowers, blue violets, faint pink, yellow roses and the loveliest lemon coloured lilies—not tied up—bunches but all love and lovely. I've never been so happy as I was when I woke & for some minutes they were still there and I've got them in my mind's eye safe enough now. (23 August 1922, Mare MSS)

Her sense of expanding possibility and grace sustained Naomi through the travails of 1923 when Conservatives won the by-election and Liberals came in third behind Labor, tough times for what was left of the *Liberal Westminster Gazette*. By the end of 1923 Naomi deserted 44 Prince's Gardens; the termination of her crowded Thursdays at 44 was a turning point. It would be worse in 1924. Naomi again sought solace with Edmée and her family in the mountains of Switzerland, hiking arduously over glaciers, hugging narrow paths for ten hours at a stretch, her London fate in the hands of Ramsay Muir, newly appointed editor of what would now be called *The Weekly Westminster*, dropping "Gazette" from its interim title. Although asked to continue as before, Naomi abandoned the latest incarnation of the *Saturday Weekly Westminster* and accepted employment as editor of *The Queen*, a flourishing publication. She would not last out the year.

Ideologically and perhaps temperamentally, Naomi was going to have trouble thriving in her new position as editor-in-chief of *The Queen, the Lady's Newspaper and Court Chronicle*.<sup>29</sup> In Naomi's day, *The Queen* focused on society news about aristocratic women, its columns devoted to fashion, the nursery, cooking, and other subjects aimed at middleclass women who might wish to emulate upper-class rituals, aided in their daydreams by graceful pages of advertising. Naomi was an odd fit for *The Queen*. She had consistently over the years disparaged the rich and idle, her last documented rant having occurred the year before in the Swiss mountains after trekking with Edmée for thirteen hours: "We came down into a valley thick with pine-woods & ended up in a hell of huge hotels and millionaires" (to de la Mare, 29 July 1923, Mare MSS). In her novel, *Skin-Deep* (1927), Royde-Smith satirized the values, activities, and paraphernalia of wealthy, foolish ladies and their followers, the types elevated in articles in *The Queen* and the readers who aspired to emulate them. Despite her sensibilities, Naomi struggled earnestly to square what was best for *The Queen* with her own integrity. Her editorship was announced in early January 1924; she began to produce articles in February.

Hoping to strike a precarious balance, Naomi contracted for specific modifications when she took over, while reassuring readers that she would not change the coverage they had come to expect: "This does not mean in the least that all the sections devoted to the house, furniture, decoration, the garden, sport, dogs, travel and so on, will lose any of

their prominence.”<sup>30</sup> Along with attention to “all things dear to women,” she would expand *The Queen*’s literary and artistic offerings, devoting more space to original poetry and prose, as well as art, music, drama, and a weekly guide to current literature, the latter a continuation of a column by her dear friend, Edward [Dick] Shanks. As “N. G. Royde-Smith,” she became the chief drama critic. She hired A. P. Herbert, who also wrote for *Punch*, to contribute a weekly column entitled “A Man’s Diary,” and she inaugurated a regular feature of “conversations between well-known men and women.” The latter was, in part, a forum for her coterie—“Mary Borden” and A. P. Herbert, Sylvia Lynd and Arnold Bennett, Binnie Hale (actress) and W. J. Turner, E. V. Knox (eventual editor of *Punch*) and Rose Macaulay, Humbert Wolfe, Marie Belloc Lowndes, and others. Aldous Huxley wrote for her, as did other friends—Frank Sidgwick, W. J. Turner, Dorothy Brooke, Evelyn Underhill, Theodora Bosanquet, Viola Garvin, and more. She pumped up several of her friends by showcasing them in featured articles. There were features about the Sitwells, about Walter de la Mare, about Ernest Milton, about Naomi Mitchison—all beautifully illustrated with affective photographic portraits.

Most intriguing of all was a weekly editorial, “The Editor’s Notes,” in which Royde-Smith, without byline attribution, commented on current issues, perhaps the only record, public or private, of her political opinions. Ironically, week after week her column was followed by aristocratic social news, “The Court and Society.” Her editorial was a totally new feature in *The Queen*; it terminated when she left, as did many of her innovations. Gone: the man’s diary, the conversations between illustrious men and women, and the extensive book reviews. Dramatic criticism shriveled. The magazine became what it had once been, albeit retaining the attractive and spacious layout that had accompanied her inauguration as editor.

In “The Editor’s Notes,” Royde-Smith, provocateur, teased her conservative readership. She wrote of the economic inequities that plagued working people after the war, noting, for instance, that if people were employed, there might not be need for capital punishment, citing its abolishment in the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and Switzerland, “but these countries have practically no unemployment.”<sup>31</sup> In the next issue, she flew in the face of conventional disdain by admiring workers who live in caravans because they avoided dwelling in unchanging, squalid

conditions and “so long as there are fairs in the land the caravans will never go on strike.” A couple of weeks later, in the vein of a Swiftian modest proposal, she reasoned that instead of sending unemployed industrial workers to the colonies where they would find no suitable work, that a small English township might better be transported, sending out

. . . not a ship-load of the same kind of emigrant, but a nice assorted Noah’s Ark with a whole community on board. Such a scheme would cover many fields and would afford relief to the oppressed middle classes with their hard-driven professional men and women. [. . .] I myself would add to the butcher, the baker and the candle-stick maker, who would clearly be essential to the expedition, a poet, a painter and a man with a fiddle. Any community may be trusted to provide its own theatre as soon as it settles down, once it has the other three arts represented in its midst. (“Notes,” 26 March 1924, 2)

With a light twist of her wrist, she opened doors to spaces beyond her readers’ narrow class vantage. She favored taxation “more steeply graded for high incomes.”

In her anonymous editorial writing for *The Queen*, she found and expressed humor in juxtapositions. For instance, she asserted that “Japan has always been more feminist than China,” citing as evidence the Japanese woman’s personal right to encourage a suitor by blackening her teeth, or of not doing so if she thought the young man unworthy of the sacrifice. Naomi was not audaciously expounding on Asian cultures; rather, her gentle satire was pointed at European women who had adopted “excessive depilatory operations on the eyebrow.” Whether blackening teeth or plucking brows, these activities are a means of “displaying the beauties in dress and motion” (“Notes,” 5 March 1924, 2). *The Queen*’s pages were replete with illustrations of the latest fashion in hats, dresses, shoes, all the accoutrements of fashion, the beauties of dress and motion. Naomi’s attitudes regarding feminine consumption were ironically at a slant from *The Queen*’s.

Her unclaimed feminism found voice, non-didactic and playful. On the one hand, she opined “that there is no logical reason why if women have the vote at all they should have it on different terms as men,” while

drolly suggesting that both men and women might have more amusing things to think about than politics when they are but one-and-twenty. She provoked the kind of response she wanted, voices of opposition, time-honored frisson for increasing circulation. One reader who had fought in the suffrage campaign wrote against her editorial in a letter to the editor: “And why this suggestion that Youth should have nothing to do with politics? One had thought that the war had taught the world one thing, if no more—that more youth, not less, was needed in the conduct of this musty world’s affairs.”<sup>32</sup> Another reader countered by advocating for both men and women an intelligence test before being allowed to vote, or, alternatively, an inquisition on the planks of the major political parties.

In the beginning, she exercised her considerable acumen and aesthetic sensibilities as a cultural critic. For instance, under the guise of “a letter from Rome,” she introduced her readers to Benito Mussolini’s popular rise to power despite the relative unpopularity in Italy of the Fascist Party and despite his benighted views about women: “He thinks they should be locked in their rooms and take no part in public affairs” (“Notes,” 2 March 1924, 2).

In the next issue, after detailing the slippage of the word “pictures” from denoting paintings to denoting film, she came to her point about Mussolini. She noted that “the ‘picture’ is now formally ranked as an instrument of history.” She continued:

When Signor Benito Mussolini (who I observe with awe now takes precedence of King Victor Emmanuel in the announcements of ‘The Eternal City,’ a new film of Sir Hall Caine’s rather aged novel). When Mussolini the stern (I again quote the same authority) heard about this film which was being staged in Rome ‘he ordered the entire army to place itself at the command of the producer.’ And the picture around which these awe-stricken remarks of mine are printed shows real Fascisti really illustrating fiction for the screen. (“Notes,” 26 March 1924, 2)

Her printed remarks about fictional film-as-history were arranged around a photograph, a movie frame capturing soldiers swarming into the Coliseum for filming of *The Eternal City*, a 1923 silent remake, now lost, of an earlier movie. In it Mussolini and King Victor Emmanuel

reviewed troops. In her analysis, Naomi implied that Mussolini's "popularity," noted in her previous editorial, was self-manufactured. The actuality he invented became fiction in film, blurring distinctions between real and unreal, and redounding to his actual, historical prestige. Her cultural criticism was clever and subtle—traits hardly fit for *The Queen*.

Naomi was also working like a demon, writing the weekly editorial, attending several theatrical events each week that she reviewed for multi-page articles, plus securing manuscripts and editing. Alone on a rare weekend at her beloved retreat at Holmbury, she slept round the clock. By the end of March she gave up Holmbury.

In *The Queen*, Naomi championed women. Many of her editorials were descriptions of the first women elected to parliament or paeans to the work of the hat clerk at the British Museum. Women athletes were lauded, often photographed in golfing and tennis motion. A weekly feature about automobiles was tweaked to focus on the freedom of women, freshly titled "A Woman and her Car." It illustrated proud women behind their wheels, including one article featuring Enid, Margie Hamilton Fellows's daughter. Another feature, "Conversations between Men and Women," demonstrated by its very existence intellectual equality between the sexes. During the railway strike of 1924, she wrote:

It might not be a bad thing to have our public service run for a season by a group of really practical women whose business it was to use their natural gifts to straighten the muddle and make things generally comfortable. [...] There should be an organization for educating them in the necessary knowledge of the machinery of government, and they might then be let loose to give it a thorough house-cleaning, with a mandate to scrape the patently outworn and wasteful parts. ("Notes," 18 June 1924, 1)

After chronicling the successful appearance of women "side by side with men in every department of our daily commercial life," she called for women to do the "planning and erection of new houses more suited to the needs of a servant-less world and still more to the decent housing of a modern healthy working population" ("Notes," 18 June 1924, 1).

As the months wore on, Naomi's editorial contributions thinned. During the last weeks of "The Editors Notes," she sometimes managed to shine light on women who were elected as members of Parliament.



More often, the columns were merely devoted to summarizing the contents of the week's articles. She abandoned her cultural criticism altogether. It is doubtful that she actually wrote these later columns herself.

By the end of September, nine months into her tenure, she was terminated by the board of directors. In her diary she expressed relief: "Good-bye to the Queen for good" (29 September 1924).

On *The Queen's* staff, she had participated firsthand in the money-making aspects of the industry surrounding the production of femininity. She emerged judgmental. She had rubbed her nose in the mechanics of gender construction, where girls and grown women alike were conditioned to mime vapid models of femininity. Naomi apprehended the power of the illustrated press and its collaboration with advertising for products, spa treatments, fashions, and so on—all decadent in her estimation, and, moreover, useful to men who made money off women, their trophies.

Fiction became Naomi's *métier* once released from *The Queen*. In a courageous development for a woman about to turn fifty years of age, Royde-Smith began forging novels, a new literary career. In fiction, she was free to exercise nuanced, perspicuous, biting cultural criticism. In one of her first efforts, she satirized the beauty industry she had come to know so well. In *Skin-Deep, or Portrait of Lucinda* (1927) she presented two women, both spiritually dead, their heads full of advertising images. One was an American who had finally realized her lifelong ambition to worship at the shrine of proper behavior and fashion in London, lured by fashion magazine photographs; whereupon she was disillusioned, not by her now embodied idol's vapid narcissism, but by that idol's ugly, middle-aged striving for youth and visual presentation. The American accidentally discovered her British idol in a spa situation where she was wretchedly huffing and puffing on a bicycle enclosed in a steam box:

A cap of ribbon and embroidery had fallen from the hair, that lay, damp and coiled, dragged back from the forehead, falling in a heavy twist over the back of the cabinet. The eyes were closed; the pale mouth was open and restless tongue moved from side to side, projecting over the lower teeth. Sweat poured over the cheeks on their dry, flushed surface, and made glistening runnels. The skin was dry and lifeless

except where, just below the roots of the hair, a red scar ran up the side of the face and across the top of the forehead from ear to ear. The flesh at the edge of the scar was faintly puckered, and little grooves invaded the face here and there along its line, pushing their gradual way downward, heralds of the final ruin they and their invisible fellows would accomplish in due time. (279–280)

The character of Lucinda, the Duchess of Merioneth, had received a surgical facelift, good for one year, subject to one renewing surgery, good for six months, then irremediable disintegration, the procedure not yet perfected in 1925. The image of the duchess had enthralled the American lady by proxy in portraits published in the illustrated press, just as “every woman in England knew, or had had every chance of knowing, Lucinda’s face.” Lucinda’s image even eclipsed portraits of the monarchy. One of her illegitimate twin daughters exulted, using schoolgirl prose and spelling to describe a scene likening adoration of her mother to Catholic Mary worship: “It’s great fun being your daughters though far less beautiful. One of the girls here has a mad pash for you. [. . .] [S]he had your photograph from the front page of *The Queen* framed and it’s in her cubikel and she has a vase of flowers in front of it. I wonder she doesn’t have candles though perhaps that wouldn’t be allowed” (214–5). The duchess had nothing better to live for than her own image—unable to love her husband, unable to love her lover, immoral, careless of her babies, discarding some who were left to die. Royde-Smith’s critique was unrelenting, harsh, and lurid. Dorothy Sayers classified *Skin-Deep* as an old-fashioned tale of horror.

Royde-Smith did not value linguistic or narrative experimentation in her own work or in that of others. She poked fun at currently fashionable aesthetics in poetry as she solidified her own theoretical literary positions. In *The Queen* she had published a fictional conversation in the guise of a review of George Moore’s *Conversations in Ebury* (1924). In it, she imagined Moore inviting W. J. Turner, Osbert Sitwell, and Aldous Huxley to help select poems for an anthology using standards diametrically opposite to her own: “What we have to look for is pure objective poetry uncontaminated by any note of subjective passion, sentiment, or feeling” (27 August 1924, “Conversation,” 8-9). They rejected a number of modern poets, excepting Edward Shanks, who had written a poem about a tree and had not used the personal pronoun

“I.” Royde-Smith clearly thought silly this arbitrary measure. Her witty presentation was heightened by sophisticated caricatures drawn by Arthur Watts, the famous *Punch* illustrator. She was attacking a precept of what would come to be termed “modernism,” and as such, she attacked highbrow fashion. T.S. Eliot eschewed the use of “I” to denote the speaker in “The Waste Land” (1922), a clarion call to fledgling poets in the subsequent Auden generation.

About the time she wrote this spoof on Modernist sensibilities, Royde-Smith had just finished compiling *A Private Anthology* (1924) published by Constable in July. The poems she chose were mainly lyrics, depending, in her estimation, for their existence on constantly renewed reception: “the true poem is born again each time it recreates itself in each new lover’s mind, and each rebirth is as real an experience for the mind in which it takes place as was the actual conception and creation of the poem to its originator.”<sup>33</sup> Her first principle for selecting texts was that the poem, or some portion of it, must have transported her; it must have taken her by “surprise and storm” (“Apology,” xvi). She was fully aware, proudly so, that her anthology was an exposé of her private psychological self. As such, she refused to include poems by Christina Rossetti and Alfred Edward Housman, “for there are moments no one can be expected to share with other men” (“Apology,” xx). She did not claim that the poems she selected were very good, although most were. She dared to place an unpretentious poem by her brother Graham in the company of such as Shakespeare, Donne, Yeats, and, of course, Walter de la Mare. She also included a lyric by the daughter of her good friend Margie Hamilton Fellows. Enid’s poem, “At Dusk,” was discovered in Naomi’s anthology by Benjamin Burrows, who put it to music collected in *Melodies of a Midlander* (1928).

Royde-Smith had matured into a writer who could compose in a wide variety of voices and genres. Walter de la Mare spotted her versatility earlier when she was still editing the *Weekly Westminster Gazette*. In a letter to her he wrote: “An awful thought has occurred to me after reading the Problems page, the theatre critiques & your last letter. Are there—*might* there not be—more than one of you?” (16 June 1923, Mare MSS).

Her voice as drama critic sometimes struck a didactic tone, establishing general applications, suggesting that her childhood exposure to Johnson’s *Rasselas* had been formative. She honed this voice while on

the *Gazette* and wielded it weekly on *The Queen*, cutting a wide swath through English dramatic history, establishing genres, opining about performances and audiences and human nature. In the Enlightenment tradition she spoke as if her experience was representative of all, *census communis*: “Imitation is always sincere, but is not always flattering”; “second night performances are notoriously the worse of the whole run of even the most triumphant successes”; “we all know the euphemism, ‘The Eternal Triangle,’ is only a temporary metaphor”; “all great plays are about ‘Bad Women’”; and countless more examples abound. She relished establishing categories, flavoring her inventions with sly humor:

The French division of novels into two classes, *roman payan* and *roman parisien*, holds good for the stage. In England we can class our comedies into drawing room and farmhouse kitchen plays. The drawing room comedy may have interludes in the garden; the farmhouse one generally sticks to the kitchen, although the Celtic element will occasionally drag its victim out to the mountain or into the marsh, generally at night, which is easier to manage in the theatre when untamed nature is the scene required.<sup>34</sup>

Sometimes she was avuncular, sometimes pithy. She wrote in a variety of voices every week as chief drama critic for *The Outlook* from April 1925 to January 1927. One voice was mock heroic: “A great breeze, fanned by the commercial Press, ever noisy in upholding what it believes to be morality, has blown through and about London ever since the production at the Globe Theatre of Mr. Noel Coward’s three-act comedy ‘Fallen Angels’ last week.” *Fallen Angels* was a play in which two women slowly become intoxicated while waiting for their mutual lover.

Royde-Smith soon tried her hand as playwright. Her play *A Balcony* was produced at the Everyman Theatre in 1926 and published soon thereafter. A seemingly simple story of marital infidelity, the play tapped complicated regions in a husband’s double-mind until his wife, Fanny, shallow and duplicitous, became his victim, and he essentially killed her for choosing to follow her desires away from him. The play was a success: “[Miss Royde-Smith’s] uses of the stage, her manipulation of the intricacies of her tragedy, above all, the power she has of suggesting the lightest movements of thought are alike remarkable.”<sup>35</sup> Less successfully, *Mafro, Darling!* was produced at the Queen’s Theatre in 1929. *Mrs.*

*Siddons: a play in four acts* was produced and published in 1931 to faint response. Her play *Private Room*, performed in 1934, was more successful.

Once, as drama critic for *The Queen*, Royde-Smith had observed: “The theatre is a queerly self-sufficing world, and those people who enter it, either as artists or as confirmed spectators, soon find themselves moving in a circle which is as circumscribed as a fish bowl.”<sup>36</sup> She was uniquely situated to write a novel about this fish bowl, having been both reviewer and playwright. Her novel *All Star Cast* (1936) was universally recognized as a *tour de force*, structurally employing a framing narrative that enclosed a story of a play, a murder mystery, its dialogue recorded as fiction. The frame was interplay among professional reviewers, each giving voice to a differing mode of criticism, seemingly satirized, but all having been expressed by Royde-Smith herself in her reviewing capacity. Aldous Huxley, her good friend and reviewing companion in the past, and most of the novel’s reviewers considered it a “remarkable piece of abstract dramatic criticism.” Privately, Huxley wrote to her: “I rather regret that you didn’t make it longer and include the experiences of the people on the other side of the curtain—actors, author & producer. It wd [his shorthand] have been a quite different book—slower and more complicated and less intense.”<sup>37</sup>

## Author

Naomi left *The Queen* without regret, although she was anxious on behalf of members of her staff who also lost their positions. She expressed relief in her letter to Walter de la Mare two weeks after clearing out: “*The Queen* and all her anguish seem ages ago. [. . .] It is years since I’ve been so much at peace with myself” (9 October 1924, Mare MSS).

She sought solitude to write, at long last, a novel, and it came in a torrent. First, she hid herself away in Sussex at The Smuggler’s Inn, only to find it too noisy owing to the hoopla of the general election. She returned to London, thence to Margie Hamilton Fellows’s bungalow, The Old Guard House, on the cliffs above Dover, where she wrote to de la Mare:

I am well started on THE NOVEL and it can't get itself left alone here [London]. You know more than I do how absorbed one must get—and time presses for I've only got a few weeks leisure left. So down to the sea with sixteen large exercise books & two fountain pens go I on Monday. [. . .] I don't know how [the novel] is going to turn out. The whole thing is fuller, more amusing than I'd thought it would be but I fear a little thin. (ca. November, 1924, Mare MSS)

On December 8 she recorded that she “finished *The Cat* at 2 a.m.”<sup>38</sup> The editor of Constable, Michael Sadleir, snapped up *The Tortoiseshell Cat*, publishing it in 1925; it was reissued in New York by Boni and Liveright.

Naomi, although successfully launched as a novelist, was strapped for money. *The Tortoiseshell Cat* was not out until July, and her job as drama critic for *The Outlook* did not begin until April. She made ends meet by downsizing, moving from 2 Tedworth Square in Chelsea to small rooms at 2 Mitre Court in the Temple. During the interim, her friends handed her work; she reviewed for *Time and Tide*, the *Daily News*, the *New Statesman*, the *Guardian*. One of her friend's gave her money. Because *The Tortoiseshell Cat* sold well during the last week of July when it finally came out, Michael Sadleir took her next novel, *The Housemaid* (1926), sight unseen. Knopf published it in the United States.

Thus began a new creative chapter in Naomi's life. Constable would go on to publish eight more novels. She turned to Victor Gollancz between 1931 and 1933. Hamish Hamilton published her biography of Julie de Lespinasse in 1932. During this period, she was also published in the United States by Harper, Doubleday, and Viking. In 1935, Macmillan contracted her novels for distribution in both London and New York. This arrangement lasted until 1946. Thereafter, her books were put out first by Sampson Low, then by Robert Hale. Altogether, Naomi produced thirty-seven novels and novellas, six plays (two published), four cultural critiques posing as travelogues, three biographies, five anthologies, and two translations from the French: an opus of fifty-three published books. The main stream of this prolific outpouring commenced when she was fifty years of age and did not abate until she was eighty-five, nearly blind, four years before her death.

Royde-Smith became a brave writer depicting ordinary people confronted by unconventional sensibilities, frequently their own. She explored alternative sexualities: lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual. Always, her novels were peopled by working-class men and women. Later, she probed the occult and mysticism, culminating in a trilogy of novels she called Catholic.

# Chapter 4

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## With Women, 1900–1949

While Naomi was making her way as a working woman in journalism, she was also coming to terms with her complicated sexual sensibilities. Having abandoned full-time employment as a teacher at Clapham High School and before carving a niche at the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, Naomi partially supported herself as companion, not quite governess, to young women of means. In Geneva, she had been the companion of Edmée Roberts (née Sprecher); they remained devoted friends for life. In England Naomi was the companion of Kathleen Mary Christina Hamilton Wills, the youngest daughter of Sir Frederick Wills, Baron of Northmoor, who made his fortune in tobacco as director of the W. D. & H. O. Wills. He was a Liberal Unionist member of Parliament for Bristol North from 1900 until 1906, at which time his health failed. In 1901 Naomi was twenty-six and Kathleen was seventeen years old, living with her family in Dulverton, Somerset. Naomi's experience as Kathleen's companion permeated one of her novels, *Jane Fairfax* (1940); it was construed as amplification of a minor character adopted from Jane Austen's novel *Emma*. Naomi dedicated *Jane Fairfax* to "Kathleen Mary Christina, once again, 1940." Previously, she had dedicated *The Delicate Situation* (1931) to Kathleen, set as it was in a village reminiscent of Clifford Chambers where Kath settled in adulthood.

Naomi's engagement with the Wills family profoundly influenced her life. She would be intimately twined with both Kathleen and her older sister Margaret [Margie] Hamilton Fellows [née Wills] until each



died. Margie, a year older than Naomi, married Ernest Fellows in 1903. They resided at 44 Prince's Gardens in London, where she gave birth to her daughter Enid. After her divorce in 1910, she purchased Tangle Park—a Surrey manor house approached by a carriage drive, replete with five “handsome” reception rooms, seventeen bedrooms, and so on, and located near Guildford in Surrey.<sup>1</sup> Both sisters were heirs to their father's tobacco fortune.



Margaret[Margie](néeWills)HamiltonFellows(left) and Kathleen Wills, with their brother, Gilbert Wills holding Margie's daughter, Enid, 1906.

During 1902, Edmée penned letters to Naomi posted in care of Lady Wills and variously addressed to Dulverton and to the Clifton Down Hotel in Bristol. Naomi was writing to Henry Spiess from Northmoor, daydreaming in her French journal of married life sharing a small flat in Geneva. Edmée was a bit envious of Naomi's new charge, her “Kathleen,” “the girl who is lucky enough to enjoy your company for several hours every day!”<sup>2</sup> By the following year, Naomi had returned to her parents' home in London and to part-time teaching at Clapham High School. Thereafter, on occasion, as a guest of Sir George Newnes in Lynton, she and his son Frank would motor to Dulverton. In response to one such visit, Kathleen's mother, Anne Hamilton Wills, wrote a letter of regret to Naomi for some unspecified reason, the antecedent lost, apologizing “for having made one of (perhaps) the worst mistakes

and blunders ever in my life,” adding that she could only hope that years of happiness and brightness were in store for Naomi. Lady Wills offered their London garden for Naomi to use for writing in quiet retreat (A. H. Wills, 6 September 1903, NRS MSS). Meanwhile, her letter made clear that Kath was under parental protection in Northmoor where she was riding to hounds with her brother Gil. This letter was important enough for Naomi to underscore it as a “*depeche de Lady Wills*” in her diary. She ceased on the spot to record her activities, nor did she resume until February of the following year, perhaps upset by the blunder to which Lady Wills alluded.

Naomi’s social standing in these situations was ambiguous. She was not exactly a social equal, nor was she a servant, nor even a governess. She was well aware of her plight and was always fully cognizant of her status as “companion,” later creating many such middleclass women characters in her fiction. These creations tended to be beautiful, elegant, charming, intelligent, and well-educated—as was the child’s inventive companion and tutor in *For Us in the Dark* (1937), set in the twentieth century, who was so vulnerable that a jealous servant could influence against her. In two novels set in the nineteenth century, governesses were depicted as friends and companions of their mentees. The governess, Miss Mordaunt, in *Jane Fairfax* was prey to a licentious husband and expected to protect her honor by sacrificing her livelihood—embracing an accepted, close-lipped martyrdom. Another governess in *Jane Fairfax* remained socially marginal even after marriage into a higher class.

In 1904, Kathleen, age twenty, came to London to dwell with her sister Margie at 44 Prince’s Gardens. Naomi had already established residence with her own sister Daisy in a flat in Adair House in Chelsea where she began to offer Thursday at-homes, attended in the beginning mainly by family members as well as by “K. H. W.” By 1905, “KHW” [Kathleen Hamilton Wills] or sometimes “Kathleen” or sometimes “44 Princes Gardens” or “44 PG” or “44” were frequent notations in Naomi’s diary for social occasions—dropped, then picked up again in the following year now in association with Margie, Kathleen’s older sister. In November, dramatically, Naomi recorded: “*diner* 44 P.G. Margie ill. BLOW!” (16 November 1906, NRS MSS). In the immediate wake of this event, whatever it was, Naomi tried to attend church, noted in her diary as “*en vain*”—thereafter, essentially ceasing almost all forms of religious observance. In her diaries she took to expressing

emotions of shame, seeking language to express her feelings, discovering it in poetry of Alfred Edward Housman and Christina Rossetti. She found particular solace in *A Shropshire Lad*, Housman's lengthy poem describing his homosexual and unrequited yearning. She quoted his poetry in her diary: "Right you guessed the rising morrow/ And second to tread the mire you must!/ Dust's your wages, son of sorrow/ But men may come to worse! Than dust/ Souls undone, undoing others,—/ Long time since the tale began" (13 December 1906, NRS MSS). She also identified with the author known as Melisande, who wrote about longing for purity while yearning to cross the kirk's threshold into worship, unable to do so: "But oh, the Doom on me lies strange/ That bids me where I wouldna gang."<sup>3</sup> Naomi was in turmoil.



Margaret[Margie]HamiltonFellows(néeWills).

Margaret [Margie] Hamilton Fellows had fallen in love with Naomi, who, in turn, may have ultimately spurned her. Many years later, Margie nostalgically crooned about her continuing passion for Naomi, taking care to indicate that her adoration had not been reciprocated in kind. At this later moment in 1917, she was responding to Naomi's *Saturday Westminster Gazette* award to her, a guinea prize, for her hymn submitted for competition. It was titled "The Bonfire (To N.)." Margie's effusive gratitude for the prize was mixed with abiding sexual fervor for Naomi:

“I thank you for the thrill the sight of your writing still produces in the heat of yours ever, Margie” (11 September 1917, NRS MSS). Margie had once made overtures; Naomi had been reticent, accounting for Margie’s supplication, a gift of a piano: “I want to be the means of bringing music to your dwelling-place instead of the discordant vibrations which I unwittingly stirred in the past” (28 September 1917, NRS MSS). Moreover, Margie made it clear in her prize-winning poem, a hymn to a deity, that “N.” had rejected her ardor. The poem’s speaker gathered wood, lit a fire, and lured her goddess to no avail: “I yet may keep the fire aglow/ When all the wood lies black and dead/ Wet from my tears, chilled by your snow;/ I yet may keep the fire aglow/ My burning heart in I should throw/ With all its memories cherished . . . / I yet may keep the fire aglow/ When all the wood lies black and dead.”<sup>4</sup> Margie was still haunted by dreams of Naomi, in one of which she was talking to her on the phone, pleading, “Don’t go away. I want you more than any time on earth. I want to hear you. I love you, love you, love you” (4 February 1919, NRS MSS).

Margie had been on fire for several women. She wrote about them in letters to Naomi. By 1920, Naomi’s sister Dolly and Margie were intimately living together at Tangle.

In her first published novel *The Tortoiseshell Cat* (1925), Royde-Smith explored themes of confronted and rejected lesbian entanglement, themes of inversion that most reviewers preferred to chalk up to her desire to make a splash as a first-time novelist by being “daring” and “modern”; however, one reviewer suggested that it was “a private horror of Miss Royde-Smith’s that dictated her theme” exploring “the peculiarly nasty and indescribable things” that awakened her heroine to life.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, aspects of her first published novel were close to home. Its setting was derived from the boarding house in Chelsea where Royde-Smith had settled with her sister once they fled the family nest. In fact, Gillian, the novel’s protagonist, also shared a flat with a sister who then married, as had Naomi’s, and also shared with a cockatoo—both a fictional and real-life pet. In the novel, Gillian was almost seduced by a dragon lady, a neighbor in the lodging. Veronica, shortened to I. V., was an unabashed lover of women, including Gillian, to whom she boasted: “I told him I’d always gone with girls and that you were worth ten of any boy” (268). Royde-Smith fashioned V. V. as a banal creature—shallow, materialistic, narcissistic, cruel, and promiscuous.

Although a vamp, she nevertheless attracted Gillian, who “beheld in the flesh the very image of a perfection wrought by her own imaginings in the secret places of her dreaming mind” (139). Gillian permitted V. V. to kiss and stroke her:

Gillian had suffered V. V.’s exaggerated and frequent embraces with a docility which had surprised her in herself, and lately she had found herself returning them with a queer thrill of satisfaction. It was rather wonderful to hear the thump of V. V.’s heart through the thin silk of her blouse when she kissed you; to feel her cool, strong hands on your shoulders and to smell the mixed aromatic confusion of scents from her hair and her face powder; from the soap she washed with and the paste she used for her shining, greedy-looking teeth; from the creams and lotions with which she kept her hands in order. V. V. did not reek of these things. She was almost morbidly clean and dainty in her person, as she was in her surroundings. [. . . Her scent] must have been shared between all sorts of people, the Jackies and Dickies, the Peters and Brownies and Smithys—they must all have known in their day. (225–6)

All the women in V. V.’s life had taken the names of men. Once Gillian became conscious that she had encouraged V. V.’s courtship, she could no longer allow herself to attend church services: “She could not enter any Christian church and pray [. . . ]; and no prayer of hers need reach the heaven” (279). She experienced self-repulsion, fainting, and screaming for a “Larry,” not her own swain but rather the husband of her friend—an appended, melodramatic, seemingly heterosexual denouement that was actually nothing more than hysterics. Three years later, *The Well of Loneliness* by Radcliff Hall ran into roadblocks and postal censorship even though its lesbian episodes were less sensuous and explicit than those in *The Tortoiseshell Cat*. Perhaps Royde-Smith’s unconsummated heterosexual denouement protected her novel.

If this predatory portrait of V. V. had been the only representation of women loving women, present-day feminists might be correct identifying Royde-Smith’s novel as aversive to lesbianism.<sup>6</sup> But here and in her many novels to come, her treatment of sexual themes was at odds with itself. The homeless cat shared by V. V. and Gillian served as

bridge between feminine and masculine associations. Tortoiseshell cats are almost exclusively female because of genetic factors. This particular cat was also a stub-tailed Manx with origins on the Isle of Man, further encoding its indeterminate and complex gendering. As unpleasant as the mangy, smelly cat was, Royde-Smith nonetheless identified with it, adopting the cat's name, Minchoulina, as her nickname (shortened to "Minchie"), a term of endearment once she married. On occasion, Naomi's husband would sweet talk her in his letters as his "Minchoulina."

Despite V. V.'s predatory nature, she engendered a private, spiritual awakening in Gillian, who became sensual and self-appreciating as a result of their intimacy. The lingering gaze of the novel's third-person narrator portrayed Gillian's aesthetic self-discovery as innocent, playful, and poetic: "She cupped her chin in her hands and saw in the mirror how the point of each shoulder broke through the cloud of her hair hanging over it, like a young moon in an outcast sky" (265). Although V. V.'s manifestation of lesbianism was portrayed as corrupt, the third-person narrator's admiration of Gillian's beauty was not. As if to muzzle the intended bite of her unkind portrait of V. V., Royde-Smith added lines altered from Swinburne's poem "Sapphics" as an epigram on the title page of the New York edition of *The Tortoiseshell Cat*:

Back to Lesbos, back to the hills whereunder  
Shone Mitylene—  
Unbeloved, unseen in the ebb of twilight—  
Purged not in Lethe.<sup>7</sup>

Gillian had vehemently denied that she desired women; nevertheless, Royde-Smith as the author selected the Swinburne epigram that could "purge not in Lethe" her memory of the woman in whose nurturing embrace she had sheltered.

Naomi's 1925 *The Tortoiseshell Cat* contained echoes of her turmoil in 1906 when she was unable to dispel her anxiety about her rupturing relationship with Margie. Margie sent roses, but it didn't help: Naomi began to avoid her. In January, Margie and her sister Kathleen invited Naomi to dine at 44 P. G. Soon thereafter, Kathleen began to dominate Naomi's social calendar. The frequency of meetings intensified through June and July, punctuated by diary memos quoting poems about

painful, yearning love, as in William Wordsworth's poetry where grief was depicted as an uneasy lover: "Ne'errest,/ But when she sate within the touch of thee."<sup>8</sup> Her diaries suggest that Naomi had fallen in love: "To live and to die daily, deaths like these/ Is to live, while there are winds and seas."<sup>9</sup> Naomi reached back to these exact poetic passages in her novel *The Island, a Love Story* (1930), about one woman falling head over heels in love with another.

Photographs of Kathleen from this time in her life bodied forth the same visage painted and described by the character of the male artist in Royde-Smith's novella *The Lover* (1928):

The drawing suggested pallor in the face, but a vivid mouth, closed with a slight effort over slightly prominent teeth gave the pursed lips an air of sweetness and resolution. There was passion in the curved, dilated nostril, wide and dark at the side of the long, aquiline nose, and passion lit by intellect in the dark, clear eye, deep in its shadowed socket under a firmly modeled brow. (14)



Kathleen Douty (née Wills), ca. 1911.

After weeks of recorded “*misère*” in 1907, Naomi hastened to Bonn, Germany, on the pretext of refreshing her German language. She arranged to receive work from the *Westminster Gazette* by weekly post. There, she experienced “Kathleen *im Traum* (in dream)” and had trouble sleeping (26 September 1907, NRS MSS). Before returning to London two months later, she determined, “Leave thou thy sister,” a line that continued in Tennyson’s poem, “when she prays/ Her early Heaven, her Happy views,/ Nor thou with shadow’d hint confuse/ A life that leads melodious ways.”<sup>10</sup> Upon Naomi’s return to London, Margie gave her the first piano, and it was accepted; she would offer a second piano a decade later. The 1907 piano was delivered on December 4, and then Margie disappeared from Naomi’s diaries for a year.

By midsummer 1908, now firmly embedded in work at the *Westminster Gazette*, Naomi was Kathleen’s guest for a week at the Wills estate in Dulverton. She and Kathleen talked intensely nonstop, resulting in notations of “bad nights” in Naomi’s diaries (15–22 August 1908, NRS MSS). Six months later, Naomi was summoned to Cannes to comfort Kathleen in the wake of the death of her father, Sir Frederick Wills, in February 1909. She was a guest for three weeks between March 26 and April 20. Her diaries were replete with daily obsessive notations about Kathleen, always about Kathleen, Kathleen, Kathleen—brushing hair together, shopping, visiting the cemetery, reluctantly going to church (on Naomi’s part), accounts of Kathleen’s bad temper, and driving “*avec Kathleen le matin*. Tried to unite but did it badly” (3 April 1909, NRS MSS). Naomi was also attempting to compose a novel entitled “Margaret Anwyl.” “Anwyl” translated from Welsh into English means “beloved.”<sup>11</sup> She did not get very far judging from the archived manuscript.

Sir Frederick Wills bequeathed £2,918,114—a fortune in those days. His sons each received three-ninths; his daughters each received one-ninth. Kathleen was given half of hers immediately with the caveat that she would receive the other half when she either turned thirty or married. Unlike her sisters, it was stipulated that she did not have the power to bequeath the principal on which her income was based since it was derived from investment held in trust, and provisions had been “made for dealing with the principal.”<sup>12</sup> Kathleen’s mother, Lady Wills, died in 1910.

In Cannes during the month after Sir Frederick Wills’s death, Naomi found herself sharing Kathleen’s fascination and company with



“E. H. D.,” Edward Henry Douty, a delicate, older man who had once been the fashionable physician of Joseph Chamberlain.<sup>13</sup> He was fifty years old, and Kathleen was twenty-six. By September he and Kathleen had married. Almost immediately, she purchased in her own name the manor house in Clifford Chambers. Naomi was prompted in her diary to cynical observations about marriage for women:

For what mean, unhappy reasons men-women marry! They are tired or lonely or want to escape from home or the man womans [her word] them into it—or they are passion blind & choose badly. I only know one woman who was good and glad when she married except perhaps cousin Elsie & she married a vain boy and Daisy. That makes three out of dozens—and some of them horrid. (28 September 1909, NRS MSS)

In March 1910, Naomi recorded that she had “burnt letters and papers,” and since there are no communications from Kathleen saved from these early years, although correspondence was frequently noted in Naomi’s diaries, they may have been destroyed at this time. After that, she made scant diary notations of any sort between May and August 1910, with the exception of enigmatically pondering in private shorthand: “Problem with He + She. Live with Mrs. D I still cud” (11 August 1910, NRS MSS). Apparently, Naomi thought that she could still live with Kathleen, now Mrs. Douty, and perhaps her husband. Thereafter, she wrote absolutely nothing in her diaries, usually a sign of despondency, and perhaps coincident with Kath’s pregnancy. Her son, Tim, was born in October.

Naomi was again summoned to Cannes to hold Kathleen’s hand for most of the month of April in 1911. She had told Walter de la Mare that this trip was a “tête-à-tête with Destiny.”<sup>14</sup> He was under the mistaken impression that her “destiny” was with another man. Edward Douty must have been very ill, for he died in Cannes of tuberculosis just a few weeks later. Kath’s son Tim was eight months old. Kathleen returned to England to bury her husband, telegramming Naomi before arriving. On May 31 Naomi recorded in her diary: “Slept with K. H. D. [Kathleen Hamilton Douty].” Her use of the word “slept” may not have been a euphemism for sex. However, Naomi usually denoted friends and family sleepovers with “stayed the night,” so it can’t be completely

ruled out.<sup>15</sup> She motored to Dulverton with Kathleen, accepted into the heart of the Wills family. She recorded in her diary “*Chaleur Devil*” in one giant scrawl over three days, and back in London, “*chaleur iuléuse* (passion worm, French feminine).”<sup>16</sup> She obviously had not divulged to de la Mare her true feelings for Kathleen, nor the significance of her presence in Dulverton; for if she had, surely he would not have written mocking her as the “Queen of Sheba” while she was mourning with Kathleen and wooing her again.

After Edward Douty’s death, Kathleen remained with her toddler in Clifford Chambers. A year or so later she added a city place, an enormous Victorian terrace townhouse bordering Hyde Park. Her domicile, 42 Prince’s Gate, was a block or two away from Margie’s at 44 Prince’s Garden off of Exhibition Road and was a part of the same Freaque Estate leasehold development. In her novella *The Lover* (1928), Royde-Smith employed an address, “42 Princes Gate,” describing its interior rooms and accoutrements as the setting for the dinner party that launched an elderly couple into confrontation with their now ancient love affair.

*The Lover* was a nostalgic homage to Kathleen, made privately clear by Royde-Smith’s inscription in her prepublication typed manuscript: “To Kathleen Douty with the author’s unfaltering love June 1928” (NRS MSS). By the by, Kathleen was no longer “Douty” in 1928, the year of *The Lover*’s publication; she had remarried in 1922 to become Rees-Mogg. However, it was Katheen Douty who had once tangled Naomi’s heartstrings. This small book was greeted with critical acclaim, acknowledged as a virtuoso performance, a nocturne, “an intangible web of music, golden light, regret, and the transmission of dreamy supra-sensual emotion.”<sup>17</sup>

Royde-Smith’s novella depicted an artist and his lover, a woman, both of them conventional and not quite bohemian free spirits who had been sexually and spiritually devoted to one another in young adulthood. The woman lover was extremely wealthy, her world finally laying its “inexorable claim,” prohibiting her from choosing to travel and work with her soulmate, his family origins founded in “the lesser strata” of Yorkshire manufacturing, quite below her class. They were united: “he had been conscious of nothing but the unassailed certainty that between them there was only one will. They might agree to part company, but it was an agreement so utterly conceded by each other

that it brought them no sense of breaking ties” (43). Nevertheless, crushing bitterness followed his renunciation: “He had given her up to some fetish: family pride, inherited obligation [. . . that] stood for some pretentious aping of dynastic claims that had been allowed a greater importance than the completion of life he and she had found together” (45–6). In short, the woman lover had terminated their love affair so that she might marry in order to give birth to a son. Ironically, her boy subsequently died during the First World War, leaving his mother in faded old age feeling that she had nothing to show for sacrificed true love.

In a tragic twist, a decade after publication of *The Lover* Kathleen’s only child would die in an accident.

The year 1912 was a watershed for Naomi. She was appointed literary editor of the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, with increased duties and eventually some increased remuneration. She shifted to larger rooms in Adair House, the same Chelsea address on Oakley Street where she had abided since 1904. This year marked the beginning of her acquaintanceship with Rose Macaulay. Moreover, Helen de Guadrion Verrall had towed into Naomi’s entourage a group of highly educated women from her Cambridge schooldays at Newnham College: Mary Agnes (Molly) Hamilton, who would become a member of Parliament for Blackburn from 1929 to 1931; Agnes Conway, who rented a room in Naomi’s boarding situation at Adair House and would go on to fame as an archeologist; Theodora (Dora) Bosanquet, who had been Henry James’s longtime secretary and would become the intimate partner of Lady Rhondda, owner and editor of *Time and Tide*. Naomi was spending her little remaining free time with Walter de la Mare.

On an afternoon in April, Kathleen stopped by Naomi’s Chelsea flat, interrupting hurried dressing with her “sanctimony.” Whatever she said sickened Naomi throughout the next day: “I was ill after last night” (24 April 1912, NRS MSS). Kathleen was in London for her brother Noël’s splendid wedding, which she attended with Naomi and Margie. Whatever Kathleen had said, it did not spell the end of their relationship. Naomi spent several days with her at Clifford Chambers in late May. Together, unaccompanied by Margie or Noël, both of whom sent wreaths in their stead, she and Kath commemorated the first anniversary of Douy’s death. They had long, “deep” talks at his gravesite and while motoring the next day to Miserden; they drove

through the New Forest. Again, Naomi trekked to Stratford for a week in July. Kathleen's son was their companion. They accompanied Timmy to his first haircut. Thereafter, Kathleen meant to vacate England for Australia in September, sending Naomi both a letter and then a telegram for emphasis when she changed her mind at the last minute (diary, 30 September 1912, NRS MSS). Both letter and telegram have disappeared.

Once she had established a London home base, Kathleen became a regular at the Thursdays and was added to Naomi's Christmas gift list reserved for family. In turn, Kathleen, as had her sister Margie, showered Naomi with gifts—silk stockings, earrings, opals, and such. Weekly, sometimes more often, they shopped together or dined out. Kathleen was in the habit of motoring Naomi to work in the morning, once driving in great circles as they plotted Naomi's bid for higher pay at the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*. Kathleen pleaded with Naomi to live with her at 42 Prince's Gate. In a journal addressed to Walter de la Mare, Naomi explained why she could not and did not accept Kathleen's largesse:

Also I think great wealth is an almost impassible barrier. I've just explained to Kathleen that I cannot go and live with her in a gorgeous flat looking over Hyde Park even if she does let me bring Leslie with me and have my own suite of rooms. She doesn't understand that no resolve on her part could leave me free under her roof. I don't feel I've got enough nature to accept a permanent, daily benefit (which could include really good cooking—and I do enjoy that as you know) without becoming either lax or sharp. The only way I can go on being friends with her, and of any real use to her, is by continuing to be quite independent of her. I hope this doesn't bore you. It's very much on my mind and *you* wouldn't like it if I were swallowed up by millionaires, would you Binns?<sup>18</sup>

Naomi struggled for financial independence away from Kathleen, seduced by the promise of luxury but fearful of losing her sense of self. Naomi's scruples, however, did not prevent her accepting invitations to dine at the Waldorf and Ritz.

In *The Island, a Love Story* (1930), Royde-Smith divided aspects of her poetic sensibilities into two women characters. Over decades

these women sporadically lived together in a Welsh seaside community. Myfanwy, the protagonist, was nicknamed “Goosey” because she blanched when confronted with farmyard sex and parturition. She came to avoid men and was besotted with Almond, nicknamed Flossie. It was to Goosey that Royde-Smith ceded the poetry written by Wordsworth and Symonds quoted in her 1907 diary when she herself was lovelorn. As for Almond, Royde-Smith ceded to her poetry that she, herself, had written in Geneva during the time she had fancied herself in love with Henry Spiess. Almond was an unprincipled user of people and dangerous. She shared Goosey’s bed when short of funds, abandoning her for the company of men when it suited her. She was portrayed as ruthless, capable of using the cover of a suffragette demonstration to burn to the ground the commercial establishment of the one man who had courted Myfanwy and threatened her hold on her golden Goosey.

Literary critics were inclined to compare *The Island* to Radclyffe Hall’s *Well of Loneliness*. One reviewer of *The Island* charged Royde-Smith with having obfuscated the sexual relationship between woman and speculated that she had “muffled and muted the inversion theme” by visitations from “phantoms of the official intellects which banned ‘The Well of Loneliness.’”<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, another accused her of mimicking that notorious novel, and doing it far more explicitly than Proust or Gide.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Royde-Smith had been one of the inner circle of authors who had marched into court in support of Radcliffe Hall’s censored novel. She received a two-page single-spaced typed letter of thanks and lengthy explanation of tactics from Hall herself: “I feel that I want to write and thank you personally for your support of me and my book in the court on Friday last.”<sup>21</sup>

There was absolutely nothing disguised about Royde-Smith’s treatment of sex in her novel. For instance, the description of the last encounter between the two women was rife with years of habitual sexual intercourse:

So it was to be here. Not where they had slept. Almond [Flossie] closed her eyes and leaned backwards against her pushing hands. She could feel the charm and tenderness of the smile with which she was about to forgive softening her mouth. She waited. They were well within the room now. Still Goosey did not speak. They had reached the bedside

now. Would Goosey pick her up in her arms and lay her among the pillows as she had done so often? She was all softness and yielding and expectation. (302)

Instead of sex, Goosey abandoned Almond, locking the door to imprison her. Goosey was under the influence of a religious conversion that, in her mind, rendered their sexual actions particularly sinful. Adding insult, the venal Almond later married the very minister who had inspired Goosey's conversion.

Goosey was socially isolated, suffering, lonely. She struck out at her community, obstructing gentrification. Refusing to sell her house on a seaside stretch of land, the so-called Island, to make way for a widened thoroughfare between commercial centers, she was pathetically bitter, exulting over the simulation of a chapel burning in hell as its window panes reflected the setting sun. A tragic figure, she elicited compassion:

The steep bank down which they had come now rose before them across the water, cut into two parallel sections—one of purple darkness, the other scarlet in the scarlet flood of sunset. Grey against the glow of the hill-side there towered and wavered the dim, gigantic, but unmistakable shadow of the woman on the ridge behind the summit. The substance that had seemed a bird when they were turned towards it was a monster now that they faced its shade. (326)

It was as though the communal shunning of Myfanwy, "queer thing," cast a monstrous shadow over those who had rejected her difference. Thinking for the reader, the character Josepha recognized her own culpability, having weakly given over to patriarchal judgments:

She had begun to acquiesce in Jeff's view that the old woman on the Island was almost a public nuisance, one of those miserable problems it was useless to attempt to solve. But tonight she could not sleep for thinking of that misery. She felt, for an hour, guilty of her own share in the world's responsibility for a wretchedness she had encountered and had not tried to heal. (328)

*The Island, a Love Story* was emotionally, not factually, autobiographical. It demonstrated how Royde-Smith mined issues earned through her lived experiences, transforming them into imagined situations and characters.

Royde-Smith perceived that homosexual relationships, like heterosexual relationships, might be corrupted by hierarchies of power—by money and class. She took herself to task—as she always did—in the character of Josepha, who threaded all of the novels in the trilogy, of which this was the third. In *Children in the Wood*, Josepha did not prevent her fragile, fey sister from being sacrificed to the convenience of their mother, who had shoved her into marriage that terminated in death during childbirth, the perceived consequence of the imperatives of heterosexuality. In *Summer Holiday, or Gibraltar* (1929), in a coincidentally shared train carriage, Josepha encountered a young woman who had been seduced by an older man and to whom she did not offer a sisterly hand; this novel ended in suicide and homicide, the perceived consequence of heterosexual adultery. In *The Island, a Love Story*, Josepha did not honestly own up to her commercial dealings with Goosey and to their developing friendship, the denial of which eventuated in Goosey's bitter alienation and Josepha's guilt, correctly, if superficially, felt.

Naomi and Kathleen went on seeing each other frequently through the beginning of the First World War, on occasion smuggling off for clandestine weekends. Together with her sister, Leslie, Naomi holidayed for a month in a cottage near the Beresfords in Cornwall during the spring before the war started. In the midst of long twelve-mile hikes, teas and dinners with the Beresfords, and composing chunks of *John Fanning's Legacy*, the epistolary novel she was writing with Walter de la Mare, Naomi journeyed train by train by train to meet Kathleen for several days of frolic with Hugh Walpole at his blue and white cottage in Polperro, where they dined on lobsters. Letters from de la Mare were piqued because she had not told him where she was. Finally, when she divulged her sojourn-after-the-fact in a postcard to him, she did not breathe a word about Kathleen's companionship: "Mr. Walpole's genuine fisherman's cottage is a miracle of comfort and very amusing sight" (30 May 1914, Mare MSS). She scurried back to the Beresfords, where she continued for another week to write her portions of *John Fanning*, sometimes with Dora Bosanquet's help.

Whenever Kathleen was in the city, and this was less often as the war took hold, she still indulged Naomi with meals at fancy restaurants. Twice over Naomi spent weekends in Clifford Chambers; these visits were not intimate, shared as they now were with other houseguests. Nevertheless, a year later she rushed to Kathleen, seeking solace when Edgar Frere, her secret fiancé, was killed on the battlefield (diary, 10 June 1916, NRS MSS). By August 1917 the two had stopped meeting altogether—no lunches, no teas, no dinners—and Kathleen neither visited nor sent gifts when Naomi had a hysterectomy at the end of that year.

Among those who came to her while she was hospitalized were Clara Smith, her sisters Erica and Daisy, Walter de la Mare several times, his wife once, Grimwood Mears (“Brimstone” in her notes) twice over, Margie Hamilton Fellows, May Spender, J. A. Spender, Agnes Conway and her mother, Lady Conway, Evelyn Underhill, the J. C. Squires, Molly Hamilton, Ka Cox, Rose Macaulay, who “was a dear” (1–23 December 1917, NRS MSS). Kathleen was notably missing.

During the weeks leading up to her surgery, Naomi received two invitations for convalescence after the trauma. Both were insistent. One was from Trissie Beresford in Cornwall; the other was from Margie Hamilton Fellows, who underscored her desire to care for Naomi with proffered gifts—that second piano—and descriptions of a sundial she had meant to give Naomi upon her marriage, if ever that happened. Now it was stationed in the garden to be embraced in gratitude, “for I have never managed to forget how fond I was of you, and to have you under my roof again will be like a wonderful dream come true. I may have lost the power of showing it but I haven’t lost the faculty for caring [. . .].”<sup>22</sup> She was as good as her word. Naomi was delivered home to her Chelsea flat by ambulance, and the next day, December 23, conveyed by cart to Margie’s Tanglely, where she was smothered in comfort by Margie, who gave her lilies for Christmas and provided books, short stories by Kipling and William Benjamin Carpenter’s *Principles of Mental Physiology*. Each day Naomi was stronger, able to leave her bed by the fourth in the new year and eager to be alone at Holmbury. A few days later Margie trusted her to Mrs. Flint’s care at The White House, having motored her over the countryside from Guildford swaddled in blankets and warmed by a hot water bottle, depositing her and a potted white



cyclamen. Proudly, Naomi returned to London and work by the end of January, noting in her diary, “home in exactly 8 weeks.”

Kathleen had had nothing to do with Naomi until her manor house in Clifford Chambers went up in flames at the end of March 1918. Naomi waited for Margie to appear at her Chelsea flat, and then the two together phoned Kathleen to commiserate, breaking the ice, making it possible for Naomi and Kathleen to resume socializing with one another, albeit infrequently, during the ensuing year. Their romantic friendship had subsided into humdrum normalcy. Although she had rebuilt her house, Kathleen did not invite Naomi for a usual spring holiday at Clifford Chambers: “Kath has thrown me out the window for the Shakespeare festival” (7 May 1920, NRS MSS). Kathleen faded, and Margie figured more and more prominently in Naomi’s social schedule, now crowded with scores of people, some professional, some intimate.

It was through Margie’s auspices that 44 Prince’s Gardens fell into Naomi’s hands in March 1919; there was no record of Naomi paying rent as there had been for other domiciles. Since Margie was well settled at Tangle Park, she had less need of her London establishment, and it suited Naomi to live there and to drum up lodgers for its several rooms while reserving use of its grand salon for her own Thursday at-homes. Furniture was brought out of basement storage. Margie accompanied Naomi shopping for a paisley shawl, the perfect decorative touch for what Naomi termed “Margie’s 44 dining room.” One furnished room was kept for Margie’s daughter Enid, and once that daughter married, the entire domicile reverted to her and her husband.<sup>23</sup>

The sisters Kathleen and Margie and the sisters Naomi and Dolly formed something of a *ménage à quatre* in an intimate minuet over time. When Naomi’s sister Dolly became Margie’s partner, taking up residence at Tangle, Naomi’s loyal devotion to Margie did not waver. There was no discernible ill will. Margie and Dolly attended Naomi’s Thursdays and drove over to Naomi’s cottage at Holmbury on weekends; Naomi, on occasion, visited Tangle, more and more attentive to Margie’s daughter Enid’s development into a young woman.

Naomi’s surgery marked a sea change in her relationship with Rose Macaulay, which had evolved slowly. They had not yet met when Naomi discovered Rose’s early poems in 1905 soon after joining the staff of *Saturday Westminster Gazette*. In 1905, Naomi was thirty years of age, Rose twenty-four. As noted by Macaulay’s biographer Sarah LeFanu,

“Women and men were represented even-handedly in the pages of Naomi Royde-Smith’s Saturday Westminster literary competitions, in contrast to the total exclusion of women ten years later from the pages of the Georgian Poets anthologies edited by Rupert Brooke’s friend and, after his death, memoirist, Edward Marsh.”<sup>24</sup> Rose and Rupert Brooke were friends; their families had been neighbors near Cambridge. By 1907, he, like Rose, was also now winning Westminster prizes for his poems. In 1911, Rose and Rupert shared a *Saturday Westminster Gazette* literary prize, each having submitted a best poem addressed to a living poet, receiving one guinea each for their efforts. Both wanted to meet Naomi, whose reputation as a literary maven and wit was spreading among London literati. On May 15 of that year, Naomi invited Rose to lunch, dazzling her, according to Rose.<sup>25</sup> They met infrequently over the next year as Rose was still living in Cambridge with her mother and came into London intermittently. Often she visited under the wing of Rupert, whose city know-how impressed her. Rose did not reappear in Naomi’s diaries until May 2, 1912, when they shared lunch with Helen de Guadrion Verrall from the *Westminster*.

During November and December 1912, Rose was included in two workday lunches together with Helen and de la Mare, whose poetry had influenced hers. Decades later, Rose reminisced about de la Mare and Naomi: “[H]e was a fascinating and fantasy-chasing conversationalist, and I fell deeply in love both with him and with Naomi Royde-Smith. He and she with her gay and ridiculous wit and her wide literary range and critical appreciation, fitted exactly together” (*Coming to London*, 159). Rose’s appreciation must date from later in the decade, for in actuality by the record Naomi did not see much of Rose when she first came to London.<sup>26</sup>

Rose broke bread in 1913 at only five workaday lunches organized by Naomi, always including Walter de la Mare, once with J. D. Beresford, once with John Middleton Murray. In addition, Naomi was beginning to include Rose slightly more often in private social activities, arranging for her to stay over in her Chelsea flat during one weekend in early January, at which time Rose charmed Agnes Conway, who “took” to her. Naomi also introduced Rose to her sister Erica. Socializing increased after Rose’s uncle gave her a London flat to use rent free, enabling her to attend Naomi’s “Confession Party” in May along with Naomi’s sister Leslie, brother Graham, Walter de la Mare,

Mary Agnes Hamilton, Joan and Evelyn Riviere, Reeve Brooke, and Theodora Bosanquet. On her side, Rose threw a flat-warming party in June 1914, and the guests were Naomi, “Mr. and Mrs. Binns [the de la Mares],” Rupert Brooke and Iolo Williams (diary, 30 June 1914, NRS MSS). After the war started during the fall of that year, Rose for the first time came to three of Naomi’s Thursdays, although she was not yet invited to Naomi’s country cottage retreat.

Because war efforts took Rose out of London, she and Naomi seldom spent much time together until 1917 when Rose began to habituate Naomi’s Thursdays. She was also included as a regular at “Lunch Clubs” with others of Naomi’s literary entourage, settling into restaurants such as The Wayside or the Fromage or the ABC or The Temple. Molly Hamilton remembers these weekly luncheons:

Very pleasant, and seldom contentious, was a weekly lunch-time gathering in the sunny rooms at the top of Mitre Court, at the Fleet Street corner of the Temple, belonging to J. Reeve Brooke. I do not remember now who started this function: either Reeve himself, or Naomi Royde-Smith, whose Westminster Gazette office was just round the corner, as was mine, in Essex Street. She and I were always there: often there also came Rose Macaulay and Gerald O’Donovan, both of whom were, at one time, in the Ministry of Information, under Arnold Bennett: both, later, wrote highly amusing novels about it.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, Naomi welcomed Rose to Holmbury, and thereafter she visited often, once at the same time as J. Reeve Brooke, who was a special friend of Naomi’s during this period before he married Dorothy Lamb. By September Rose was firmly planted in Naomi’s inner circle, reciprocating hospitality by inviting her home to her mother in Beaconsfield. Later in the year she was again at Holmbury, overlapping with J. Reeve Brooke, Dick Shanks, and Margie (diary, 5–16 September 1912, NRS MSS). Soon, both Shanks and Rose would dedicate their first volumes of published poetry to Naomi: Shanks, *The Queen of China and Other Poems* (1919) and Macaulay, *Three Days* (1919), who wrote, “To N. G. R. S. who is responsible for many of them [poems].”

Toward the end of the war, Rose found work in the Ministry of Information in Crewe House in London where she was placed in

the Italian department under the supervision of Gerald O'Donovan. O'Donovan had left the Catholic priesthood in 1910, and once released from his vows of celibacy, had successfully proposed marriage to a young woman, independently wealthy, just five days after having met her. They had three children together. Nonetheless, Gerald O'Donovan and Rose Macaulay fell in love. In the beginning, neither was at ease in adultery. During June 1918, he dashed off for months in Italy with his wife, Beryl, who had given birth a mere two months before. At this early moment, Rose may have confided her longings to Naomi, who on July 24 recorded in her diary that she had met with Rose. Scribbled next to her name was "Madame Bovary," Flaubert's novel about adulterous yearning of a married woman, not an unmarried interloper. Rose kept her romantic affair with O'Donovan secret, and it matured into an enduring relationship that lasted until he died in 1942.

Naomi's diary for 1919 is missing. By June, however, she had moved to the upper floors of Margie's huge house at 44 Prince's Gardens, conveniently located around the corner from Kathleen's. Rose may have stayed overnight in November, writing to her cousin: "I've been up at P. Gardens 3 days this week—It's a convenient place, and rather fun."<sup>28</sup>

Naomi and Rose became inseparable, and they did have fun. Physically, they were strikingly different: Naomi with soft hair and soft curves; Rose with sprightly hair and boyish frame. Wits, they responded readily to one another. It was comfortable for them to mix their friends and family (although Virginia Woolf considered Naomi her rival and never blended). Naomi's glee in Rose's company was palpable:

My weekend was wonderful. I went straight from the office on Friday to Mrs. Macaulay's in Beaconsfield. Mrs. M., whom I adore, has a car, a Ford, in which she took me over to Earl Claydon on Saturday. She & I sat behind & Rose, with a road map, in front with chauffeur, a neighboring lady, rather like "Goodie," but plump & pretty who wore a very elaborate, rather large hat trimmed with the best silk flowers. Every mile or so the car stopped & the lady turned round with wide, blue eyes & said "What do you think can be the matter with HER, Mrs. Macaulay?" & Mrs. M. would dive into a real old lady's reticule full of parcels & bits & produce a little book & look up diseases of Fords until a passing

man came along & cranked HER up. Rose is quite good at maps when she attends to them, but there is so much else to attend to when you are out four in a car & every now & then we overshot our turning, & as the pretty driver could only drive straight ahead with any certainty, we had some highly dramatic episodes. The first of them consisted of driving right across the village green at Penn & almost into the village pond which was full of infant quackers [. . .]. I've never suppressed so much laughter or come nearer to death. (to de la Mare, 17 August 1920, Mare MSS)

Rose would occasionally nestle into one of the upper rooms at 44, although she continued to live mostly with her mother in Beaconsfield. Still, for more than a year through the end of 1921, for several months Rose experienced herself and was seen by others as Naomi's housemate. Rose began to help Naomi organize her Thursday *soirées*, which now bulged with people, "*tout le monde le soir*," sometimes numbering as many as sixty (Hamilton, 137). Rose, as a rule, did not share in the costs.

By the end of 1920, Naomi expanded her orbit to include Gerald O'Donovan, who graced her Thursdays during October and November. Twice in November Naomi invited him together with Rose to Holmbury. On November 12, Naomi noted in her diary, "Began Conquest of Gerald O'Donovan," a double entendre referring to the book he had published that year and also, perhaps, to her intentions, for she took him to lunch at the Waldorf on December 2. If so, this foray into O'Donovan territory may have been unsuccessful, for he ceased attending Thursday *les soirs* and essentially evaporated from Naomi's world until 1922, when on Thursday, May 11, Rose and Naomi, to amuse themselves, put together a special evening that included the de la Mares (husband and wife) plus the O'Donovans (husband and wife) along with the Lynds, the Davidsons, and Jeanne Footner. Quipped Naomi in her diary: "Naomi & Rose are dead/ Side by side their souls have fled/ Sad to think that we mourn/ No one can go to forewarn" (endnotes, 1921, NRS MSS).

Naomi's life was a patchwork quilt of work and play. Rose once again had her own flat, although this did not change their frequent meetings. Having reviewed *Potterism* (1920) both for the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* and *Time and Tide*, Naomi remained a fan of

Rose's artistry, finding *Dangerous Ages* (1921) "so very much her own work—just what she & she only can or ought to do."<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, Naomi's job as literary editor at the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* was in jeopardy as that important newspaper was being dismantled. Anxious and ill, she sought caretaking for two months in Switzerland, hospitality offered by her Genovese woman friend Edmée, together with her welcoming family. Walter de la Mare published a novel that nobody knew was about her, *Memoirs of a Midget*, and it cut close to her living bone, a creative and cannibalistic activity that she understood, withstood, and even encouraged. Margie and Dolly continued their partnership at Tanglely, and she was often their guest.

On June 28, 1922, Kathleen married Col. Graham Rees-Mogg, giving rise to Naomi's diary word play in commemoration of the event: "marriage, maryage, mary-ache." According to villagers in Clifford Chambers, Kathleen Mary Christina Douty had married Rees-Mogg to straighten out her son Tim, who was running wild beyond her doting control.<sup>30</sup> He had been sent down from Eton for being untruthful, reported Naomi, who was visiting Kathleen soon after the marriage. She noted that Kathleen was not as radiantly happy as she might be: "Kath buys a fresh bull or a new pasture and her Major rides off to buy good cattle for it or, looking very handsome in his white riding things to play polo & we sit & sew and talk about furniture and the head parlour maid who is called Moss & who had a nervous breakdown. I am going away tomorrow—not very regretfully" (23 August 1922, Mare MSS).

Margie's daughter Enid married the Earl of Kinnoull, and Margie reclaimed 44 for their use. By June 1923, Naomi had moved to 2 Tedworth Square in Chelsea, sharing the flat with Clara Smith. For a while in 1924, her Thursdays continued in diminished state—some attended by Rose. Naomi even spent an evening alone with Gerald O'Donovan in April. Nevertheless, her old patterns of work and play were fading. Naomi's life was soon to undergo a radical transition.

Naomi resigned from *The Weekly Westminster* as literary editor and drama critic to become editor of *The Queen* in early 1924. This really was not a congenial circumstance for her, and she was out by September. She had worked in anguish, unable to get along with the *The Queen's* board. Once out, she felt freer than she had in years for she had found utterly exhausting the triple job of editing and also writing weekly

columns and weekly dramatic criticism. She no longer had time for her Holmbury country retreat and quit it for good.

One of her innovations at *The Queen*, most of which disappeared when she left, was a weekly essay conversation between men and women who were cultural figures. The subtext was that men and women were equal. Always interested in boosting the careers of her friends, she selected Rose Macaulay and E. V. Knox (“Evor” of *Punch*) as conversationalists for the 14 May 1924 issue. It was a splendid spread, written by Knox and illustrated with half-page photo portraits of each. As an interlocutor in the essay, Rose was highly uncooperative, prompting Knox to conclude, “But you cannot make Miss Macaulay talk a great deal about what she has written herself, or advance her views with any parade of enthusiasm. You must take her earnestness through her satire, which, after all, is a good way” (“Conversation—V.,” 10-11).



Rose Macaulay photographed for *The Queen*, 1924.

Without salaried work, Naomi was nearly penniless. She vacated London in October for Alfriston, Sussex, where, expressing fright about her intention, she began to write a novel. According to her diary accounts, she and Rose corresponded frequently. Margie offered her house in Dover for a place to hole up. Naomi accepted the gift, using it from November to December; it was there that Naomi finished her

first novel, *The Tortoiseshell Cat* (1925). Her salaried work as drama critic with *The Outlook* was not slated to begin until April, prompting Margie to give money to Naomi for living expenses: “I only ask you, darling sweet friend, not to spoil my pleasure by flinging this back at me. Take it as a token of the wonderfully great love that has existed between us and make me happy. I have loved your visit & thrill at the thought of your book and I am your loving M, hand-delivered.”<sup>31</sup>

During 1925, Rose was still very much a part of Naomi’s life even while touring Europe with O’Donovan during April and August. Naomi received regular postcards from her. Rose continued to see Gerald on weekends, where she was passed off as a family friend, and alone in London in her flat, but to parties she went alone (LeFanu, 155, 183). During November, Naomi, who was then living at 2 Mitre Court, wrote to Walter de la Mare that she was nursing Rose, who was sick.

Naomi and Rose, according to Rose’s biographers, had a serious falling out in 1926. By consulting archived letters, some only now seeing the light of day, and published book histories, it becomes apparent that the schism that seemed eventually to rupture their high regard for one another originated in their novels.

In *The Housemaid* (1926), her second novel, Naomi may have breached Rose’s trust. Royde-Smith’s overarching intention in the novel had been to split aspects of herself into two women protagonists, one the Naomi who was hostess of *les soirs* and creator of tasteful, elegant environments similar to the salon at 44, and another, the Naomi who slaved in the grind of publishing firms, eking out a meager living, obligated to family caretaking. The male protagonists were amplifying doubles of the pattern established by the women characters. To Royde-Smith’s way of thinking, she was using legitimate material from her own years with Walter de la Mare, and she read it aloud to him as it was being composed. He recognized that the characters were “ghosts” of themselves. Between de la Mare and Royde-Smith this was acceptable tit for tat. Each had acquiesced as grist useful to the other’s art. *The Housemaid* was also class critique, arguing that working people did not have the luxury of illicit love, whereas affluent folk possessed resources enabling them to realize their abiding, albeit illicit passion.

Although Royde-Smith may have thought she was exploiting her own private business, it was possible that Rose Macaulay might have had another perception, one in which she regarded Naomi as having



transgressed trust by using secrets gleaned from what she imagined of Rose's clandestine affair with Gerald O'Donovan, or, perhaps even from Rose's confidences. Certainly, Rose would have been alarmed by the name Royde-Smith bequeathed to the wife of her fictionalized wealthy adulterous lover, for "Beryl" was also the name of O'Donovan's wife. Royde-Smith portrayed the fictional Beryl as shallow and uncultivated, clearly an inappropriate wife for an intellectual fellow.

Macaulay retaliated. She had been writing *Crewe Train* since July 1925. Most of it was given over to more or less lighthearted ridicule of the corrupt London-based publishing class—a milieu that had nurtured Macaulay and in which she was a gay and willing participant. She was making fun of herself as a talkative party person, a recipient of reviews solicited from friends, a woman whose lover was also a reader for Collins and who may have influenced publication of her novels. *Crewe Train* came out in September 1926, six months after Royde-Smith's *The Housemaid* in February. In her terminating chapters, Macaulay viciously attacked a woman character, Evelyn, who was portrayed as a meddling, gossiping, self-satisfied, self-ignorant, destructive writer of fiction, careless of loyalty to the peril of her friends. Evelyn's short story damaged the emotive lives of innocent people, and Macaulay had the character of Evelyn's fictive husband, a publisher, judge her harshly:

She never would realize that people resent being talked about and written about; she always seemed half to think that they liked it. And of course they didn't like it; no one did. Fact was, it was impudent, yes, rather impudent, writing stories about the private affairs of the people one knew. If you wanted to do that, you should frankly write reminiscences, and call them "About My Friends," or something, which was quite the fashion now. Then the victims could write and contradict what you said of them if they didn't like it. But not fiction; that was hitting below the belt, thought Peter, for even publishers have their own code of honour. (*Crewe Train*, 263)

Macaulay was in a tight place. She could hardly remonstrate with Royde-Smith's description of adulterous lovers in *The Housemaid* without broadcasting her affair with O'Donovan. Nobody at the time could have guessed the source of distress between the women. After

all, Rose's secret life with O'Donovan was buried so deep that Virginia Woolf considered Rose androgynous. Wrote Sarah LeFanu, a more recent Macaulay biographer: "No one admits to the hurt they felt when they discovered the secret had been kept from them. Rose Macaulay loved someone in successful secrecy for a quarter of a century and hid her grief at his loss for years afterward" (291).

The early biographers of Macaulay assumed that Rose had used Naomi as prototype for Evelyn, and it was likely that she had. Coincident in time with Rose's reaction to *The Housemaid*, the venom of her portrait in *Crewe Train* gathered intensity as she was writing the final chapters of her novel after the publication of *The Housemaid*. The vituperation may have unsettled family biographers, who tried to explain Rose's satire in light of her history of friendship with Naomi, a relationship that had relied for so many years on Naomi's generosity. In hindsight, once they learned of the affair after Rose's death, they speculated that Naomi had spoken too freely about Rose and O'Donovan; however, if Naomi had spoken of them, more people would have claimed knowledge. Those who did know were told by Rose herself. She told her cousin Jean Smith in 1927, and Jean kept the secret to her grave. Rose also told Victor and Ruth Gollancz, as well as Sylvia and Robert Lynd (LeFanu, 187). On Naomi's part, there was not one shred of innuendo or mention of Gerald O'Donovan in her gossipy correspondence with Walter de la Mare, which mentioned Rose in other contexts, some uneasy, as when Rose had seemed to snub de la Mare, causing him discomfort.

Naomi and Rose continued their pattern of socializing during the months after *The Housemaid* was published in February. Rose attended a Thursday *le soir* on March 4, and she invited Naomi to dinner on March 5, together with Hugh Walpole, Archie Macdonald, and Mr. and Mrs. Macmillan (diary, NRS MSS). On March 17, Rose and Naomi took a long walk in the park, perhaps seeking privacy for colloquy about Naomi's book. Subsequently, Naomi invited Rose to Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* for which he had won the Hawthorden literary prize. Again she and Rose walked to Primrose Hill on May 3. Rose attended yet another Thursday *le soir* in May. These were normal rhythms.

It was not until the publication of Macaulay's *Crewe Train* in September that the two became estranged.

The source of early biographical blame of Naomi may be a letter that Rose sent to Sylvia Lynd; it had been available to her relatives and

later found its way into archives. In this letter, Rose noted that Naomi might be spreading the erroneous idea that the portrait of Evelyn was based on a mutual friend, Viola Garvin. By way of defending herself, Rose snapped: “As to scandal mongering, Naomi does much more of that herself.” In the same letter, Rose accused Naomi of initiating subjects and “what she hears and what she tells are strangely like, I notice, sometimes” (quoted by LeFanu, 155).

Naomi did actually write a letter addressed directly to Rose about the Eleanor character in *Crewe Train*. She was not gossiping behind her back. In her letter, not saved by Rose, she apparently camouflaged dismay about Rose’s personal attack on her with fret about their mutual friend Viola Garvin. Rose responded to Naomi in a letter that has only now been found:

Darling, be a novelist, & recognize that one doesn’t do whole portraits. I wrote a little of her manners & speech, & filled it up behind with a character I made up—a scandal monger, in fact. I’m terribly sorry if the Garvins think it’s her (Viola). As to the story she [Eleanor, the character] wrote, that sensational romance about Denham & the fisherman, was so utterly unlike V.’s delicate & un-sensational study of family life—different matter, different style, different altogether. So again I say, be a novelist and remember how one mixes & half creates one’s characters into little lines, or sprinklings, of actuality—often 2 or 3 people are in one, often a touch of one & the rest made up. (28 October 1926, Milton MSS)

By pointedly describing Viola’s “delicate” renderings of family life as opposed to her character’s sensationalism, she may have been digging at Naomi’s melodramatic novels. Rose went on in her letter to share a gossipy tidbit, making a point of writing that Naomi was the only person she had told, enjoining, “I know you won’t spread it.” She finished by describing her health and Gerald’s last visit, signing “All my love, R.” Given her accusation to Sylvia Lynd about Naomi’s propensity to tell stories solicited from others, Rose’s remarks may seem disingenuous.

The friendship of Naomi and Rose cooled but did not end. After *Crewe Train* came out in September, they shared lunch on November 16, and then Naomi attended Rose’s party on November 19, accompanied

by Ernest Milton, whom she would marry secretly a month later. Rose appeared at one Thursday in January 1927, and then there's little more of Rose. Naomi may have been wounded by Rose's personal attack in *Crewe Train*, for it was incommensurate on the public platform with whatever Naomi had done in *The Handmaid*. The satirizing Rose drew more blood than the romanticizing and sociological Naomi.

While Rose and Naomi drifted apart, they never completely severed communication. What remained of the ensuing years in the archives is a smattering of travel postcards from Rose when she was traveling with O'Donovan, and an occasional visit, witnessed in Naomi's more and more scanty diaries. Still, by 1931, Rose and Naomi were again in each other's lives—less as friends and more as fellow writers and literary colleagues.

By April 1926, Margie's health had begun to fail precipitously, and sister Dolly's health was also in crisis, thrusting Naomi, age fifty-one, into the role of caretaker. She brought Dolly from Tanglely to a nursing home in London, where what was diagnosed as a nervous disorder might be treated: her legs were no longer able to carry her. Dolly returned to Tanglely in time to help Kathleen nurse Margie, who, sinking fast, died of pneumonia on August 3, age fifty-two. Naomi then brought Dolly back to London, settled her in rooms, and stayed with her. The next day she sat in a hospital room holding the hand of Enid, Margie's daughter, during her mother's funeral service. Enid was herself scheduled for surgery (diary, 11 April to 4 August, 1926, NRS MSS). It then fell to Naomi to accompany Dolly to the Isle of Wight, see her situated, and to return immediately to ferry Enid to a private funeral for her mother in Worplesdon near Tanglely. Besides tending others, Naomi was also grief-stricken, wailing to de la Mare:

Margie's death is one of the most dreadful things I have ever known. It is not only that she was—when I first knew her—one of those people it is unbearable to lose, but she has gone so horribly & has left such squabbling misery behind her. [. . .] Dolly is trustee & executor & she is too ill & shattered to cope with it. She gets a very large annuity—but may die before it emerges from the welter of lawyers' business. M. has left me a very comfortable legacy, but I can't be pleased even about that. (15 August 1926, Mare MSS)

Margie left an estate of £1,965,000 in advertised total. Naomi received £5,000, and her siblings Maud, Graham, and Erica each received £1,000, along with dispensations to others. Dolly was well taken care of: “£4,000 to Miss Dorothy Eunice Royde-Smith,” plus a “freehold house, the Old Guard House, St. Margaret’s Bay, Dover, and all the furniture therein, and her long and small ropes of pearls, furs, lace, jewelry, pictures, horses, carriages, and motor cars.”<sup>32</sup>

Fast on the heels of Margie’s death in August, Naomi’s first play, *A Balcony*, swept into rehearsal. Ernest Milton starred, along with Phyllis Titmuss, whom Royde-Smith judged very good and amazingly pretty. However, Naomi’s own pleasure had been sapped by Margie’s death: “I feel now that the play itself is poor stuff—thin & dull” (to de la Mare, 15 August 1926, Mare MSS). It was produced at the Everyman, running to twelve performances between August 25 and September 13.

Three weeks later, Naomi and Ernest Milton, age thirty-six, married secretly. No one was invited to the nuptials. Still, their marriage was life-changing. Naomi and Ernest began to build a world together and many patterns shifted. Naomi no longer sponsored institutionalized Thursdays; she sought retreats away from London and its literary ferment. Perhaps no diaries were kept in 1928 and 1929; at least, none are archived. During this period, Naomi moved to Hatfield after she and Ernest lost a considerable amount of hope and money invested in their Queen Theatre venture, an effort to link their creative talents. She spent several months with Ernest in the United States from the end of 1929 through February 1930 while he performed in a Broadway production. Coincidentally, Rose Macaulay was in the United States at the same time, but on the opposite side of the continent—Naomi in New York and Philadelphia, Rose on the West Coast.

Roger Hinks, Naomi’s coauthor in their epistolary venture *Pictures and People* (1930), innocently assumed Naomi would share eager interest in news of Rose, suggesting that even close colleagues and friends were unaware of a rift between the two. Rose and Naomi continued to correspond, albeit infrequently, and at times they even socialized, as at “Raymond’s party with Keith Henderson, Aldous & Maria, Mottram” in January 1931 or a lunch Naomi arranged with “Mrs. Snowden,

Lady Townsend, Sybil Thorndike, Lilian Braithwaite, Rose Macaulay, Virginia Vernon.” They did not, however, retrieve the warmth they had once enjoyed.

Rose congratulated Royde-Smith for producing a biography, *The Double Heart, a Study of Julie de Lespinasse* (1931), calling it “brilliant” and “entertaining” “& full of lovely Naomi-ish bits—that make me laugh” (8 September 1931, NRS MSS). A couple of years later, Rose put her shoulder to pushing Naomi’s biographical portrait of Mrs. Siddons, the nineteenth-century actress. In a review of it for *Time and Tide*, she claimed it successful and delightful, a story told with “most moving sympathy and power” (13 May 1933). There was not one negative word in the lengthy, but bland, two-column piece. She also wrote a positive review of Naomi’s *The State of Mind of Mrs. Sherwood* (1947) for the *Times Literary Supplement*. Nevertheless, Naomi never again fully trusted Rose, and this lack of confidence was conveyed in letters to and from Ernest Milton. In April 1935 he cautioned Naomi not to answer Rose’s letter until he could advise her, and later in August he declared that Rose filled him with disgust: “She is an unutterably false & dangerous woman. I don’t think she’s mad—just double unless you call Iago mad” (Milton MSS).

Many years later Naomi wrote Viola Garvin, once editor of the *London Observer*, refusing a request to reminisce about the poet and civil servant Humbert Wolfe, recalling having heard about a pencil game organized against her novel *The Bridge*. In fact, in 1932, during the period surrounding publication of *The Bridge*, Naomi had voiced outrage to her publisher, Michael Sadleir, about a party game at her expense, so it was possible that at the time someone had either gossiped out of school or had been untruthful, and in either case, was malicious. Sadleir at the time and Viola later both vehemently denied such a game had ever transpired. Nevertheless, in a 1943 letter to Viola, Naomi was still wounded, having tried to raise a wall of oblivion: “[. . .] letting my acquaintanceship with all of you begin *after* these horrors. So I can’t delve into those days when I was useful enough to Humbert and to Rose for them to play at being friends [. . .]. I’m sorry to write this way but I am busy and happy now and don’t want to go back into a time I can forgive but not altogether forget.”<sup>34</sup>

As literary editor of the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* and then *The Queen*, Naomi had generously encouraged scores of writers, including

Rose Macaulay. The tables had turned. Now an author in her own right, she depended upon the good will of others, including those whose reputations she had boosted. Her disappointment may have been intense when she found those she helped short on reciprocal generosity.

Royde-Smith was always hard on herself in her fiction, often using aspects of what she perceived about her various selves to create characters that she then judged severely. She took her persona-as-muse to task, suggesting that her charisma was an accident of complexion. One of the characters in a late novel *She Always Met the Post* (1953) was a woman feature writer and editor of a ladies' magazine. Beautiful and shallow, physically she "glistened," attracting both men and women indiscriminately, and they fell in love with her. Royde-Smith's conclusion: the love of acolytes was as shallow as charisma based on facial dew.

Naomi and Louise Morgan [Theis], editor of *Everyman*, had become especially close between 1930 and 1933. She warned Louise that Ernest would "always have a twinge lest I should love you very nearly as much as I love him. It's a good thing we meet so seldom."<sup>35</sup> She was living in Hatfield at the time, Louise in Hampstead with her husband and young children. Naomi's utterances were mannered rather than effusive. Nevertheless, Louise reciprocated with warm affection, describing a glistening quality in Naomi: "How enchanting you were last night. You should always wear white. [...] I always adore you in a crowd. You wear a little aura of excitement" (ca. June 1930, NRS MSS). Theirs was a tainted dance between author and editor of reviews who oversaw distribution of publicity and salaried work—as Naomi once had.

Anxious to escape city life in London, Naomi welcomed an introduction to an avant-garde writer, Mary Butts, who was living at Land's End in Cornwall. The introduction was accomplished through Richard Ellis Roberts, editor of *The New Statesman and Nation* and then *Life and Letters Today*. Ellis was appreciative of Butts's modernist fiction. Butts's life had been complicated. Before her first marriage and during the 1910s, she had lived with her lover Eleanor Rogers, from whom she separated when she fell in love with John Rodker, with whom she had a daughter. By the time that she and Naomi met in December 1932, Butts was living with her bisexual second husband, the artist William "Gabriel" Aitkin, from whom she divorced in 1934. Naomi described her initial meeting with Butts in *Pilgrim from Paddington* (1933). They shared tea with Ruth and George Manning-Sanders, both writers:

At tea, sitting round a black polished table that reflected candles and candlelight between dishes of cream and ginger and marrow jam, that glowed like amber, and Cornish butter and home-made cake and bread, we found Mary Butts and Gabriel Aiken—her husband, and the talk was of ghosts and wrecks and of books written and unwritten, including *The Death of Felicity Taverner* [Butts, 1932] and Ruth’s proposed and moving comedy of a child’s summer holiday in the Scilly Islands, *She Was Sophia* [1932]. (52)

Mary Butts and Naomi’s correspondence was curiously intense, uncharacteristically so on Naomi’s part. They seemed to connect easily, intimately, and frankly. Mary wrote: “Your visit to Sennen is a very lovely thing in both our lives. As though something had happened we’ll never be without again & can’t imagine what things were like before it happened—was that it *has* happened. It is a thing we bless—” (n.d., NRS MSS). Responding, Naomi described life with her “genius,” their shared moniker for each of their spouses: “My genius is now 4/5 Lorenzino de Medici [. . .]. Monday will see him restored to himself and me. I love you Mary Butts and want to push on Cleopatra with my wish for her & you” (23 May 1933, Butts MSS). Mary was writing *Scenes from the Life of Cleopatra* (1935), and Ernest was immersed in character preparation for his performance in *Night’s Candles*.

They shared many important aspects of their lives aside from their own ambivalent sexuality and that of their artist husbands. They were both fiction writers, and they both were experiencing tendencies toward Christian observance leaning in the direction of Catholicism, as well as sharing an abiding curiosity in parapsychological and mystical phenomena—not that they agreed about psychic representations. In a letter, Naomi ruthlessly critiqued Butts’s collection of short stories, *Several Occasions* (1932): “You are not using but *betraying* magic. You are half drawing veils. You don’t draw them quite—and you must stop. You must not write about but because of it” (ca. 1933, Butts MSS).

Mary strove to persuade Naomi to settle in an adjacent cottage to hers in Sennen, but for Naomi this was too intimate, and Sennen was within striking distance of Ernest’s turmoil in London. Moreover, she viewed Mary as dependent, financially needy, constantly soliciting review work or work of any order. Although Naomi hired her to proofread *Pilgrim from Paddington*, she grew unhappy with the



arrangement and wary of entanglement. In the same letter in which she had attacked Butts's understanding of magic, she deflated hope for neighborly proximity in Penzance: "Wells is heavenly. It enfolds and soothes and prepares ways. It makes Penzance seem like Hell. I don't think I shall ever live in Sennen—only go there from time to time—from this place. Last night in mist & darkness the cathedral front was filled again with all the statues that have crumbled or been taken away. I saw them. It was incredibly rich—and gone" (ca. 1933, Butts MSS). Mary was stung: "Sennen *isn't* good enough for you. Wells is perhaps. But we're very sorry about that" (8 January 1934, NRS MSS). Naomi had insulted Mary by rejecting both her writing and her neighborhood. Perhaps her relationship with Mary Butts had become too intense. Their correspondence dwindled to nothing.

Mary Butts died aged forty-seven in March 1937 after emergency surgery for a perforated ulcer. Naomi wrote an obituary for *Time and Tide* in which she eulogized her as "a person so vital that to be with her was immediately to be increased by some measure of her own stature and, even to think of her in absence, was a stimulation," adding, poignantly, a snippet of Edna St Vincent Millay's poem, a resentful lament over the loss of a beloved: "Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;/ Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave;/ I know; but I do not approve, and I am not resigned."<sup>36</sup> In June, for *Time and Tide* Naomi reviewed Mary's posthumously published *The Crystal Cabinet*, an incomplete autobiography in which the woman comforts the child she had been.<sup>37</sup>

A decade later, Mary Butts's cottage on the cliff overlooking the Atlantic was the dark setting of a penultimate chapter in Royde-Smith's *Love in Mildensee* (1948). The narrative hinged on the protagonist's self-recognition that desire-out-of-love and desire-out-of-hate might be equally binding forces, leading women to partner with women in guilt and isolation.

Reminiscent of Royde-Smith as a young woman, the novel's protagonist, Annette Willloughby, chaperoned a prospective English student to boarding school in Mildensee, a thinly disguised Geneva. Annette adored the adolescent who slumbered on the train; she was mesmerized by a strand of silky hair falling across the girl's face. She felt herself "the mother who had loved this innocence; the ravisher who had devoured it; the priest who had striven to free the elusive soul from

the bonds of the fragile, mortal flesh. She was torn by pity, she burnt with desire” (41). Although the chaperone returned to her normal, self-possessed state of being, she knew “she would never be quite the same Annette she had been yesterday” (43). Nor was she.

Once again in a train carriage, now speeding away from Mildensee, the protagonist, Annette, had disguised yet another adolescent companion, a murderess, as a cross-dressing boy, cropping her hair and providing trousers, ceremoniously flinging her coarse dark braid out an open window while hurdling through a black tunnel, tolerating a grateful hand on her knee and kisses lavished on her feet. She experienced fear “driving her into hate, with a pulsing hatred that seemed to throb in the same rhythm, but to another tune, as the sensual idolatry of Lynton’s silver and ivory stainlessness” (247).

In maturity, the two women, now partners, inhabited a cottage in Cornwall, warding off marriage with men, eschewing Catholic confession, and locked in isolation. A middle-aged man, once a young man from her past in Mildensee, sought Annette, belatedly concluding that he loved her. On terrain sloping toward the Atlantic, remembering that “the word magic had evil connotations,” he followed his heart’s desire down a footpath that “led straight to an enormous boulder that lay crouched and sinister as if it were the ossified body of some toad-like monster which had destroyed the inhabitants of the land and broken their stone fences, before it, too, was slain” (267). Behind this prehistoric menhir, there was an unfenced, precipitous, and dangerous pit driving down to a cavern, its floor jagged with rock spires. Annette had ensured their segregation as women from mankind in an environment fraught with vaginal menace. The cottage on the cliff that it protected was similar to Mary Butts’s environs in Sennen that Naomi had associated with hell.

By the time Naomi wrote *Love in Mildensee* after the Second World War, many of the important women in her life were dead. Winnie Austin, to whom this book was dedicated, had died in 1919. Margie Hamilton Fellows had died in 1926. Mary Butts in 1937. Kathleen Rees-Mogg would die a year after its publication in 1949. Zoë Richmond and Theodora Bosanquet remained alive and in Naomi’s life; however, they lived a distance from Winchester, where Naomi made her home between 1937 and 1954.

# Chapter 5

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## With Walter de la Mare, 1911-1956

- Peace, 1911–1914
- War, 1914–1918
- Fiction, 1919–1956

### Peace, 1911-1914

During 1911, Naomi was habitually meeting with writers and colleagues from the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* over informal weekly lunches at the Wayside or Wellington or Formosa or Temple restaurants. She enjoyed cultivating essayists and journalists, keeping her people organized, distributing and gathering reviews and essays for the literary pages. Naomi was witty, seductive, always encouraging—a charismatic professional muse; it was her role to enthrall the loyal hands and willing pens of intellectuals agreeing to write without attribution, paid by word count and inches, as was the custom on the *Gazette*. Since September 1910, she had been soliciting work from Walter de la Mare, then a relatively unknown writer. In late February 1911, de la Mare nuzzled into Miss N. G. Royde-Smith's luncheon milieu. It was their first face to face encounter in what was to become an enduring, sometimes romantic, and intimate friendship.

Married and father of four, Walter de la Mare had rather courageously abandoned his salaried position in the accounting department of the Anglo-American Oil Company, hoping to support his family as a writer. He was not a wealthy man. His first book of collected poems had

appeared in 1902 under the pseudonym of Walter Ramal, and a full-length novel came out in 1904, neither of which had been remunerative. However, in 1908, through the intercession of a popular Edwardian poet, Henry Newbolt, de la Mare was awarded an annual government pension and had begun to augment his income by reviewing for the *Times Literary Supplement*.

His novel *The Return* (1910) was awarded the 1911 Polignac Prize of the Royal Society. In September Naomi Royde-Smith began corresponding with the goal of securing weekly contributions for the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*. They exchanged assessments about John Donne as mystic; she corrected his facts; she praised de la Mare's treatment of the occult. They quibbled over ownership of books sent for review. N. G. Royde-Smith wrote diplomatic chastisements, such as: "The printer is the enemy of style, and he asked me yesterday if you could be asked not to make your proof corrections so heavy" (October 1910, Mare MSS). As acting editor, she also presided over choosing books for review, valued advertisement of new works. She apprised de la Mare of her power: "I must apologize that no review of your fairy-book has appeared yet [. . .]" (30 December 1910, Mare MSS).



Walter de la Mare, 1912.



Naomi Royde-Smith, ca. 1926.

Walter de la Mare's demeanor that first afternoon over lunch disappointed Naomi's expectations, or so she claimed over forty years later. Instead of her imagined "lean ascetic with a high forehead, haunted eyes and a rather quelling power of silence," a manner she thought befitting the poet who had conjured subversively sinister magic, she encountered a man who was "short and sturdy" ["stout" in the draft manuscript of her essay] with the face of a "Roman emperor" who had "an enchanting smile" and "faun's ears": "His blue serge suit with a round jacket gave him a faintly nautical air [spoofing on his name], and he was far from silent."<sup>1</sup> For de la Mare the "real" was what he had imagined before meeting, not what he actually encountered. Nevertheless, Miss N. G. Royde-Smith certainly did not disappoint de la Mare's lively fancy: "Who'd have believed you were so tall! The *real* Miss Royde Smith was middle height, not a bit slim, with white round hands & so calm & clever, dressed in brown although she was always really kind & considerate [. . .]" (Easter Day [April 16] 1911, Mare MSS). Several months later he returned to this first moment: "you queer old thing, you *were* a surprise when your eyes & your hair & your shoulders & your cold hands came into the doorway that cloudy March afternoon" (PMK 27 June 1911, Mare MSS). Walter de la Mare was smitten.

This was the beginning of a story that would unfurl over the ensuing forty-five years until Walter de la Mare died. The documentary record is dense, albeit weighted unequally, revealing a good deal about his feelings and thoughts and not so much about hers. For unlike her obsessive response to Henry Spiess, she did not keep intimate self-probing journals about her entanglement with Walter de la Mare.

Early on, Naomi did try her best to do for de la Mare what she had done for Henry Spiess ten years before. She initiated three different diaries during 1912, two devoted to de la Mare. In addition to her normal daily diary containing the usual encrypted details of her crowded life, she attempted to keep a daily diary starting in January simply to record reception of his letters; it petered out by April although his letters to her continued to flow whether she recorded their arrival or not. During the same year, in yet a third journal, she tried writing miniature essays about de la Mare. After three anecdotes, she stopped for no discernable reason. Over eight hundred of de la Mare's letters to Naomi have survived, along with approximately forty of hers, many of which were written in her professional capacity as literary editor (Mare MSS). She obviously wrote more often than records reveal. Usually, but not always, he destroyed her clandestine letters after reading them. Her missives sometimes arrived in the evening post concealed in books sent for review. In his letters to her, he reassured her anxieties by making certain she knew that he was burning her letters immediately. He burned hers, but she kept his against his wishes. Perhaps, with wife and family, his motivation to burn was stronger. His were dateless without salutation and signature; she preserved most in their postmarked envelopes, although on occasion several might be jumbled into one envelope. Besides love letters, appointment making, and general literary gossip, their correspondence contained poems provoked by their circumstances, again mainly his, many of which were published—if not immediately, at least during the long course of his life. Her poems, mainly unpublished, are tucked away in diaries and archives.

During late 1913 through June 1914, she and de la Mare collaborated in writing an epistolary novel, *John Fanning's Legacy*, published many years later solely under her name. Both would produce novels using aspects of the other: he in *Memoirs of a Midget* (1921), she in *The Housemaid* (1926) and *Melilot* (1955).

There are no records of Naomi's immediate impressions of de la Mare during the first months after meeting in 1911. In those early months, de la Mare wrote, often and at length, invocations that brimmed with supplication and word play. In at least eight instances after March 1911, he referred back to a single encounter on a parapet overlooking black water: "[. . .] the swan in the flood & the cold dark wind blowing over the water—something not quite there—as Henry James would say. And it was so curious dimly seeing your face against that restless background of water" (PMK 2 April 1911, Mare MSS). He accused her of witchcraft by "magicking up the swan." By October, he was more explicit: "Even thought a bit you were only pretending—or half pretending to be friends at the beginning & I suppose making fine fun of my swan. Fun or no fun, magic it was—& it's lucky I don't dabble in magic—there's devils in plenty to come at a nod, not to speak of the legim [sic.], that hap along without" (ca. October 1911). Finally, de la Mare penned a poem, capping his phallic swan imagery and terminating its appearance in his letters. In this poem a lady charmed swans in March mist; it was a dreamer's vision: "But only in memory/ Lovelier than ever/ That lady will mock/ From the mists of the river."<sup>2</sup> This untitled, unpublished poem was template for a later poem, the poignantly devastating "The Old Angler" (*The Veil and Other Poems*, 1921).

Naomi's daily diary for 1911 remained blank until April 30, her birthday, as though she had lost (or thrown away) her first and had started a second. From de la Mare's letters, we discover that her initial overture was to invite him together with Mrs. de la Mare to a Thursday at-home on March 2. He apologized for his wife's inability to attend, and then, several days later, wrote again to apologize for having stayed late when he came by himself. For five months Naomi refused to meet Walter de la Mare unless in public or unless others were present, as at her Thursday *les soirs* or at tea with her sister Erica, or on walks with his young son Colin. He hated her blockade. Excusing himself from a Thursday, he railed: "And there are a lot of people—what's the good? Do you ask me then because distrust cramps your breast at the possibility of being left alone with me?" (PMK 30 May 1911, Mare MSS).

In response to de la Mare's attentions, besides pushing him away, her next gesture was to make clear that creativity was a two-way street. She had learned her lesson from Henry Spiess and no longer allowed herself to be flattened and flattered as an idealized private muse. Having read de

la Mare's works, she now expected him to read hers. She shared poems, juvenilia included (archived with his editing), and an unpublished novel, *The Irresolutes*, written and rejected by publishers in 1904. Not satisfied with his first responses, she pressed for more, and he complied, claiming that more than anything he wanted to be "instrumental" in her literary endeavors (PMK 14 March 1911, Mare MSS). Indeed, in the beginning, he was Naomi Royde-Smith's man muse.

Nevertheless, during de la Mare's first flush of courting, Naomi's attention was not riveted on him but rather on Kathleen Mary Christina Hamilton Douty, née Wills. Before traveling from London to Cannes for the month of April in 1911, Naomi refrained from telling him anything about her feelings for Kathleen. She also declined to correspond while she was away. She was off to have, in her words quoted by de la Mare, a "*tête-a-tête* with Destiny." Not to be put off, he sent several philosophically slanted letters addressed in care of a "Mrs. Douty." He ruminated about the "incessant insecurity & fugitiveness of everything." He felt that the present was a pretense, that he was on the "brink of something," that the future couldn't possibly come, and if it did, it would bring futures that couldn't happen: "And I long to get things over, to have them safe in memory—beyond the gnawings of foreboding & anxiety. Even you are best in memory, where I cannot change you nor you yourself" (PMK 24 April 1911, Mare MSS).

Ironically, when he was seventy-five years old and convalescing, de la Mare unveiled what his memory had finally preserved in amber: "It's strange that I can remember you years before we met—when you were a girl; & I sometimes saw you in the early morning with children (on the way to school?) in Nightingale Lane. And you completely unaware of it. [. . .] What is this Memory, a kaleidoscopical island in an enormous sea of the forgotten" (PMK 9 June 1948, Milton MSS). What was "real" for de la Mare was what he had imagined; for him, the "real" and his fantasies were one and the same.

While Naomi was in Cannes, de la Mare wooed her with a freshly minted narrative poem entitled "The End of J. B." He challenged her to name another poet who had written verse for her. At this point he knew nothing of Henry Spiess, the poet who had preceded him in her affections. "The End of J. B." was never published. In this manuscript of thirty-eight lines, de la Mare versified sentiments about memory similar to his philosophical letters to her. The protagonist, "John Binns,"



sits by the river Lethe, willing and wanting to forget all excepting one memory of an experience he had not yet had, but one he was sure would withstand death's oblivion. Only one image in the poem was imbued with hope: "one giant Yew/Raised fruited branches to the Milky Way/Black as the Cross against the bower of May" (ca. April 1911, Mare MSS). In his next letter he queried her reactions, wanting to know if "J. B." could be shifted from present to past tense, from "sits" to "sat" on the bank of Lethe, and if the word "you" could be substituted for "Yew," thus associating her with fruit, milk, bowers, and Christian salvation (PMK 24 April 1911, Mare MSS).

"Binns" became Naomi's pet name for de la Mare, known as Jack to his friends and family and W. J. to her coterie. At first, he nicknamed her "Ann," associating "Ann" with what he called his "cry for water," ostensibly his thirst for something vital, but he grew embittered during that first summer. He asserted that "Ann" had become tainted with scolding and lecturing and pushing him away. "Naomi" was a perfectly good name, he conceded; nevertheless, "Naomi" was not a suitable interlocutor in his private silent discourse. "Nann" was his new choice as of August, and so she remained until she became "N. G." during the 1920s and thereafter.

At de la Mare's urging, Naomi began to write new fiction for his perusal. He counseled her to continue writing while it was "piping hot": "I smile a long quiet smile to myself when I think of this sudden inspiration for I do believe it's a little bit ME that's done it! I like it *enormously* [. . .]," continuing with useful instructions about using setting to enhance emotional resonance. He did acknowledge that she would probably know more than he about a young girl's first sexual "horror & confusion." Calling her the "Queen of Sheba," he quoted a passage from her new offering in which she had described a woman finding compensation when disappointed in love. De la Mare quoted Royde-Smith's composition back to her, adding his own emphasis: "[. . .] Margaret was consoling herself for her first jealousy by taking the *second-best* which is so curiously often offered to women at those moments when they have begun to long for some gift which is denied them" (PMK 26 May 1911, Mare MSS). Perhaps this was the manuscript of *Margaret Anwyl* that Royde-Smith had started while comforting Kathleen Douty in Cannes. De la Mare assumed that she was referring to himself: "True, O Sheba! There I am as plain as plain

can be with my friendship. *S.B.* not *J.B.* it must be in the future.” De la Mare’s emphasis underscored “*S.B.*,” which stood for “second-best”; “*J.B.*” was “John Binns,” his nickname in their private correspondence. Alarmed, Naomi slammed shut her notebooks, refusing to lift her pen to write fiction for him, ending her creation of the character Margaret, because he had presumed that she was writing from her own experience rather than from her imagination. This masculine muse of hers was so certain of entitlement that it did not occur to him that if she was writing from personal knowledge, she might be suggesting in her unhappily ambivalent way that “second-best” referred to her love for Kathleen Douty.

In a letter postmarked 12 May 1911, de la Mare declared that he loved her, and at the same time he vowed to stop digging for her secrets:

You do not know what you mean to me—the best I have, the best in me. And I will try & try not to question any more. We’ll just believe in one another: else, I know, I shall soon weary you into hating the very thought of me. It shall, as you said, be ‘different’ & ‘not bitter.’ I do see that. But I do love you—can say it knowing it need not make you angry nor me ashamed. And if it does offend you—just forget it.

Negotiating the terms of their relationship, she had apparently refused to give him what he wanted, proposing a “different” sort of arrangement and enjoining him, or perhaps both of them, not to be “bitter” about it.

After de la Mare declared love, Naomi began to be more responsive, although until late June she was still refusing to see him alone. Over and over, he accused her of “reticence” and harangued her. In July they spent an afternoon together out-of-doors and without chaperones. He asked her to remember their discussion: “[. . .] we sat & you said all the horrid things your hard little mind could think of in Richmond Park.” He went on to acknowledge that she was free to love another man: “I know what you said at Richmond is true. I never for an instant imagined else. He’ll come along some day, the ‘nice Englishman’ & Binns will be like a tale that is told, all but full of sound & fury” (PMK 25 August 1911, Mare MSS). Weeks later, while on an outing in Henley with wealthy friends and accompanied by cushions, a footman, the accoutrements of luxury, she implored de la Mare to trust her as much as she trusted him; she disdained the disparity in wealth between herself and her hosts:

I'm very glad that it does not make me in the least bit discontented with my life. I'd honestly *rather* be poor. Your alternative of a nunnery or a £10,000 a year spouse just shows that you don't know me yet. I wonder why it is that I am quite content and calm believing in you, knowing, in spite of what seems wicked, that you are good and sincere—and you are so tormented by doubt about me. (ca. summer 1911, Milton MSS)

When eventually Naomi found a man she wished to marry, she did not think it would be for money.

Another event upon which he remarked in his letters for reiterated remembrance occurred in what he called “the charmed time of the heather.” During August, Naomi accepted an invitation to visit the de la Mare family on holiday near Hastings, and while there, she and he had nestled in the heather where they sat quietly talking and listening to the sounds around them. Later he described her face in profile, and marveled at the extraordinary change in himself, for even his wife had noted that he was different:

What's odder still, she said that my face went thin! In that one Sunday evening when you & I sat in the heather with our backs to the poor scorch heath at Hastings. [. . .] I don't know what it means; (or forebodes) only that you & it ['distant music and solitude'] have come together & that nothing has resembled it in my life before. (ca. September 1911, Mare MSS)

In her daily diary for 1911, deep in the pocket side slits where it had eluded the compiling archivist, I found a sprig of desiccated heather and an unsigned note in de la Mare's handwriting. He wrote: “I didn't mean what you thought I meant. And I do believe it's only that I get in deadly terror in mind sometimes—without interest or hope, & wonder how I can be a friend worth anybody's having. Don't think the word, but the self that loves you beneath them all” (n.d., NRS MSS).

By the time in that first year that Naomi went on holiday to Geneva, mid-September to mid-October, their relationship had shifted and deepened profoundly. She sent him letters that he could not bring

himself to destroy, vowing to stash them safely until she returned from Switzerland when he could give them back to her for safekeeping.

One of her missives has survived, indexed as an “incomplete name” in her Philadelphia archives. It was hand-delivered before her departure. The note is in her handwriting. On the blank side of the triangularly folded sheet of paper is inscribed “J. B.” [John Binns]. It is one lone love letter from her to weigh against his hundreds. It is a lighthearted, literary, and smug note:

My dear and dear. If you knew how the face of all the world was changed by those few pencil scribbles this morning! It *is* worthwhile writing to me when you're gone. When you *say* you love me I know I love you. Not that I wasn't knowing it on Sunday all day. But the person who makes all that fun when you get pale & stern and 'really must go now' is a difficult person to be left alone with. Being by myself I've never minded—but being without you is quite another thing, and that I do most increasingly dread. And it's a burden and a responsibility I'm going to be to you, you see, if this goes on, and you so burdened as it is. Hoard the hours. I should think I did! Who is it, keeps their records then & dusts them & polishes them & prepares sandwiches for them & sets a bell in a little silver clock—later & later for their knell—I'd like to know. Not you. You just take as many of them as I can borrow, steal from what the WORLD calls my life—and then you're not content & waste some of them most shocking. I've got all those we had locked in a Memory Chest. 'So is the time that hides you as a chest, or as a wardrobe which the robe doth hide, to make some special instant special blest, by new unfolding his imprison'd pride.' There'll be a very 'special instant' when the horses have turned their heads to the East once & for all next week—should you like to have the Boy to tea. Good night. I'm so sleepy. I've been to the play tonight—but it was all just marking time until the 'real day'—tomorrow—and you know that's true because you do it yourself. (Box 16, NRS MSS)

In this note, Naomi teasingly declared her love. She scolded him for wasting her time when they were together—and this after she had spent her precious, limited hours preparing for their rendezvous. She went on to quote Shakespeare's "Sonnet 52" inaccurately from memory, claiming that she hoarded moments with him for recall, as he did of her. She ended with a mock-heroic trope about leave-taking for Switzerland, horse heads pointed eastward and invited the "Boy," his ideal of the poet, to tea.

Naomi and de la Mare had not decided what to do with their acknowledged and now mutually declared love. In one lost letter de la Mare may have clearly said that he did not intend to have a sexual affair, or so speculated his biographer, Theresa Whistler. Ostensibly, Naomi responded, but the letter cited by Whistler is now also lost. In this retort, Naomi declared that she had not really wanted a sexual liaison, that she had just been going along with him: "It's really what I've meant all along—and if I've seemed to *be* or to want something more tangible and less real it was only because I thought you did—only I couldn't say so. I could only tell myself that there had to be symbols and signs of realities so long as this muddy vesture of decay must needs stand between poor mortals and their sight of everlastingness."<sup>3</sup> Again, in language they shared, she was placing spiritual over physical love. It was a usual attitude for her, and she had lived her conviction.

De la Mare began to express niggles of marital guilt. Perhaps rationalizing, he claimed that although married he experienced discomfort only when writing letters and never when he actually fantasized about her. He compared his passion to his love for his son Colin, who had just blown a kiss to him across his office desk. Did he really think she was like a child blowing kisses? It's true: he often asked her to be childlike. In a subsequent letter, he maintained that she inhabited his "subconscious" and that he was not plagued by conscience because she existed in his imagination: "Perhaps all the best things, the really real things, come into life through the imagination. That way they live. If they come purely through the senses they don't so much live as well" (PMK 26 September 1911, Mare MSS). It is clear that after seven months, de la Mare and Naomi, whatever their agreements, had not made a carnal bargain. In January 1912 he said as much: "If I had been a Don Juan & you wildly in love with me, could we have struck a harder bargain for the privilege?" (PMK 25 January 1912, Mare MSS).

Undoubtedly, many in London had already assumed they were sexually entangled. De la Mare fretted that Naomi would take the brunt of malicious talk, and, indeed, she did. As the gossip amplified, de la Mare, bleak, apologized: “. . . how wretched I am that you are being bothered & talked at about me. [. . .] I know quite well I ought for *your* sake to drag myself out of your life. How could I knowing what my life would be without you?” (PMK 25 June 1912, Mare MSS). Eventually, Naomi requested that he stop coming to her office because it was causing trouble for her. Whistler in her informative biography *Walter de la Mare, Imagination of the Heart* (1993) erroneously conjectured that Naomi had done her level best to lure de la Mare into bed. The mistaken designation of Naomi Royde-Smith as *femme fatale* seducer of de la Mare continues to crop up, most notably in an essay in the *New York Review of Books* (2003).<sup>4</sup>

When Naomi returned from Europe in the fall, de la Mare asked her to select one poem from three to be included “for her” in the collection of poetry he was putting together to be published in 1912 as *The Listeners and Other Poems*, the title poem of which would become cornerstone to his fame, collected in anthologies for decades. Of the three poems, one actually did appear in *The Listeners*. It began: “When the rose is faded,/ Memory may still dwell on [. . .].” Yet a second poem was never published; its first stanza began: “Cold, dear, in this small grave/[. . .] My dead desire.” The third poem, “The Vision,” appeared thirty-three years later in *The Burning-Glass* (1945), the first stanza of which began: “O starry face, bound in grave strands of hair./ Aloof, remote, past speech or thought to bless—.” Naomi chose “When the Rose Is Faded” for inclusion in *The Listeners*. It expressed memory of a rose lasting longer than its fragrance; she preferred it to the poem about dead desire and the one about a starry face bound indeterminately by hair and grave.

The year 1912 was filled with irritation and pique between Nann and Binns. De la Mare was adamant, not wanting to meet her at lunch with others “munching,” not wanting to mingle at her Thursdays, not wanting her “to hang the Ten Commandments around his neck.” What he desired were more letters, more bus and train rendezvouses, more walks across London and through its parks, more peace and silence in her company over teas and suppers in her Chelsea flat. She often recorded in her daily diaries that he had sent cross and unjust letters

and often that he was unpleasant, typically: “Binns in a bad, bad temper after lunch” (22 February 1912, Mare MSS).

He tried valiantly to rescue the Thursdays for resuscitation in his imagination. In February, he wrote that he used to hate her at-homes because of the admiration bestowed on her by others; however, he was certain that at the last Thursday they had been as intimate as if alone: “And your eyes had a kind of haze of flame in their darkness & you were ever so much alone with me, weren’t you dear? And then every now & then you looked so horribly tired & it makes me horribly anxious. And I thought just to have a moment with you to say good bye—and you wouldn’t let me” (PMK 10 February 1912, Mare MSS). He had come in late, joining a group that included Graham, Kathleen, and three other women friends. He was right. Naomi tended to shove him out the door on Thursday nights. She was an exhausted working woman. The *Saturday Westminster Gazette* pages went to press on Friday.

De la Mare was avoiding all of her Thursdays by March 1912. They continued to make assignations on trains and in buses and in parks. Often they would dine at The Good Intent in Croyden, near Anerley where he lived with his wife and children.

For her part, in her diaries Naomi wrote poems suggesting resistance to de la Mare’s pull on her affections, and when he read these poems he confessed lack of understanding, not from “want of brains” but “from want of sensitiveness.” In one poem she wrote:

If I could tell—if any word of mine  
Saying ‘I love you’ suddenly made clear  
How much, or when, I should be bankrupt-dear  
And all the world might know it by that sign,  
If to my heart had crept a thieving Fear  
To rout him I might cry that all was well  
But should told that he still lingered here  
And mocked security—if I could tell. (diary, 3 January 1912,  
NRS MSS)

Here, employing an extended money metaphor (“bankrupt,” “dear,” “security”), she speculated that if she actually managed to show a “sign” of her love for him—ostensibly, sexual consummation—she might “rout” him, chase him away, for he would finally have what he wanted

from her. On the other hand, he just might stay, and of this she was uncertain. De la Mare's response? He replied that if she'd just say, "But I do—O yes' all would be well. I know that would be an *expensive* way of doing things—but so it is" (ca. January 1912, Mare MSS). Revealingly, he assumed that for her purchasing what he called "the ticket" might cause her conscience to "squeak," perhaps a projection of his own plight, while missing her ambivalence about either keeping him or pushing him away, and her recognition that if she submitted one or the other of them might leave.

If ever Naomi submitted in flesh, it might have been on September 13, 1912, but the evidence is circumstantial at best. De la Mare commemorated the thirteenth one year later when he greeted her on "an anniversary" of knowing her for "real." He wrote a love letter in tribute: "It's always the first time with me—because somehow I did know you all, the real first time. And fall in love with you—I do that with almost every turn of your head & touch of your hand" (PMK 12 September 1913, Mare MSS). Since "real" for de la Mare often denoted activities occurring in his imagination, it was not clear that they had had an actual sexual encounter. For Naomi's part, in her daily diary for September 13, 1912, she had enigmatically recorded: "Lived in my bedroom." There was nothing more. During the rest of September and all of October, the record of de la Mare's letters goes unusually silent until the beginning of November, the first lacuna since the beginning of their courtship. Perhaps he did not write or the letters were lost or destroyed. As for Naomi, in her daily diary for 1913, in the memo space located at the bottom of the page of this "anniversary," instead of sweet nostalgia she copied an Oxford prize poem (1878) about Rizpah, the biblical concubine of Samuel, who speculated about loathly scavengers who "feasted on some wretched sheep,/ Which far behind its herd has fallen asleep,/ And satiated with one horrid meal/ No second relish for another feel." The famous last two lines of this poem traditionally were used by students of Winchester College to mark an unpalatable meal that did not bear repeating. If those lines were Naomi's comment on whatever had happened on September 13 and if anything carnal had transpired in her bedroom, perhaps she felt it should not be repeated.

De la Mare sent her printed copies of "An Epitaph" and "The Ghost," chastening her to remember the circumstance in which they had been written (PMK 22 January 1912, Mare MSS). He frequently



associated Naomi with “ghost” in his lexicon, by which he meant she had a particular “essence,” something deeper and more true than what he considered her various constructed, multifaceted social selves: “the you in essence, the ghost I *took* whether you would or wouldn’t” (ca. January 1912, Mare MSS). He conceived of this “essence” as a psychic emanation over which she had no control and was beyond her will. The image of Naomi-as-ghost gathered meaning over time. To him, she was what “comes after death”: “I suppose it is the child in me that longs to come & hide his eyes in your cold hands” (PMK 8 April 1912, Mare MSS). She—“Ghost!”—was associated with “green & quiet” and “peace” (PMK 8 April 1912, Mare MSS). Sometimes she was symphonic music, sometimes silence. He conjured her ghost in dark rooms where he knew she was “there” even if he failed to see her: “You remind me of a crocus—half closer to the shadow of a cedar tree—like a beautiful poem [. . .] and you have held life with your truth clenched, like a torch in the wood” (PMK 20 January 1912, Mare MSS). He spent late nights alone in his study trying “[. . .] to make your ghost come out of the dark doorway in the corner. Once I saw your gold hair faintly riding in, but *you* were crouching round the corner.” For him, her “essence” was not the imagined presentation of physical hair, it was what crouched beyond his conscious fancy. De la Mare also thought of himself as a ghost: “You shall see wind in long tangled grass & such a ghost a dancing on his grave—a ghost divinely mad & so alive as to have access between the real & the other” (PMK 24 May 1912, Mare MSS). Naomi-as-ghost was de la Mare’s muse, whether she wanted to be or not. He imagined her everywhere: “I put my hand to the empty chair beside me. And a ghost did come. And then—there wasn’t time to slip quite into peace” (PMK 1 July 1912, Mare MSS).

Much later, during the First World War, unable to compose poetry, he blamed his dearth of inspiration on the ghost he could no longer conjure through the portal opening to his subconscious: “[. . .] it’s impossible to turn out a nursery jingle unless some queer little door’s ajar in one’s mind, somebody’s peeping in the window at me.”

She was wry about her role as his muse-as-portal. In her poem, titled “Unrequiting,” the speaker drolly addressed a “dear,” an intimate other:

Dear, it is strange that one whose idle hand  
 Opens a door for you

Into the unimaginable land,  
Can never follow through  
To share its hour with you.<sup>5</sup>

Naomi tweaked de la Mare: although she casually enabled his imaginings, she could not share his special other world. It was not clear, in her estimation, who was “unrequiting,” perhaps both: he might not invite her to share the “unimaginable land”; she could refuse to accompany him thither, perhaps because for her the land connoted death.

In another of her verses, she was sardonic about de la Mare’s tendency to conjoin her ghost with death, noting that if she was separated from him by sea or wild he would “discover” her, but if she were dead, he would take her body to a sure, sorrowful place: “[w]here you could hold it and be/ At one with yourself for a space/ And with me.”<sup>6</sup> She was conjecturing sardonically that de la Mare preferred her dead so that he could commune with himself, a romantic cathexis, and all the while, he would survive while she was lifeless. An ironic footnote: Naomi redrafted this poem in 1955, attributing it to the character of a narcissistic poet in her novel *Melilot* (1955), who substituted his masculine voice for the feminine in the original poem, the revision beginning: “If you were dead I might take/ Your tender body [...] (140).

In the October pages of her 1912 daily diary that was solely devoted to de la Mare, Naomi began to record a poem that she dated June 27–28 in its final form. After receiving it, de la Mare took to calling her the “mystery” in his letters. The poem, squirreled away in so many different archives in both the United States and England, must have been important to her. Existential, it conveyed self-empowerment and self-responsibility, and surely it was not a generous message for a muse to deliver to her aspirant:

How can I tell,  
I who am heart of the mystery, word of the spell,  
How give to you—even you  
Signal or clue?

For, if I be  
Not only the shrine but the secret,  
Not a mere key  
But the treasure it locks from the door

It is all mine.  
It has grown with me from the beginning  
The coarse with the fine;  
All that I doubt,  
All that I have striven to possess,  
All I'd cast out.

Could you look in,  
See where I shelter a virtue, stifle a sin,  
You would still ask  
Which was the ultimate honesty,  
Which the mask.

You cannot find  
Any sure way through the tangle,  
Soul, body and mind:  
You can but take  
Peace and the torment, the clear with the dim,  
For the mystery's sake.<sup>7</sup>

Royde-Smith's insistence on self-possession, diminishing the masculine key in favor of the feminine portal to treasure, was retort to pressure from de la Mare; he wanted her to embody his idea of "child" and "woman" and so on. He enjoined her to eschew cleverness. He wished she were not analytical. In her versified retort she maintained that if he wanted her as muse and mystery, then he must take the complicated whole for it could not be disentangled—as in Cartesian separations of body and mind. She was self-determining and not an object of his invention.

When apart, de la Mare and Naomi agreed to meditate on one another coincident with the rising moon, which for others might be a cliché, but was not for de la Mare. For him, this telepathic bridge was immanent as well as urgent, and Naomi was identified with that moon: "The little moon that April brings,/More lovely shade than light [. . .] Close to the world of my poor heart/ So stole she, still and clear [. . .]" ("April Moon," *Motley*, 1918). Naomi was born in April. Five lyrical poems, the sequence beginning with invocations of moon and ghost, were published first in a private edition of *The Sunken Garden* (1917), then in *Motley*. They were treasured by Naomi in untitled manuscript

renditions, sequenced by numerical ordering and typed into her private papers: (i) “April Moon,” (ii) “Moonlight,” (iii) “Vigil,” (iv) “Betrayal,” and (v) “Life.” In “Vigil” he hoped for a shared future: “O ghost, draw nearer [. . .]. Be ours the one last leaf/ By Fate left bare!” His last poem, “Life,” chronicled the hour their ecstasy was doomed to die.<sup>8</sup>

Naomi remained his “moon” for another year: “I believe you must be in heaven—you seem so far away & in a kind of silvery moonlight.” Besides seeing her as the moon, a natural external phenomenon, he conjured her sitting in his “inward landscape” under an enormous dark tree. De la Mare fused her with nature and himself, associating both with a clichéd expression of the feminine principle: “And there in the warm rainy air stood the poplars thick with their first birds—My dear, it’s all you—all the beauty & inward meaning [. . .].” In April, he persisted in conflating her with birds, “just the flitting of wings & the singing in the wood side.” If only, he thought, he could “see” her a little longer, he would be able to scribble some verses.

Naomi never put her own poems forward for serious publication except as effluvia produced by unappealing fictional characters in her novels. She did not call herself a poet; verse making was neither her métier nor ambition. Nevertheless, she was an insightful critic of poetry. De la Mare often sought her counsel arranging his poems. He trusted her taste and skill in this endeavor, and thought nothing of imposing on her, nor, it seemed, in the beginning, did she mind the imposition.

Naomi vacated London during the whole of July 1912, first for one week with Kathleen in Clifford Chambers, then in Wales with her sister Erica, hiking. She saw more of Kathleen during 1912 than she did of de la Mare, sharing Kath’s intimate family moments—those “long talks” at Edward Douty’s graveside—a full week in July, another in November.

Kathleen was often in London. During July, for instance, although Naomi wrote just three very short letters to de la Mare, driving him to distraction, he, on his side, sent her long missives every third day or so. While on holiday at Clifford Chambers, she received his plea for help selecting poems for *A Child’s Day* (1913): “This is ghastly doggerel, Nann! [. . .] Please be a real kind friend, and mark anything you think must be cut or altered.” While on holiday in Wales, she received his request for her skilled sensibility arranging the poems for the same volume: “It would be no end of help & relief” (PMK 6 July 1912, Mare MSS). In this way, Naomi continued her muse work. She spent several

evenings accomplishing his behest, logging the number of hours of toil in her diary. When she returned at the end of the month, she helped him post his manuscript. Later in 1913, he thanked her for also arranging the poems for *Peacock Pie: A Book of Rhymes*.

He sent odd expressions of thanks throughout 1912: he compared himself to a cow lowing after her calf. In another letter: “Nann dearest know this & I’ll tell you how your eyes & your cheek & your mouth come back to me & your fairness haunts me & someday I *must* write a novel because only that way shall I be able to tell you how & what I’ve thought of you & I long to hide my eyes in your breast & forget & forget awhile.” In response, she called him a “baby,” rendering him, in his own words, “impotent” and “vindictive.” She read proof for him, and he called her a “brick.”

Walter de la Mare did not envision Naomi as a novelist, but unwittingly he was partially responsible for provoking her into becoming a prolific writer of fiction over the last four decades of her life. It started with a letter to her in which he asserted that she was too much of a “woman” to write novels. He had just participated in a particularly intellectual and wide-ranging conversation about “Psychics & tendencies & Spiritual Intuition & Suffragettisms & Wo-man & Tagore & Nietzsche.” The upshot of this encounter was an adjuration to Naomi not to author novels because it was unwomanly. Teasingly, he preferred to picture her future in “a delicious little house & sitting in it a spinster of ripe age & opulent experience”: “[she] could do a real good novel if only she had time & would try. And yet I’m glad in a way you don’t. It may be sheer masculine Turkishness & stupidity but I am glad you’re more a woman than anything else, though Intelligence does its best against it. It would take pages & pages to argue this all out, but I know I’m right” (PMK 17 December 1912, Mare MSS). He also disparaged as unwomanly her review articles: “It doesn’t matter how good your reviews are, or how much I am surprised & marvel, & it’s queer I should, I am always in the distance rather sorry you wrote them. This is never so with your poems. Why’s that? Is it jealousy of another self, man’s distrust of woman’s reason, Sultanism—[. . .]?” (PMK 6 December 1912).

Of course, de la Mare was most comfortable with Naomi as poet. Clearly, she was not his equal. Nevertheless, moving into 1913 he began to express competition with Naomi. She wasn’t a problem for him so

long as she remained his inner landscape; she posed no more threat than would his rib. If she wasn't his rib, she was free to upset the balance he enjoyed in their arrangement. If Naomi were to make more of a commitment to her own creative writing, de la Mare might lose his muse. Indeed, she might expect more musing of him. They passed a gift of amber back and forth during their bus assignments. It was meant to engender dreams about the other. In one of his recorded dreams, he watched, horrified, a conflict between a lobster and some other more "horrible thing." In the dream there was intense hostility between the two creatures, and "each was busily feeding & feeding on the other's brain!" (PMK 2 June 1913, Mare MSS).

Naomi welcomed Edgar Frere to lunch in her Chelsea flat on December 18, 1912. Thereafter he became a regular at her Thursdays, his presence coinciding with de la Mare's faltering attendance. Six years younger than Naomi, Frere was Eton educated and had rowed for Magdalen College, Oxford.<sup>9</sup> He abandoned his profession as solicitor to write. He authored two novels, *Rebels* (acquired by the British Library 13 June 1912) and *Ann* (1912), the latter adapted from a comedy by Lechmere Worrall. They were shallow romances, conveying commonplace, benighted sentiments, such as: "Aileen looked up into his strong face, experiencing that sense of power so dear and so necessary to women. For whilst man expresses himself directly, woman only attains full self-expression through man" (*Rebels* 25). Judged by his writings, it is difficult to understand how Edgar Frere could have become a significant person in Naomi's life. But he did.

Nearly all of de la Mare's early letters were permeated with persistent interrogations of Naomi's intimate life, both present and past, inquiries that became less intense in August after she told him about that other poet in Geneva who had once plunged her into despair. He quoted her, "'Because really if you knew,' you say," about which de la Mare wailed: "will you ever tell me 'what' I wonder" (PMK 3 June 1911, Mare MSS). Nevertheless, he did not cease probing for more revelations. In November, de la Mare was still pressing her for experiences beyond all the "ancient history." Two years later she relented. By May 1913, she had confessed "the horrid truth," her language about herself in a journal letter to de la Mare written while visiting Kathleen Douty in her manor house in Clifford Chambers. Frequently, she wrote journal

letters to him that she did not post to his home but rather saved for him to read when they were alone together.

De la Mare had accused Naomi of putting some fellow “in his place” at her last Thursday. Responding, she explained:

I like him, but he’s rather silly and never filled even a small chapter in that history you say is too long. Indeed and indeed, Binns dear, it is long—if you mean years—but not incidentally. I’ve told you—and you’ve dragged out of me all the horrid truth—you know more about it than anyone else and *you* know, you must know this, that I can’t be held responsible for other people. All that concerns me or that I can tell about is what I’ve felt or done or desired and that you know, and of that knowledge you must make the best you can. You’ll never make me deny any of it or wish it hadn’t been, any more than you’ll hear me question you about what you felt I did and desired before you stopped to consider Ann. I know that these things happen to us *from outside*; and I suppose you too know how in between one can light and fan a little artificial flame because the real one is the only thing that matters and we cannot do without some semblance of it.<sup>10</sup>

For all her existential courage in this discourse about self-responsibility conjoined with allusions to the physical manifestations of the ideal, a Platonic perhaps even Christian concept, Naomi was not above feeling anxious divulging aspects of her private life. He tried to reassure her: “You baffle me & tell me secrets I never knew of & disappoint me with your absences” (PMK 13 February 1913, Mare MSS). De la Mare subsequently defended himself: “And to ‘tell on you’ after your kindest taking of me into the past like that—what a wretch or wretches you must think me. I don’t think you will ever be able to know what a cheap & muddled mind mine often is” (PMK 4 June 1913, Mare MSS). He thanked her for unveiling a world he asserted that he had not known existed. She remained worried lest he share her secrets with others.

De la Mare was no longer conjuring Naomi as intangible “ghost” or essence. From his retreat at Dillybrook Farm where he was one of a group of self-identified Georgian poets, he began the process of redefining her as his muse. He wrote that she was with him; but that

“only through you can I get to her. O gate, why are you so far from the town! You dear Nann—no wonder there are two of you, & you have lent her hands & mouth” (PMK 30 March 1913, Mare MSS). He replaced her ghost with violets at his bedside and enclosed an accusing poem about the moon, which he had habitually associated with Naomi. This draft of the poem about a destructive moon was slightly amended and published as “Ariel” (*The Burning Glass and Other Poems*, 1945). Ariel had been left with a “moonless heart” after “the Bright One” left, and the moon’s departure had been a lowering action that “[r]olled her icy snows.”

De la Mare was petulant about Naomi’s social life, sneering at “Countesses and Freres.” She reminded him that she was free to make relationships of her choice. He threw her words back at her by quoting them: ““Someone might come: how can I say? *Idon’tknow*’ [her original emphasis]” (PMK 30 March 1913, Mare MSS). His response was heavily censored, whole pages torn away by his own hand. She had accused him of being ““blind & self-deluding.”” He was stung. A few days later he dithered that she would falter from the “false advantages and the dispensations of a so-called respectable course that suffocate heart & mind,” and would be utterly wearied of “fragmentary walks & talks.” He enclosed a goose feather.

New people began to crop up in Naomi’s entourage, including several men. Besides Edgar Frere’s weekly attendance at her Thursdays, she invited J. Reeve Brooke with others to the White House in Holmbury. He also joined her for several days in Wales during her July holiday with her parents and sister during the period before he married Dorothy Lamb. It was the same with Tom Shanks. She was plied with dinners by Grimwood Mears and A. E. Berriman, an aviation and automobile specialist. J. Middleton Murray and his companion, Katherine Mansfield, became friends, as did Hugh Walpole. Molly Hamilton was now a constant companion.

During August 1913, de la Mare and Naomi may have had occasion to spend three days alone with one another in her new Chelsea flat, another location in Adair House, or at least, so speculated de la Mare’s biographer, Theresa Whistler. There was no record of this cohabitation in Naomi’s diaries for Whistler’s dates, just the usual notations of her work week and daytime appointments. Of course, he may have stayed nights that she discreetly left unrecorded. De la Mare wrote in



a letter to her that he had influenza on the eighteenth. On Wednesday the twentieth, Naomi lunched with him in a restaurant; she noted in her diary that he returned to her flat to help her “hang pictures.” Her sister Erica came to dinner that evening; she was a usual third for the pair. Naomi went to the Westminster office on the twenty-first and lunched at the Temple, noting that Mr. Frere had returned and that she had dined with “Binns.” She went on to list Thursday *le soir* attendees, including A. E. Berriman, who had also “hung pictures” with her two days before. She received a letter from de la Mare postmarked on the twenty-first quarreling with her memory of Berriman hanging pictures while he was there. On Friday the twenty-second, she lunched with “WdelaM” at the Wayside and later had tea with J. Middleton Murray and Mr. Hargrave.

The basis for Theresa Whistler’s observation was a letter from de la Mare postmarked on the twenty-third. He wrote: “The three days just gone are the first we’ve really had & there they will always be. I never knew before what peace it would mean without that ceaseless counting of minutes & you were the dearest & kindest Nann I never even imagined there was.” He reiterated that he loved her and praised her new flat, “the quiet delicious little rooms.” From the content of his thanks, it seemed that she had whiled away their shared moments reading aloud French poetry to comfort him during his illness. On the twenty-fifth, he continued: “I long to talk to you, not to talk, just to see & watch you, for the cold of your lips & the dark that just for an instant swallows me up. I think—just as if I had read it in a story—of what our life might be together and—perhaps falsely—of how much better a thing I might be.”

In response to de la Mare’s declaration that he considered novel writing unwomanly, she persuaded him to collaborate in an epistolary novel. He agreed, supposing that penning letters from the point of view of an invented character would “make some things clear” between them, adding that “it is easier to be yourself through someone else.” In the beginning, he expected to write Nicholas Quantock as a character who was in love with a biographer-interlocutor, Mary Gillian France. In this love exposé de la Mare was disappointed.

A decade later, he relinquished his rights to their mutual creation *John Fanning’s Legacy* (1927), nor would he accept financial compensation. When Naomi tried to revitalize the collaboration in October 1926, he

wrote emphatically: “It’s *your* book; & even if any of poor Quantock’s letters had me for amanuenses that amanuenses’s name is not going to appear.” In November, he was even more specific. He asked her to compose the last Quantock letter and send it to him for “a twist or two”: “The point is, it is *your* book—in conception, elaboration, motif, characters, & everything else, & now you have to complete the impulse of it.” Indeed, she was responsible for 221 pages compared to approximately seventy-four of his. They began their faux correspondence for the book during October 1913. His last contribution was on May 21, 1914. Naomi continued through June of that year, then put it aside with the onset of war and additional *Gazette* responsibilities. She picked it up again in 1926 to finish Mary Gillian’s letters; then added seventy-three pages of an additional character, Mary Gillian’s cousin, who wrote a “Confession,” a postscript that conveyed an indictment—perhaps of de la Mare himself.

Naomi’s novelistic “conception” in *John Fanning’s Legacy* was an exchange of letters between a conscientious, insistent sleuth, a literary biographer, seeking answers to questions about a great novelist from an informant anxious to hide both his unsavory opinion of the great man and his own culpability, for he had been an accessory in abetting the great man’s murder of a woman. In planning the novel it appeared that Naomi had turned the tables on her real-life with de la Mare: her Gillian character was an inquisitor, which had been de la Mare’s characteristic impulse in their colloquy, and de la Mare’s Quantock character was obfuscating and avoidant, which had been her own impulse in response to unwanted inquisition. The epistolary format was a fitting transparent vehicle for them while they were still engaged in clandestine correspondence. De la Mare continued to burn her letters, and on occasion would remind her to burn his, which she didn’t: another secret.

Early in their collaboration, de la Mare was anxious about her vivid fictional characterizations. He feared she was writing portraits of people she knew rather than creating from her imagination. Thought he, if indeed she really was inventing characters from whole cloth, “why in goodness gracious didn’t you begin writing novels in earnest long ago? What was the date of the last one I saw?—you’ve gone a long way since then” (PMK 6 December 1913, Mare MSS). He tried to assert that neither he nor Naomi was writing autobiographically:

“Is he *me* to you—in any way? He isn’t so to *me* & yet one keeps him what he is by sheer chance. Gillian is *not* you—not at all. It is a bit of a triumph” (PMK 2 June 1914, Mare MSS). Just four days later, de la Mare expressed doubt regarding his own assertion that he was not writing himself into Quantock. In a letter, he referred to himself as “Quantock,” then self-censored: “If you could see the hollow-eyed, lantern-jawed ~~Quantock~~ hotbed of Anxieties that is writing these lines, the Flying Dutchman would be a Snail compared with the celerity of your return. *No letter.*” The possibility that he might be writing himself into Quantock stunted his imagination. He apologized at the end of June for not having time for his share of the writing, and as it turned out, he never had time again.

De la Mare’s concerns about Royde-Smith’s portrayals were not entirely unfounded. Just as Naomi admired the works of de la Mare, her character Mary Gillian adored a great author and admired how he synthesized the experiences of others that he compressed into art:

And then, when his mind was saturated, when he had made all those other busy, absorbed people yield up to him something of their secret, the idea behind it all began to rise in his mind like a great wave that is bound to break once it has rolled up to his height. [. . .] The book is its own justification, even if it did—which it does not on any single page—betray any real confidence, or give evidence against him as a spy. He did not mean to write a book while he was gathering in all the streams that flowed together to that great pool. (174)

The character Gillian seemed to approve of artistic exploitation of others; however, the entire novel itself debated the ethics of integrating authorial experience in fiction using material gathered from the private lives of unwitting victims.

Royde-Smith wrote most of the book, including the epilogue and the creation of a new character, long after the termination of her collaboration with de la Mare. This epilogue, “Sister Gwenda’s Confession,” comprised more than a quarter of the work itself and was written in late 1926.<sup>11</sup> De la Mare read the finished manuscript in January, 1927, before publication. Changes were made at that time, some following his suggestions. In the “Confession,” Royde-Smith’s

new character Gwenda leveled moral judgment against John Fanning, the great author. Although Gwenda agreed with her cousin Gillian's acceptance of fictional portraits drawn from recognizable individuals, she perceived danger in the extraction. In Gwenda's opinion, Fanning was a psychological investigator, a callous voyeur: "He needed people in their self-revealing hours, and when those hours were exhausted he had done with them" (276). The plot, altogether Royde-Smith's construction, came down on the side of Gwenda's disapproving judgment: John Fanning not only dropped his prey after sucking them dry for his own purposes, he was also capable of actual, not just metaphorical, murder.

Early on, de la Mare had asked Naomi if she had a prototype in mind for the creation of John Fanning. In the beginning of their collaboration, the likely prototype for the Great Man was Royde-Smith's revered author Henry James. James had been notorious for artistically thriving on intimacies of those in his social milieu. His private secretary of fourteen years, Theodora Bosanquet, had helped Royde-Smith compose a small portion of the novel on June 15, 1914, while visiting at the White House in Holmbury. De la Mare wrote Naomi in July about a Thursday encounter with Dora: "Divine Avenger. How cold with anger you were at me—panting wiggling to drag D. B. [Theodora] by her black hairs into the rest of the company. Did you for an instant think I wanted to gas about the letters to her then, even though I was—as you were—interested to know how they struck the literary confidant of H. J.?" Naomi may not have wanted Dora to divulge to de la Mare that she had helped write some of the Gillian epistles.

In *John Fanning's Legacy*, Royde-Smith used the trope of honey making to describe the activity of transforming life into art: "People are so silly about the uses of life. Nobody blames the bee because it makes honey from flower-juices instead of buzzing sermons about the fruit" (175–6). Some four decades later, the same metaphor came to mind when she composed an essay in which she described Walter de la Mare's imaginative absorption of others into his art:

De la Mare's genius was fed by an absorbing curiosity about people, especially about people he met for the first time. He would fasten on a newcomer as a bee does on a flower, ignorant of the process through which the extracted nectar

would presently become his own authentic honey. One young man, alarmed at the extent to which he had revealed himself, warned me, ‘He breaks down all your defenses.’<sup>12</sup>

In *John Fanning’s Legacy* Royde-Smith was exploring her fears about having shared her “horrid secrets” with de la Mare. Between the book’s inception in 1913 and its actual culmination in 1927, de la Mare produced *Memoirs of a Midget*. Significant elements in that novel were fictionalized observations about Naomi. By the time Naomi was finishing *John Fanning’s Legacy*, she had time to reflect on this private exposure. Although she and Binns may have had Henry James in mind when they began, by 1926 she may have decided that Walter de la Mare himself was the prototype for the Great Author.

March 26, 1914, Naomi invited both Mr. and Mrs. de la Mare to a Thursday along with Goodie, her brother “Graham, Mr. & Mrs. Riviere, JMM & Katherine Mansfield, Dora Bosanquet, HdeGV.” She also insisted that de la Mare ask his wife point-blank if she preferred that they halt their relationship. De la Mare acquiesced: “I have asked the question as you said. We talked it over quietly & my wife’s answer is that she does *not* want us to give up seeing one another” (PMK 28 March 1914, Mare MSS). Having Mrs. de la Mare’s consent did not ease the tension between Naomi and de la Mare. He was “cross” in the park, “cross” at lunch at the Wellington, “cross” walking through the Marble Arch to tea at the ABC, and “cross” in her home “for 10 horrid minutes” (diary, 5 May 1914, NRS MSS). They “squabbled” on Friday; he declared that he could not stand her “brazen mocking face” because it displayed that he “bored her stiff.” This was the prickly atmosphere that had framed the writing of chunks of *John Fanning’s Legacy*.

After Elfrida de la Mare gave her consent, Binns and Naomi were free to socialize together safely outside of the usual workplace luncheons and Thursday *soirées*—now adding dinner parties and other special occasions.

Naomi, for the second time in the same summer, was invited by the Beresfords to stay with them in Cornwall, this time overlapping with a visit by Walter de la Mare. Apparently the Beresfords had assumed that Naomi and de la Mare were lovers. Naomi’s alarm about the prospect was muted by de la Mare: “My wife knows there’s a chance of your coming down & of course T. B. [Tressie] has done it on purpose.” As propitiation, he enclosed a stone for her “silken throat” and a blade

of heather from the cliffs. Naomi dwelled at Treyarnon from July 16 through 20, declining to stay under the same roof with de la Mare. She arranged, instead, to take rooms in a nearby cottage.<sup>13</sup> De la Mare reported that at first Tressie Beresford was upset by this arrangement; nevertheless, after Naomi arrived, the Beresfords scheduled her for supper on Saturday and lunch on Sunday. All were invited to tea at Naomi's on Sunday evening. Then she walked in the rain and in darkness with Binns, although he was not mentioned at all in her diaries. He wrote about the promenade in letters to her. Once she returned to London, he, who continued in Cornwall, waxed about the beauties of nature she was missing: "Just think it is half light over the fields; we might have walked by the beach road [instead of on a detour caused by the rain]. Shall we be here again?" (PMK 20 July 1914, Mare MSS).

## War, 1914–1918

World news was rarely noted in Naomi's diaries. That changed abruptly on July 26, 1914: "War in Serbia." On August 1: "Germany invades France & Belgium." On the third of August (probably her war news flowed backward from the meager allotted diary space on the fourth): "War declared with Germany." The war crashed into Naomi's diaries and her private exchange with Walter de la Mare. For Naomi it was particularly painful because of her ties to Germany—she had lived months twice over in Bonn during the 1910s—and to the German language, her second mother tongue learned at her beloved nanny Dooly's knee. She wailed in anguished disbelief: "*Unglaublich! Unmöglich! Ya, Herrschaft. Aber leider wahr* (Unbelievably! Not possibly! Yes, the resistance-less acceptance of commands. But unfortunately true)." <sup>14</sup>

During the first weeks of August, she took to dining and walking almost every day with Grimwood Mears. Together they sought the last post at night for the latest war news. In September Mears gave up his considerable practice at the Bar, Inner Temple, to gather evidence for submission to the Bryce Committee on Alleged German Outrages. More intimately, she and Binns met to talk matters over, primly conversing "about the effect of the War on personal relationships" (diary, 19 August 1914, NRS MSS).

De la Mare's salaried job as reader for Heinemann Publishing dried up within the first week of war. Terminated, he was offered two or three months of half salary in exchange for one last month of full. Bitterly, he chose the latter.<sup>15</sup> Out of what he called the "daze of the universal consciousness of anxiety, doubt & incredulity," he glanced back with fond nostalgia on Cornwall in July: "And how queerly far away those two small folk walking to Treyarnon & in the darkness & rain: it's only a few weeks ago." He bade her to fall in love with "this old married bloke, which a recruiting sergeant would turn down like an empty medicine bottle" (PMK 10 August 1915, Mare MSS).

Meanwhile, de la Mare was in sore need of money. He removed his family to a cottage in Cowden in rural Kent, while Naomi hunkered down in London, where she remained based for the duration of the war. Many creative writers earning their keep in publishing and journalism lost their livelihoods when England entered the war. Not all were able to retool for wartime jobs such as writing patriotic propaganda. In August 1914, Naomi's editor, J. A. Spender, instructed Naomi to organize a Literary Emergency Fund to subsidize writers. De la Mare hoped to contribute projected proceeds from a ballad set to music and proceeds from an anthology if Eddie Marsh could put one together. Kathleen's generous £100 trumped amounts gathered from others, including £10 from Naomi herself, £5 from Henry James, and so on.<sup>16</sup>

Naomi sent £50 from the Literary Emergency Fund to de la Mare, fibbing about its origins as from an "anonymous" donor "who realizes that the gross public doesn't pay for poetry and thinks that those who do care for it ought to make up for the others" (28 September 1914, Mare MSS). He returned the money along with a £10 donation of his own, explaining that he was doing so because William Heinemann had been asked to subscribe, and besides, he asserted, he did not really need it, promising to reconsider if things were to go badly. A week later he had to answer further to Eddie Marsh's query about why he had turned down his "anonymous" gift of £10. De la Mare wrote that he had returned the "£10" because he was not in any straits, although there was no one from whom he would "not more gladly have received such a kindness."<sup>17</sup> Surely, de la Mare must have realized that Naomi had beefed up Marsh's contribution with an additional £40. It was clear that she was concerned about the wellbeing of his family and strove to augment his income. He had scruples about taking unearned money from her.

J. D. Beresford wrote to thank Naomi for offering to loan him £50 from her personal funds. He declined the money but was grateful to know it was there if he should need it.

Naomi noted in her diary of September 15 that Edgar Frere had stopped by her flat after dinner: “he came for his housewife & said goodbye.” She meant “housewife” in this way: Frere had asked if he could name her as heir in his last will and testament before beginning military service, and she had acquiesced. She did not consider herself engaged to be married, nor did he. Nevertheless, he had romantic feelings: “In plain language, I love you, & you don’t love me. I don’t know why you should—anyway, I want to go on being a friend of yours, & I suppose you won’t object to that so long as I don’t bother you.”<sup>18</sup> Few in her circle knew about Frere’s feelings for Naomi, although she had told Clara Smith, her close friend.<sup>19</sup> At first, when she entertained Frere at the White House, her brother Graham and friend Winnie Austin were also guests. Frere had time alone to tell her “all about his family,” perhaps an explanation for why he would rather she receive money if he were to die in the war. Over the next few months, he was at the White House in Holmbury for weekends, once at the end of October and again in mid-November; he was also her guest for dinners alone in her flat, saying “goodbye” on January 3, although he reappeared on the twenty-fourth and the thirtieth. In her diaries for the first two months of 1915, instead of merely noting “Gr:!” to mark her menstruations, uncharacteristically, she scribbled, “Gr: *enfin*,” suggesting that she was relieved to have begun to bleed. In an undated letter comprised of just one sentence, Frere reminded her of one of those trysts: “Dear Naomi, I remember every minute of that day at Holmbury. Yours very sincerely, Edgar Frere.” Every few months thereafter, he would show up for supper in London or a visit at Holmbury. According to her diaries, she and Edgar Frere spent portions of weekends in Holmbury—February 13–14, February 26 to March 1, March 13–17, and March 26. He sent letters and then postcards once he was stationed at the front in France, all heavily censored by the military, undated, and without place names.

Frere called Naomi his “sweetheart” and reassured her that he intended to propose marriage once the war was over. He hoped to survive and return as a captain, with a salary and pension: “Darling, some day I hope to ask you to marry me. You know I love you—why do you talk of my cooling down?”<sup>20</sup> Preserved in Naomi’s Temple



University archives are photographs of two men in First World War military uniforms. One is her brother Graham, a private; the other is Edgar Frere, an officer.

While Naomi was being courted by Edgar Frere, she was consorting with de la Mare in their regular way. On Monday, October 19, 1914, she recorded: “Binns not at all well—rather small & pale & clean shaven & young—quiet, came to tea.” A week later: “Binns to tea and dinner—very peaceful.” Two days later she heard that he had appendicitis. Immediately, she posted £25 to Mrs. de la Mare and wrote a get-well letter to him on behalf of the editor of the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, reassuring him that the *Gazette* had pieces of his that would be published and that there was more work in the pipeline just as soon as he could manage. Throughout November, she sent postcards in care of his home address in Anerley, trusting his wife to convey them to him in hospital. J. D. Beresford alerted her to de la Mare’s appendectomy on November 12, and he promised to keep her informed very confidentially of his progress. She “sent a blue swan to Binns. Also red roses”—the “blue swan,” a private joke, given the libidinal attributes de la Mare had once associated with swans. Two days after his operation on the fourteenth, de la Mare pleaded with her to visit him in Guy’s Bright’s Ward, sending her a schedule of visiting hours. Again he begged for her on the seventeenth. She complied the next day, finding him “looking ill & pale & unshaven & still in pain.” She sent more roses.

Naomi taught de la Mare to knit on Saturday, stopping to visit on her way to Holmbury, where she rendezvoused with Frere, and again on return at the end of the weekend. After she crossed paths with Mrs. de la Mare, “who was very rude & foolish,” she stopped visiting Binns, and he went on to convalesce during December in a home in South Kensington. She wrote a poem for him (critiqued in his own hand), in which a woman speaker—who had “held a truce with sorrow,” who had “almost forgotten how to weep”—claimed she had been charmed into helplessness by a sorcerer: “Sometimes, when they have appendicitis/ The really truly very great Magicians/ Forget a little how they’ve left their spell-bound/ Victims [. . .].”<sup>21</sup>

De la Mare’s biographer Theresa Whistler attributed the end of his passion for Naomi first to this health failure, which she speculated brought him to realize how much he depended upon his wife, and secondly to Naomi’s lack of attention to his health, which was not

true. Naomi was keenly aware of his suffering, as witnessed in her diary entries—to which Whistler was not privy. Actually, de la Mare's romantic desire for Naomi had begun to cool long before his appendicitis; it had lessened in intensity during the preceding year, having burned brightly throughout 1911 and 1912, beginning to wane during 1913, the year following that enigmatic allusion to an encounter in her bedroom in 1912. Interestingly, there was no record of reciprocal intensity on Naomi's part at any time, although she certainly did write to say she loved him. By the time of his appendicitis, he was no longer head over heels—yearning to kiss her, hungering for those moments in her presence—and had begun to objectify her in natural phenomena—birds, moons, that sort of thing. As we know, she was already seeing other men, and more than once had reminded de la Mare that she was free to do so.

Naomi's second attempt to give money to the de la Mares, that £25 at the beginning of his illness, produced more misunderstanding and tension. She wrote Eddie Marsh to say that de la Mare's wife had just returned the donation. She enlisted Marsh's aid, asking him to try again in his own name to send Fund money to the de la Mares.<sup>22</sup> In an incoherent letter written to Naomi a couple of days after his operation, de la Mare insisted that he would have grabbed at "E. M.'s Fund" if his brother had not offered "to stand." He scolded her "tantrums" for daring to tell him "'to think of [his] family'": "You do so want to have your own way in everything. It's unnatural. After all it's my appendix!" (PMK 14 November 1914, Mare MSS).

In order to understand Naomi's skein of intimate simultaneous entanglements with de la Mare, Grimwood Mears, Edgar Frere, Kathleen Douty and her sister Margaret [Margie] Hamilton Fellows, plus others—for instance, J. Reeve Brooke—we might ponder her utterances to de la Mare: "I like you to call me 'Sheba'—but I never was. Viola in *Twelfth Night* and *Mademoiselle de Lespinasse* are the only people I've ever felt like."<sup>23</sup> Shakespeare's Viola—witty, resourceful, and cross-dressing—elicited romantic love from both women and men. In *The Double Heart, a Study of Julie de Lespinasse* (1932), Royde-Smith was clear in her "Author's Apology" that she was not claiming to add new information to the readily available documentation of Lespinasse's life. Instead, she proposed to offer what she called a "psychological" insight into the manners of the age, conjecturing that *Mademoiselle*

de Lespinasse was “never to love openly” and that love for her was synonymous with contrary doubleness of thought and action (11). Julie de Lespinasse profoundly affected the lives of the men who surrounded her. Naomi’s Thursday salons may well have been modeled on those sponsored by this famous eighteenth-century muse of the French Encyclopedists.

Decked out in uniform, “*avec des grands gants tres beau* (with large beautiful gloves),” Edgar Frere came courting on the evening of New Year’s Day 1915, gifting her with old French glass, “very splendid.”

Earlier that very same day, de la Mare had hauled himself up the same steep stairs to her flat. He had warned he was coming: “[. . .] even if you were to breathe hand grenades & howitzers, but that’s what I’m thinking & don’t care a tuppence however you bang away.” In December missives, peevish, he had refused to bow to “female tyranny” and chided, “shame on you for ordering about with your mustn’t say this & your mustn’t write that & your four perils.” At that time, he enclosed two poems, one typed, entitled “26<sup>th</sup> November, 1914,” which was published as “Alone” (*Motley* 1918). Three times this dirge repeated the refrain: “Alas, my loved one is gone/I am alone;/ It is winter.” A hand-written second poem, entitled “The Sunken Garden” (*The Sunken Garden 1917* and *Motley* 1918), repeated injunctions regarding a woman who “hides all her sorrows bitter rue”: “Speak not—whisper not!” and “Breathe not—trespass not!” (ca. December 1914, Mare MSS).

De la Mare arrived during that afternoon on New Year’s Day 1915, “very ill & nervy.” He was so feeble that Naomi enlisted Kathleen to motor him home. The two women conspired to care for him at Kathleen’s manor house in Clifford Chambers. He accepted the invitation, then declined, too weak to make the trip. Instead, he chose to seek respite in Worthing with his wife, divested of children. From Netherhampton House in Salisbury, he offered to join Naomi for a day in Holmbury but only if he would not be required to walk. He did not go.

Over the next several months de la Mare often resided in various locations away from the London area—in Worthing, Whitney, Weymouth, and near Oxford. He and Naomi shared lunches, teas, and dinners whenever he was in town, and he wrote many letters to her, letters, however, that were strikingly different from those of his courtship. He no longer mooned over her; instead, he offered opinions about literary friends and acquaintances.<sup>24</sup>

By summer's end, 1915, de la Mare was facing up to himself, envying Naomi's contentment in herself when she was away from the London hurly-burly. Ruefully, he had discovered that he sought "familiar burrows." He lamented that he was coming to know himself in an "age old way": "Only for so long pride stands in the way; & the hope that one may be able to dig up & relay one's roots & so enjoy alien flowers & fruits. But this pride is folly & the hope vain" (PMK 10 September 1915, Mare MSS). De la Mare was admitting to himself, and to her, that he was giving up on his idea of Ann and Nann.

German Zeppelins began to bomb British military sites in late January 1915. By May, London itself was under attack. These bombardments were frightening, albeit hit and miss, causing fatalities—although nothing like the carnage that would occur during the Second World War. The de la Mare family, when not in more remote regions of England, dwelled in Anerley, southwest of central London. Receiving word that she was safe after a raid in September 1915, he confessed that he envied her the spectacle, although when the "racket" should get close, he might "bob."

Weak and recuperating during the next several months, de la Mare leaned heavily on Naomi for professional survival. Although worried about her "sore throats" and appointments with physicians, he still was in the dark about her debilitating menstrual periods. Independent and proud, he insisted she not intervene with her editor to provide work for him, yet he had no scruples about asking for her time and talent—which she freely gave. He plotted to gather in one volume poems previously published in the *New Statesman*, the *Westminster Gazette*, and *The English Review*. The final product would also contain yet unpublished poems. Now in addition to the five-poem lyrical moon sequence beginning with "April Moon," Naomi received on June 18, 1916, three drafts of new poems: "Alone," "The Sunken Garden," and "Mistress Fell." Early in January, he had asked her to look through what she had from the *Gazette*, a job that entailed searching through several years of weekly publications. Once she had gathered the poems, he asked that she mark them with a cross if she thought them suitable, adding: "the whole lot is coming to you soon; & you'll just bang away, won't you? The one thing is to sly anything away that isn't as good as the best, whatever that may be" (PMK 24 March 1915, Mare MSS). Naomi retreated to Holmbury for two weekends in March over "Binn's poems."

In July she proofread his typed manuscript. His poems, arranged by her toil, finally appeared as *The Sunken Garden and Other Poems* (1917); it was a limited edition of 270 copies, containing twenty-four poems. All but one of these made up half of *Motley and Other Poems* (1918), which was later published to critical acclaim. Perhaps defensively, de la Mare felt it necessary to remind Naomi in 1918 that she “hadn’t written ‘Motley.’” Not that she wasn’t always a “brick,” he temporized.

The war marked the beginning of Naomi’s restlessness about her living circumstances. Since 1904, for over eleven years she had resided in flats located in Adair House in Chelsea. Now she sought larger living quarters, landing at 52 Longridge, Earl’s Court, between May and November, and then she fled from an unruly environment—a drunken landlady and servants in disarray—retreating to Chelsea at 35 Rosetti Gardens Mansions in the same block of flats inhabited by Dora Bosanquet. Here she would stick until 1917 brought another nomadic perambulation.

There was no escaping the incursions of war. De la Mare had been turned away from service by a physician who found him “over age” and “not hale.” Edgar Frere left for the front at the end of November, saying “goodbye very calmly,” and her brother Graham enlisted two days later. Rupert Brooke, who haunted both Naomi’s and de la Mare’s nightmares, had died in 1915 of sepsis on his way to join his squadron.

Naomi learned of Edgar Frere’s death while she was on holiday near the Beresfords at Porthcothan in northern Cornwall. She had last seen him on May 11, 1916, when they dined together with her sister Leslie and husband George. Eleven days later, on May 22, Second Lieutenant Frere died of wounds in France, according to a newspaper announcement sent by Clara Smith that arrived a week after the event. Naomi wrote Walter de la Mare about Frere’s death but not of her very personal loss. It was clear from his cavalier response that he did not realize how important Frere had become: “I can remember meeting E. F. only thrice—once at one of your Thursday evenings long ago in Adair House—so do not really know him. I am very sorry to hear he is dead.” He continued with platitudes about death and gossip about mutual friends (PMK 6 June 1916, Mare MSS).

Edgar Frere died a hero of wounds received in action while leading a patrol party at the Battle of Vimy Ridge. The captain of his company wrote that he died during a heavy bombardment: “Late that night I took

a patrol up one of the communication trenches. Frere volunteered to come with me and joined the bombers who were leading the patrol. [. . .] His death was a great loss to the battalion.”<sup>25</sup> His medal, a star, was given to Naomi in 1923.<sup>26</sup>

Two days after receiving Clara’s letter, Naomi recorded in her diary: “Bathed at Treyanon and fell. Sick & odd.” Grieving, she sought Kathleen in Clifford Chambers for several days of comfort before returning to her journalistic duties in London. During the next several weeks, she and Frere’s mother mourned, finding solace in one another’s company. They corresponded, and Naomi preserved “Addie” (Adelaide) Frere’s letters for posterity. In September, she met with Frere’s grandfather, who was “not a very nice old man,” and after that encounter she arranged her own last will and testament. As Frere’s heir, she received £300—£100 immediately and “the rest invested in 6% Exchequer Bonds, the interest to be sent on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February and August each year.”<sup>27</sup> In her 1924 Will, Naomi bequeathed: “all property still held by me, which I may have inherited under the Will of the late Edgar Frere, to my sister Maud Royde Smith.”<sup>28</sup> When it came to dedicating *A Private Anthology* (1924), her first attempt to wean away from daily journalism, she thought of him: “To the memory of Edgar Frere, killed in action 22 May 1916.” It was puzzling and perhaps pointed that in her 1920 last will and testament she bequeathed the royalties from this particular book to Walter de la Mare.

During 1916, de la Mare was sometimes accompanied by his wife when socializing with Naomi. At Molly Hamilton’s party on January 26, she “talked to Mrs. de la Mare all evening.” Several months later, on July 25, the de la Mares and the Frank Sidgwicks were her dinner guests.

Rupert Brooke had bequeathed his royalties to Walter de la Mare, and they provided steady, increasing income; Brooke’s reputation as a poet soared as he came to represent his wartime generation of lost hope. De la Mare was invited to the United States by Yale University to receive an award for Brooke. While there, he scheduled a lecture tour. Kindly wishing to alleviate Mrs. de la Mare’s anxieties about his prospective ocean voyage during wartime, Naomi hurried a letter to “Binns” on *Westminster Gazette* stationery with predictions gleaned from J. A. Spender, who anticipated non-activity of German U-boats as a result of the US presidential election campaign. She explained her haste: “I thought I’d write at once as every hour of worry makes a difference”

(12 October 1916, Mare MSS). He embarked in early November and returned four months later at the end of February 1917. While away, he wrote Naomi once a week, full of homesickness mixed with glee over his American reception (and remuneration)—and also to complain that she'd not written.

Naomi met with Binns both at one in the afternoon and at 6:30 on February 28, 1917, he having rushed to her flat and companionship upon returning from the United States. Thereafter, his letters devolved into making dates to meet with her. He was almost always at either Monday or Friday lunches (now at the Fromage and ABC in addition to The Wayside, The Temple, and Formosa). Alone, they shared teatime usually once each week, remaining loyal to one another. He eagerly sought her opinion of the poem "Nocturne" (*Motley* 1918), the first bit of "unreviewing" he'd done "since year 1."

Naomi's 1917 diaries are punctuated with world news and replete with notations about air raids over London. On the day "[r]evolution in Russia [was] announced," she saw "Brimstone," her nickname for Grimwood Mears—nearly fifty years of age, married for over twenty years—who was clearly courting with dinners, automobile jaunts, and various excursions: "E. G. M. [Edgar Grimwood Mears] *plus tard* who did his best. Awful night" (diary, 28 March, NRS MSS). Later in the year, she entertained him at the White House, and for pleasure they motored to "Newlands corner & Pitch Hill" and Arundel, what he would later refer to as the Pulborough drive (diary, 27 October, NRS MSS). She did not exactly discourage him, otherwise he wouldn't have been driving her around the countryside; however, he took to addressing her as "Daphne" in honor of the Greek nymph who was turned to laurel in order to frustrate Apollo's amorous pursuit.

During the January weeks in Holmbury as she recovered from her December hysterectomy, Grimwood Mears came to supper, sleeping at the nearby Royal Oaks, close enough for them to share a "heavenly day in the woods" before he left for the United States. Accompanying Ambassador Lord Reading, he would be responsible for securing cereals for consumption in wartime England. He complained from Washington that she was not writing. Wearing by her non-responsiveness, he eventually took to posting carbon copies of his journals, significant, no doubt, as war history (NRS MSS). Still, when he was back in London, they were frequent companions August through December. On one

occasion, she begged off dining with him, because, as she confided in her diary, she “couldn’t light the fire,” a play on his given name Grimwood coupled with “Brimstone” (diary, 1 October 1918, NRS MSS). She recorded that they had a long, serious conversation, and Grimwood “parted forever,” suggesting turmoil on his part, although he amended his exit the very next day with three letters one after the other to her office and finally secured her for dinner. A week later, at Holmbury they dined on partridges he had brought for their delectation, and they plodded around the countryside where, enigmatically, they “went up the hill” on one day “to gather firewood” and on another “went up the hill” where they “met a furry caterpillar.” In the endnotes for her 1918 diary, she quoted a poem from *Punch*, perhaps by way of explanation: “That love that has not Heaven for its goal,/ Is like a house without a staircase built[. . .]/ So love, by no up-lifting purpose blest,/ Grovels on the earth, & cannot find the stair,” and also copied once again that fragment from Rizpah about being “satiated with one horrid meal/ No second rapture for another feel.” Perhaps she was referring to her own aversion to sex and intimacy with Grimwood Mears, or for that matter, with anyone else.

As a British diplomat to Versailles during treaty talks at the end of the war, Mears thoughtfully telegraphed Naomi with word of the Kaiser’s abdication on November 9 in advance of news of the Armistice on the eleventh. Through Naomi’s contrivance, J. A. Spender interviewed Mears when he returned to London. Naomi’s diary for 1919 was not saved, so there’s no record of the terminating events of “Daphne” and “Brimstone’s” fizzling liaison. In 1919, he departed for Allahabad to become chief justice of the high court.<sup>29</sup>

Naomi and Binns shared lunches, often with others, and sometimes as often as twice a week during most of 1918. Private teas and suppers in her flat were no longer on the menu. Either he wrote less or fewer of his letters were preserved, probably the former.

During the month after the end of the war, Naomi ran something like an infirmary at Holmbury for victims of influenza—for Erica, Edward (Dick) Shanks, her niece, Joan, plus an invalid cousin in a nearby house. In mid-November she packed up her place just in case the de la Mare family, whose son Colin was already desperately ill, accepted her invitation to flee the influenza. They declined; instead, she



was invited to dine in Anerley on November 22, and a week later she sipped tea with the de la Mares and the poet W. W. Gibson.

In December, when Naomi really needed help, ill herself with the Spanish influenza, she phoned Grimwood Mears to solicit a ride home from the office.

## Fiction, 1919–1956

J. A. Spender, in 1919, channeled by Naomi, conveyed thank you, but no thank you to Walter de la Mare, informing him that a series of articles for which he had been contracted had come to an end, work that had been “more suited to the student than to the casual reader of a weekly paper.” The tone of the letter was as unsympathetic as its message. Speaking in her own voice, Naomi refused to search the Gazette files for a previously published story, a task, she said, that would take two or three days to accomplish: “You will have to do as other authors are doing, either come yourself or depute someone to come to the office,” although she did agree to look up VATs for the year of Edward Thomas’s death (21 March 1919, Mare MSS). She relented somewhat a couple of weeks later and offered to help hunt for the story while he was on holiday, just so long as he would give her authority to deputize someone to do the search. Offering him a morsel, she asked him to write an article about Kipling, which meant that de la Mare’s work had not completely dried up at the *Gazette*. In return, he once again requested her help and received it, promoting a play he had just completed.

De la Mare was unabashed by Naomi’s displayed reluctance to do his bidding. Within the month, “wicked,” in his own words, he asked for her charity again, making light of her “long-suffering.” He asked her to secure a London typist for a short story he was submitting to a writing competition sponsored by *Land and Water*, a British weekly published from 1914 to 1920 that was edited by Hilaire Belloc.<sup>30</sup> He wanted more than secretarial services; he also expected her to edit and proofread, fill in the forms for the competition, and post the story, all in a rush within the week before the deadline. Begging this boon and at the same time celebrating her forty-fourth birthday, he enclosed a lock of sheep wool gleaned from his holiday, about which she joked: perhaps it was lock from his own brow “bleached by competition story-writing.” She went

on to supply him with an idea for a short story about a parrot, “which excited him, and it seemed to have started him on ‘Pretty Poll’.”<sup>31</sup>

After she had met the *Land and Water* submission deadline for him, de la Mare asked to read the short story she herself had submitted to the competition, magnanimously asserting that he “would not quail if that same Miss Ann bagged [the prize].” While he was composing this letter, her story “Proof” arrived in his hands, and he continued his letter after reading it. He wrote that her characters had confused him at first, then not, and that he detested one woman character in particular because she claimed that the secrets of others were always given up for her pleasure. In praise, he declared that the plot came “emphatically to a clencher,” which, he lamented, was more than he had accomplished in his own story. Of her story, he could not rid himself of the refrain, “*hieme et aestate, et prope et procul, usque dum vivam et ultra*” (In winter and summer, near and far, as long as we live and beyond), not realizing, of course, that Naomi was using the phrase that she and her former secret fiancé, the Genevese poet Henry Spiess, had shared. De la Mare marveled that she had managed to write her piece in a day, as she claimed. Contradicting his earlier views on women as fiction writers, he now urged her to write a novel (5–6 May 1919, Mare MSS).

*Land and Water* received hundreds of entries in competition for their prize. (The winners were Ethel Colburn Mayne and Lt. Col. J. J. Jones, who each received £75.) Naomi’s pseudonym adopted for anonymity was “Gregory Gooseberry,” and Gooseberry was especially singled out for praise because he had made the final list of more than one judge. Her story received special mention by the judges in their article of explanation for how they had awarded the prizes.<sup>32</sup> “Proof” was published in the August 7, 1919, issue of *Land and Water*, one of nine finalists. A decade later, it was honored in an anthology put together by Dorothy Sayers, *Great Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror, 1<sup>st</sup> Series* (1929).

De la Mare may have been ambivalent about Naomi’s success. His correspondence thinned; there are no letters for three months between June 26 and September 25. There was no record of a direct response to the special attention showered on “Proof” nor to its publication. He did save those of her letters written formally on *Westminster Gazette* stationery and addressed to “Walter” or “W. J.,” not to “Binns.” They usually conveyed work instructions; sometimes she fretted for his sake

about his family's health. There had been another outbreak of flu, causing her to offer to shop or write letters for his wife. Her help was rejected. In return, Mrs. de la Mare invited Naomi to roost with them on the eve of yet another of Naomi's moves from one domicile to the next, this time from 13 Stafford Mansions in Battersea to 44 Prince's Gardens in Kensington. Naomi declined.

In late September, a month after the publication of "Proof," de la Mare sent her a poem entitled "Written in Dejection" (renamed "Futility," *The Veil and Other Poems*, 1921), in which the speaker predicted that the universe would return to its origins and that human care was futile, weaving "idle argument on the air/ We love not, nor believe" (PMK 13 December 1919, Mare MSS).

Walter de la Mare finally began to write the novel about Naomi that he had once threatened. Throughout composition of *Memoirs of a Midget* (1921), he had her in mind not only as his central character but also as his primary reader, and he sought her response on several occasions:

Here's a bit of the preface. If you see any that should be altered, will you tell me on Tuesday—when I'm hoping to see you at lunch about 1:45. I have come to a sort of end of Miss M with a good deal of shakiness as to whether it can be considered an end. But such is autobiography. I'll bring another hunk of it on Tuesday [. . .]. (PMK 20 June 1920, Mare MSS)

He thought *Memoirs of a Midget* was "autobiography" although it was about both himself and Naomi. De la Mare was quite pleased to read portions to her and rejoiced in the creation of his woman protagonist: "It's a grind but I so rather enjoy Miss M's company & haven't met anyone so innard to talk to for—you know how many years. She really has had an influence on me too" (PMK 16 August 1920, Mare MSS). It was clear that Miss M had supplanted Ann-Nann-Naomi in his conversation with himself.

As for Naomi, she was effusive about the book. Her warm encouragement bolstered his spirits when they flagged, prompting him through various revisions. Besides posting chunks to her as he composed, he read aloud the last chapters on October 12, afterward declaring that he was going to rewrite them because of her reaction: "Quite really, quite

truly what you said gave Walter the conviction, which had already been swimming around in his mind, that those last chapters needed ever so much more working at. It supports me enormously, though, to know that you didn't think them a failure after what you had heard already. They are the crux" (PMK 15 October 1920, Mare MSS). Among other changes at her behest, he heeded her advice and shifted the novel's final episode to its "preface."

Although de la Mare was still "nicketing at the Midget" during December 1920, his concerns had shifted to publicity, reminding her that she had promised to review it. He repeated this solicitation, even attempting to arrange for her to write a review while she was convalescing in Switzerland in late spring, where unbeknownst to him she had been fainting, running high temperatures, and suffering debilitating headaches. The transport strike prevented the manuscript from delivery to her for review while on holiday. Finally, according to her diaries, she read the book in proof on June 12 and wrote the first published review of his novel for the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* (17 June 1921). De la Mare grumbled: "There is an impersonality—even when it is most generous—in your review that is as refreshing as to see an Iceberg in the middle of the Indian Ocean" (PMK 22 July 1920, Mare MSS). *Memoirs of a Midget* was a critical success, winning the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1922. Its triumph pleased Naomi, who exulted that even though Rose Macaulay had gone to Geneva she, Naomi, didn't envy her because she was "so much in love with Miss M and so cock-a-hoop at her success" (n.d., Mare MSS).

*Memoirs of a Midget* was profoundly aligned with de la Mare's and Naomi's intimate relationship, and at the same time was so disguised that readers would never guess the connection since they had not been privy to their private lives. In the first half of the work, he described hopeless love such as he had felt in the early lovelorn years of his courtship. In the second half, he portrayed what he considered Naomi's shortcoming as a romantic partner.

The novel itself was told from the narrative point of view of a midget woman, an exercise in visual perspective. Retrospectively and disingenuously, Naomi recalled its inception when she was with de la Mare: "One day he asked me: 'Would the problems of daily life be different if you were nine feet high?' And I said, 'Or nine inches.' A week later he had written the first chapter of *Memoirs of a Midget*."<sup>33</sup>

Through Miss Midget's eyes, Walter de la Mare invented a world both fraught with peril, much like Gulliver's nightmare in "A Voyage to Brobdingnag," and replete with natural beauty, sparkling, and writ small.

De la Mare also experimented with topsy-turvy gendered perspectives, first projecting himself into a midget woman, then into a dwarf man: this was what he had meant when he told Naomi that he was writing his "autobiography." Both of these characters were avatars of love-yearning-verging-on-illness that were versions of the early years of de la Mare's obsession with Naomi. The character of Miss M, the midget, for the first half of the novel suffered over love for a woman. De la Mare had co-opted Naomi's woman-in-love-with-a-woman secret life and melded it with his own yearning, for Miss M desired Fanny in words that could have been cribbed from any one of his 1911 and 1912 love letters. She implored Fanny to think of her at certain hours, "to write day by day in the first of the evening; to share the moon: 'If we both look at her at the same moment,' [Miss M] argued, 'it will be next to looking at one another. You *cannot* be utterly gone, and if you see even a flower, or hear the wind [. . .]'" (140). Fanny, who wanted nothing more than to work for her living, was disinclined to reciprocate the midget's passion.

Midway through the novel, de la Mare withdrew his self-projection into the feminine midget and transferred it to the masculine dwarf, Mr. Anon. This fictive change in perspective was in keeping with de la Mare's theory that multiple possibilities might abide side by side within the same personality, and he considered it fair game to use his imagined multiple personalities as grist. No matter the complexities of projection, the midget remained the first-person narrator throughout. What changed was authorial attitude toward her, shifting from sympathetic identification to critical judgment in which she was scrutinized for failings, now the object of desire rather than the voice of yearning. She was desired by coteries of moneyed patrons urging her to perform, by carnival audiences also paying for her performance, and most importantly, by the dwarf, a misanthrope, who asked her to share his heterosexual solitude. Miss M had tolerated him as a friend but his manhood repulsed her. De la Mare put words into Miss M's mouth when she confessed that she was only capable of loving a woman: "But

not even love's ashes were in my heart, except, perhaps, those in which Fanny had scrawled her name" (326).

In countless letters written over the previous decade, de la Mare had complained of Naomi's cleverness, coldness, and vanity; he accused her of being a show off. In *Memoirs of a Midget*, he used these traits to characterize Fanny, who was too clever and calculating by half, and not at all a nice person. Yet another of what he identified as Naomi's selves was used to characterize Miss M in the second part of the novel, the Miss M who was seduced by social approval and willing to entertain crowds of paying customers.

Kenneth Richmond, a lay psychoanalyst friend of both de la Mare and Naomi, claimed that de la Mare did not know "everything" about one of his characters. Richmond was not referring to the fiction but rather to the person who had been the source of the portrait of Miss M. De la Mare retorted, assuming that Richmond was referring to Miss M but also understanding that they were talking about Naomi: "My own private conviction is that she did, more or less awaken to herself, & love Mr. Anon. But could she specifically confess it?" (to NRS, PMK 3 September 1921, Mare MSS). Conflating his fiction with his self-identified autobiography, he presumed that Miss M's eventual self-knowledge would bring her to recognize, anon (soon), that she had loved Mr. Anon—that is to say, that Naomi would someday realize that she had, indeed, only loved Binns. He was wrong.

On the day of the novel's publication, using Kathleen's Clifford Manor stationery, Naomi sent de la Mare a poem titled "Lines, Written After Meeting 'Miss M,' July 21, 1921." As it turned out, Naomi had already taken some of *Memoirs of a Midget* personally and felt compelled to explain why experiencing love was complicated for her. In this, her muddled poetic explanation, she described motherly love showered on a child, who, all innocence, absorbed the lesson that she should simply enact her name, which was "Love." She ventured into the world assuming that everyone would adore her, only to discover "shame" and "remorse" when she first desired another person (gender unspecified). Then she was transformed by the "chance-blown spark/ [t]hat sets the heather blazing," even though it opened her to "pain and fear." All said, the mother's voice will live in memory, and the safe, old name of "Love" will thus survive "when God was as visible in your April." Naomi, born in April, may have been associating herself with God as Love, a more

virtuous ideal than personal desire. She was suggesting that de la Mare was fortunate to have the memory of her.

In her daily diary for 1921, Naomi inserted a newspaper clipping, a poem by Walter de la Mare, entitled “Ad Infinitum,” published in the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*. (Its title was changed to “Oh, Yes, My Dear” in *Poems 1919-1934* published in 1935.) De la Mare may have been replying to Naomi’s “Miss M” poem in which she had claimed that motherly love replicated itself until a chance spark of passion generated pain and fear. De la Mare jibed with bitter humor:

Yes, presto! Puff! Pee-fee!—  
And Grandma Eve and the apple-tree,  
O, into that distance, smalling, dimming,  
Think of that endless row of women,  
Like beads, like posts, like lamps, they seem—

Women, he jingled, cannot help themselves, and “[y]ou to be the next in that long row!”

Not initially, but in time, Naomi became uneasy with de la Mare’s plundering of her secrets. Royde-Smith’s first indictment occurred in *John Fanning’s Legacy*, published five years after the *Midget*, where she depicted a voyeur-novelist who fictionalized the secrets of others: “Nothing could stop him then and I am sure nothing should have stopped him. The book is its own justification, even if it did—which it does not on any single page—betray any real confidence, or give evidence against him as a spy” (174).

It is testament to their artistic commitment—she as his muse, he as the artist she admired and sponsored—that their literary relationship remained intact. De la Mare begged Naomi to cull stacks of his poetry for inclusion in *The Veil and Other Poems* (1921): “If you’ll just ruthlessly weed out all the quite impossible, & mark the highly improbable, I’ll be—well, I don’t know what I’d be, but among other things, your deathless debtor!” He followed most of her advice, although he added back a couple of poems and wrote two new ones, key of which was “The Old Angler,” in which a fisherman hooked “a Naiad slim.” Thinking he had won the Naiad, the fisherman released her, whereupon she “tossed up her chin, and laughed—A mocking, icy, inhuman note,” and he, “the cheated,” was left forlorn, “[d]angling a baitless hook.” Naomi was

dryly enthusiastic about the complexity of the poem and the weight of the fisherman's remorse: "Really, my dear, it's made me swim in a queer and bubbling pride that I too am a human being & share the faculty which at its full pitch can do things like that. [. . .] The Angler's remorse is much greater than the witch's guile. Oh!" (23 August 1921, Mare MSS). Tongue in cheek, she offered him five guineas for the poem and went on to remind him that he had shared a poem similar to this many years before, suggesting, perhaps, that he was warming a leftover. Her memory was correct. "The Old Angler" rehashed a previous conception, one composed and sent to her during the very first months of their romantic friendship. The prototype described a lady who bewitched swans; it was untitled and remained unpublished.<sup>34</sup>

The years 1922 to 1926 were tumultuous for Naomi. She lost the literary editorship of the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* as that periodical floundered toward its demise. Subsequently, she was released from her editorship of *The Queen*. For six months, from November 1924 until May 1925, she was without salaried income, rendered dependent on Margie Hamilton Fellows's patronage. Her first foray into supporting herself without a regular salary was an anthology, a nod back to her first publications as a young woman in the first decade of the century. Then she began to write her first successful novel, *The Tortoiseshell Cat*, finishing it in December 1924 while living alone in Margie's house in Dover. Dedicated to Walter de la Mare, the novel depicted a young woman struggling between lesbian and heterosexual desires.

Her relationship with de la Mare was now old shoe, treading worn paths, an occasional meeting along with friendly social correspondence.

She accepted dinner invitations from Mrs. de la Mare and seemed welcomed into the family. Meanwhile, she was busy making new friends. She met Ernest Milton in 1922 while working as a theater critic, and he, Jewish and American in origin, was a renowned Shakespearean actor helping to resuscitate the Old Vic under the ownership of Lilian Baylis.

Naomi asked de la Mare to write the forward to Ernest Milton's play *Christopher Marlowe* (1923), published by Constable, and he did, generously gifting the book with fresh poetry. Four years later Ernest Milton would become her husband, and Naomi's life would undergo a major transformation.

Royde-Smith read aloud to de la Mare portions of her second novel *The Housemaid* (1926) while writing it during spring and summer of 1925. Just as she had been audience for *Memoirs of a*



*Midget*, de la Mare was hers for *The Housemaid*. The muse had, indeed, begun to turn just as de la Mare had feared. The novel gave voice to Royde-Smith's judgments about their romantic interlude now transmuted into fiction. Sequestered in a cottage near Dorking in Surrey, not the White House, she wrote day and night. De la Mare, who had essentially ceased corresponding regularly, wrote in July to wish her luck with "Ann," the name of a character in her novel and his early nickname for her. She was already reading aloud to him as his letter implied: "What chunks there will be to hear when next I come. It's so charming to think of you engrossed in those ghosts—but what an inexhaustible engrossment it can be!" (PMK 7 July 1925, Mare, MSS). In October, describing himself in the third person as "Walter," he signed his letter "John" (in homage to a character in *The Housemaid*), petitioning to hear more. And in December he objectified himself yet again, as in "not even John could help Walter & Walter gazed dumb at John." Having just finished editing the page proofs of *The Housemaid* in December, working late in a cold room near a church in Surrey, Royde-Smith acknowledged her debt to him: "[...] it came over me how much more *The Housemaid* is your book than the *Cat* was. I don't think *Skin-Deep* will be—but *Children in the Wood* will—and perhaps all of them. Still this is a private dedication of *The Housemaid* to Walter, John and De la Mare."

When it appeared in February 1926, published simultaneously by Constable in England and by Knopf in the United States, the novel was formally dedicated to Margaret Hamilton Fellows, who died several months later.

Two twined strands, a double helix, organized the plot of *The Housemaid*—nearly touching at points, mirroring and commenting through juxtaposition, all of which was sociological observation embedded in romance. The diverging fates of two sets of lovers were at stake, and in both cases single women were courted by married men. On one level, the text was an examination of adultery and social class—leisured gentry juxtaposed with working people. Some reviewers noted that the wealthy characters were "unreal" and "wearisome" but that Royde-Smith's "dialogue in her pictures of humble life" was "fresh and natural." The book was recognized as "almost a sociology" of a wide cross section of British life. She was delineating the rising status of the underclass in the years shortly after the First World War: working-class

couples displaced gentlemen intellectuals in Temple tearooms, the preserve of the cognoscenti; recently enfranchised women owned and managed restaurants, smoked in public and took lovers; modern town homes were less opulent; servants were no longer dwelling in-house, freed to live in private domestic situations connected by bus routes to workplaces; the theater was in the process of being reshaped by American entrepreneurs in the service of advertising.

Should couples divorce if mismatched in marriage? The long and the short of it, according to Royde-Smith, was that the leisured could afford consummated, albeit adulterous love and remarriage while working folks could not, their love enshrined in a single sacred kiss and nothing more. John Page, owner of a hardware store, and Eileen Tansley, typist, had financial obligations to their respective respectable families: John's daughter might be promoted from housemaid to house parlor maid only if she lived at home with "decent" parents, eschewing scandal; Eileen had to return at the behest of her widowed father to rural Devonshire to care for her half-sister, an unpleasant invalid.

All of the women characters no matter what their class origins, ironically, were in truth housemaids. John's wife had been a professional housemaid before marriage when she turned her energies to making a home for him, grieving her loss of independence. The affluent Dorothea made a house for her lover, each room a jewel of good taste. Both she, patroness of the arts, and Eileen, typist for the *Evening Telegraph*, had once decorated their own luminous habitations for themselves, and both gave up these independent pleasures to make homes for men, joyously for the rich, despairingly for most others.

Eileen, now an office worker in temporary huts adjoining the Aldwych Theatre, after kissing John (granted, it was a very long kiss), returned to her workspace. In a stupor of self-realization, "[s]he now sat, motionless, deep in the golden reverie of love, her happy blood feeding her heart with the rich current of its joy" (268). Dawdling with an antique magnifying glass, its lens tilted like a mirror on tiny hinges set in an enameled frame, its wrought claws set on slender scaled legs, she moved it around on a sheet of paper watching ". . . the hard knot of light concentrated by the lens turn yellow and then brown as the paper smoldered in the ray. Mechanically she moved the tripod from place to place, making a pattern of scorched dots, moving slowly, languidly happy, setting the little boat of this game with the sun to sail

in the stream of her flood of joy” (268–9). This moment of passion at play displaced to paper caused incineration unbeknownst to Eileen. She dismissed the magnifying toy when the sun shifted into shadow and departed. When the sun returned, fire smoldered then blazingly assailed the theater’s box office, a silvered temple of tawdry American advertisement, causing panic in the audience of wealthy patrons and opportunity for heroic deeds.

The well-to-do lovers, Michael and Dorothea, made love once they returned home after the conflagration:

The woman he had found in the darkness was more than the lovely radiance that had stood before him in the hushed and lighted room six hours ago. She had become, at a touch, first a sweet coolness of peace and security, and then, a soft, increasing bliss, a fine-strung ecstasy, a chord that grew note by note into an arc of harmony that wrenched the music of the stars, the reeling suns of the universe into the substance of its toppling curve. And, as the music ebbed away from his straining sense, she was there, divine and pitiful, the cause and the consoler of his shaken frenzy, still holding him in the safety from which his being had taken its amazing flight, hushing him back to life with a soft, sobbing mouth laid in consolation against his own. (309)

Public emergency had provided opportunity for masculine heroism. Privately, neither John Page nor his counterpart Michael Sherlock had much to say for themselves, nor did they initiate action; that was left to their women. John confessed his exquisite love for Eileen to his more powerful wife, falling to his knees, burying his head in her lap, breaking into “sharp, hoarse sobbing” of renunciation. Michael did not do much better. Directly after lovemaking, he equated Dorothea with his mother: “Was it her voice that had murmured on the words no woman had ever spoken to him before, her arms that had held him, as, in his childish dreams, he had thought the ghost of his young mother was holding her unseen child?” (308–9).

Eileen and Dorothea were avatars of Royde-Smith’s self-perceived social identities. Although from different class circumstances, both women had refined aesthetic sensibilities. Eileen was Royde-Smith’s younger self, the poor working girl whose intellectual gifts were evident

to John: “To him the riches of her mind, fed on poetry, the literature of the imagination, were incredibly vast and liberating; to him her beauty, veiled and diminished by life and by servitude, was visible and transcendent” (263). The second avatar, Dorothea, was Royde-Smith’s mature self, the patron of the arts, doyenne of weekly *soirées* where intellectuals and artists mixed with the everyday folks of her life. Michael despised her *soirées* (as de la Mare had despised Royde-Smith’s). The author’s incisive judgement: without Dorothea the male protagonist “was imprisoned in the circle of his own consciousness. He needed her spirit to make him free of his own” (277). The worker Eileen was banished by the author to greater servitude; the leisured Dorothea survived to while away her life in a bower filled with love and beauty.

By the end of the year in which *The Housemaid* was published, Royde-Smith was writing fewer articles and reviews. She no longer depended on journalistic income; she was beginning to earn her living from book royalties. Early in 1926, she began work on her third novel, *Skin-Deep*, a tale in which she would develop further her critique of the influence of degrading advertising on the representative value of art. In November, de la Mare gave her permission to finish composing his character Quantock’s last letter and to allow *John Fanning’s Legacy* to be published so long as she did not reveal his participation. She finished a draft in early December, sending it to “Binns,” adding that when she saw him she wanted to tell him something that couldn’t be put in a letter, and “till then think of me with good-will, as always, I think of you.” On January 7, 1927, she had “tea with Walter Peacock.” She told him face to face that she was now a married woman, Mrs. Ernest Milton. Since she characterized de la Mare as a “peacock,” he may not have been congratulatory.

At this time, de la Mare bowed out of Naomi’s life in person as well as in correspondence. He sent a few letters about *John Fanning* while it was in manuscript and then later about reviews of the work. As the years went by, some of his missives were impersonally typed by his secretary. On occasion, he sent her newly published volumes of poetry, mainly written for children. He always sent greetings to “E. M.,” and he saved her letters, now safe, no longer secret. For her part, her scribbles were chatty about literary and theater colleagues, about books and poems, about her celebrity lecture gigs and broadcasting on the BBC (where she arranged a beginning job for de la Mare’s son Colin), about life and

travels with Ernest, and about her astonishing production of novel after novel, her letters brimming with energy and ideas for stories “buzzing” in the air she breathed.

Practically every letter she wrote touted her productivity: “*Children in the Wood* comes out in New York next Thursday or so—and I’m at the last 1000 words of another—a short & darkly sentimental work [*The Lover*, 1928] which I’ve written entirely to please myself & with both eyes off the public” (Easter Monday 1928, Mare MSS). De la Mare, thanking her for a Christmas present in 1928, queried, perhaps seriously, perhaps not: “Could you send me a theme—& plot or two?” (30 January 1929, Mare MSS).

Between 1924 and 1934, ten years, Naomi produced an astounding twenty-three books. Most were fiction and published mainly by Constable in London until 1930 (and primarily by Knopf then Harper in the USA) and until 1935 mainly by Gollancz and Hamish Hamilton in London (and by Harper, Doubleday, and Viking in the USA). The books were: *A Private Anthology* [collected poetry] (1924), *The Tortoiseshell Cat* (1925), *The Housemaid* (1926), *John Fanning’s Legacy* (1927), *Skin-Deep* (1927), *A Balcony* [play] (1927), *The Lover* (1928), *Children in the Wood* (1928), *Summer Holiday, or Gibraltar* (1929), *The Island, a Love Story* (1930), *The Delicate Situation* (1931), *Pictures and People* [with Roger Hinks, an epistolary travelogue] (1931), *Mrs. Siddons* [play] (1931), *The Mother* (1931), *Julie de Lespinasse* [biography] (1932), *The Bridge* (1932), *Madame Julia’s Tale and Other Queer Stories* (1932), *Incredible Tale* (1932), *The Private Life of Mrs. Siddons* [biography] (1932), *David* (1933), *Pilgrim from Paddington* [travelogue] (1933), *The Queen’s Wigs* (1934), and *Van Lords* [autobiographical travelogue] (1934). In 1935 Macmillan took over publication of her works in both the United Kingdom and the United States and did so until the end of the Second World War.

In *Pilgrim from Paddington, the Record of an Experiment in Travel* (1933), Royde-Smith invented a means to secure luxurious solitude by taking train trips on obscure rail lines—observing landscapes, buildings, art, history, and memories—while immersing herself indulgently in chosen books, most written by women. She praised Elizabeth Cambridge’s *Hostages to Fortune* (1933) for its “desperate courage.”<sup>35</sup> She was not so generous with Walter de la Mare’s latest volume of poetry, *The Fleeting and Other Poems* (1933). She appreciated the old enchantment now “less sweet” breathing out of every stanza. She

casually dismissed most of his volume as reflecting his “discipline under other masters,” remarked that many of the poems had been published years before in newspapers and private printings, and then recoiled from the climactic poem, a long narrative entitled “The Owl” about a baker mother, stingy and calculating, and her beautiful daughter, serpent sidling and flirtatious, who maliciously fed food to a cat in order to tease an intruder who had begged for a crust of bread. The mother accused the daughter of having offered sex to this “Wandering Jew”; the daughter tossed what the cat had not eaten at the beggar’s feet before turning into an owl and harbinger of death: “She lifted her stricken face, and laughed:/ Hollowly, ribaldy, *Heugh, heugh, heugh!*/ ‘A Jew! A Jew!’/ Ran, clawed, clutched up bread and meat,/ And flung them at his feet./ And then was gone; had taken her flight [. . .].” Royde-Smith was shocked and upset, so “bowled over” (in her words) one assumes by the poem’s misogynistic vituperation and pejorative depiction of response to “Jew” that she sped on the train past de la Mare’s town of Taplow “without so much as casting a glance towards the hills beyond the Dumb-Bell Inn” and the chimneys of the poet’s house.<sup>36</sup> In a letter to de la Mare, she reported meaningfully that Ernest had read the poem aloud to her and “we were both astonished at it all over again.”

Smoldering and vengeful, Naomi asked de la Mare if she could visit him. Her description of this meeting in *Pilgrim from Paddington* punctuated her emerging disapproval of his recent poetry, making it clear that she thought he had settled into a narrow existence with his wife. She noted that he had added tiny editions of books to The Midget’s library, including an “illegible” New Testament, and that he dwelt smugly, master of his garden, eschewing art and “people in the news,” proud of his ancient apple tree, although he could not mount a ladder to harvest its fruit: “Each year the tree on this hillside garden is so laden with blossoms that, since no ladder may be used there, all the gales of autumn will not be strong enough to make it yield its full harvest in windfalls, and apples will be left there till November to rot and shrivel round their smooth black seeds (175).”

An avenging Naomi had taken aim at de la Mare’s profound, often expressed anxiety about growing old and losing his creative vitality. She accused him of waiting passively in his autumnal years for windfalls from the Tree of Life, emphatically asserting that what remained of its

apples were rotten around “black seeds,” a bow to the sinister she had always appreciated in his art.

Not surprisingly, de la Mare and Naomi rarely corresponded after publication of *Pilgrim from Paddington*, or perhaps they did not keep their letters during the year 1934. He wrote once in 1935 to say he had a book coming out at the same time as her *Jake* (1935). He kept her letters from 1935 until his death; she did not save his again until 1951. However, we know from her responses that he wrote on occasion to commemorate her birthday and sometimes to send her volumes of his poetry. In 1943, she sent him her novel *Love in Mildensee*, pointing out that she had written the central portion long before she became Miss Royde-Smith of the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, an allusion to his early misjudgment of her writing since he had read and dismissed this book in manuscript. In 1946, she notified him along with several of her author friends, such as Marie Belloc-Lowndes, that she had to sell their books in order to fit into furnished rooms. Of his she had kept “the bound page proof of *Midget*” and more cherished editions of his poetry, but not all. She reported that she had carefully cut out one or two inscriptions from those she sold (6 November 1945, Mare MSS).

In an essay written for *John O’London’s Weekly* in April 1953, “The De La Mare I Remember,” Royde-Smith, now age seventy-eight, announced that she had ceased loving Walter de la Mare and his work and that she had not seen him or his wife since that moment when she sat with them in their Taplow garden in July after he turned sixty: “For twenty-two years I had loved him and his work, and the memory of him in the full ripeness of maturity has been with me as I make this imperfect salute on the eve of his eighty-first year.” De la Mare and Naomi had met in 1911. Twenty-two years from 1911 would place the end of her love in 1933 when she reviewed his volume of poetry *The Fleeting* in her *Pilgrim from Paddington*. She asserted that she was writing from the vantage of knowing him in the “full ripeness of his maturity,” by which she meant the years beyond middle age, thus accounting for this essay in which she damned him with faint praise on his birthday.

To underscore her opinion in the 1953 *John O’London* essay, Royde-Smith based a character on Walter de la Mare in her 1955 novel *Melilot*. Christmas of that year, she sent him a copy of *Melilot* and solicited twice over for reaction, to which he did not respond, dying as he did

in June 1956. He was prototype for the character of the “genius” van Airth (pun on de la Mare), and her portrait was scathing in keeping with her avenging mode. The young woman character Melilot was an incarnation of an enabling muse such as Royde-Smith had once been. Melilot is the flower of “sweet clover”; it completed Royde-Smith’s reiterated trope of the buzzing genius nosing into flowers: “[Van Airth] needs what people—not me only—what everybody can give him. It’s like bees—and the honey gives them back to themselves” (195). She was observing that honey was food for bees, and, narcissistically, also was food returned to the artist—rather than sweets for the pleasure of others.

In *Melilot*, Royde-Smith harkened to de la Mare’s bitter accusation in his 1933 poem “The Owl” in which he excoriated a young beauty for flirtatiously withholding food from a starving stranger. The character Melilot’s father adjures: “‘There is only one indelible remorse. . . . If you have been cruel you can return to kindness; if you have been unjust you can repent and confess, but to refuse food to the hungry stranger is worse than murder for which you can be hanged’” (199). Royde-Smith had Melilot provide “food” by swooning into van Airth’s bed, whereupon he abandoned her, buzzing off to plunder fresh flowers.<sup>37</sup> Melilot, pregnant, then a mother, ended in exile from literary London. Royde-Smith herself had been fearful of pregnancy from the time she had experienced as an adolescent her mother’s parturition misery and the shock of seeing a fetal corpse. Moreover, she had good reason to believe that pregnancy would interfere with her life as a self-supporting woman. In this novel, Melilot suffered the fate that Royde-Smith had dreaded until she knew that pregnancy was no longer possible.

Naomi had long considered incompatible the activities of mothering and career making. In 1932, she had participated in a staged debate with a feminist about motherhood as a full-time job, arguing that “the small measure of success which women have had in the history of the world has been achieved by celibate women.” Her opponent, a woman’s suffrage pioneer and militant feminist, retorted that if motherhood was a full-time job, then “why isn’t she paid?”<sup>38</sup>

In *Melilot* Royde-Smith, now eighty years old, cannibalized details from her early years of entanglement with de la Mare—descriptions of his handwriting and the content of his letters, bus and train clandestine meetings, unpaid work at his behest, unrepentant guilt about his wife,



loss of reputation and employment. It was all there in fiction. De la Mare-cum-Van Airth emerged as a harmfully unconscious narcissist. Aware of her grudge, Royde-Smith attempted to assuage her attack by putting words from Shiller's *Nanie* in the mouth of Melilot: "*Auch ein Klaglied zu sein in Mund de geliebten ist herrlich*" (A plaintive song, in the mouth of a loved one, is glorious) (255).

They had not been face to face in decades. By 1955, de la Mare, whose wife ten years his senior had died in 1943, was himself declining. Naomi reminded him that he had often asked her to tea while she lived in Winchester and wondered now that she was residing in London if she might accept his hospitality. She suggested dates, only to change her mind once he chose, finally settling on October 4. They shared tea. Thanking him for asking his driver to return her to London, she wrote: "It was strange, almost shocking, to find myself, at once, back in that web of the same thoughts to which contradiction in detail makes no division [. . .]" (5 October 1955, Mare MSS). Walter de la Mare died in Twickenham, Middlesex, on June 22, 1956. Although he received her parting poem because it was saved in his correspondence, he may not have been able to read it before dying. Her poem, "At Ebb-Tide," terminated with: "How should we know/ Left by the tide's forsaking,/ That, in the hour of its flow,/ It was not a dream of our making./ Vanishing so?" (postcard ca. 1956, Mare MSS).

# Chapter 6

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## With Ernest Milton, 1923–1964

Naomi bound her now graying hair into a soft bun on her nape with winged folds gracefully framing her visage punctuated by those piercing blue eyes. Her body was beginning to thicken, maturing into middle age, providing ballast as she sailed into new worlds. As drama critic in 1922 for the *Weekly Westminster Gazette*, she was absorbed into the sanctums of theater society—peopled by legions of producers, managers, actors, artists, reviewers—her prestige augmented by her weekly theater column for *The Queen* during 1924 and for *The Outlook* during 1925 and 1926. Among other venues, she haunted the Old Vic, a dutiful pleasure.

Writing in the voice of an accepted friend in the innermost circle of the Old Vic, interviewing Lilian Baylis, she could write comfortably of her subject's confidence in their cozy companionship:

A log fell out of the fire as I was talking to her. Some minutes after it had been replaced and when we were once more deep in the related adventure of her life, a blue spiral of smoke rising from behind the cushion on a chair opposite to the one on which I sat [prompted me to rush to extinguish the fire]. [Lilian Baylis] lay back again among her rugs and cushions and waited until my full attention could be hers once more. She was allowing me to share the first inactive hour of her long and crowded week, and, with the instinctive economy

of the prodigious worker, she wasted no energy on a matter she could safely delegate to another.<sup>1</sup>

Lilian Baylis had kept the fire of Shakespearean theater glowing during the era after the First World War when businessmen began taking over London West End theaters. The nineteenth-century London tradition of actor-managers had built theater houses that were now falling to the care of a new generation of relatives who saw them as sources of speculative income.<sup>2</sup> These great theaters were relegated to the status of real estate for lease. Performances had to guarantee box office success in order to pay for overhead, and this led to increasing production of farces, musicals, and modern drama, offerings that could draw large audiences. “Sir John Harvey said glumly: ‘We have no one who will sacrifice himself for the benefit of the higher drama in London by maintaining on his own shoulders the great traditions of the past.’”<sup>3</sup> In this context, Lilian Baylis’s management of the Old Vic was a glaring exception, as Naomi reported: “In these days, when West End managers with capitalists behind them go about declaring that Shakespeare will not draw, Miss Baylis’s achievement in a theatre not ten minutes’ walk from the Strand is a remarkable instance of the triumph of an inspired will” (“Baylis,” 340). A showcase for classical theater, the Old Vic became a training ground for talented artists and willing audiences. Several decades later, in another incarnation, it was the launching pad for the National Theatre.

In the course of reviewing for the *Daily Westminster Gazette* after a performance of *Othello* at the Old Vic, Naomi and Dorothy [née Lamb] Brooke—together with drama critics Herbert Farjeon and St. John Ervine—chatted with Ernest Milton, a thirty-two year old American and leading actor (diary, 6 February 1922, NRS MSS). She sought Ernest Milton again backstage at the St. Martin’s after his performance of Ferdinand de Levis in John Galsworthy’s *Loyalties*. Lilian Baylis had released Milton in 1922 from his obligation to the Old Vic repertory so that he could star as the “infernally awkward” Jew in *Loyalties*, and the play ran for four hundred performances. Milton was a busy actor, and Naomi was a busy drama critic as she reinvented herself during the shifting fortunes of the Westminster publications. She wrote a play, *David* (unpublished), in May and pulled together *A Private Anthology* of poetry (1924). Based on her detailed daily diary during 1922, Milton was not yet among her Thursday guests at 44 Princes Gardens. By 1923

her relationship with Milton, apparently, rolled in the usual grooves she reserved for patronage of artists. She wrote to Michael Sadleir, an editor at Constable, introducing a play by Ernest Milton, noting that he wrote it when he was nineteen years old and that he had several more completed plays. In May she sent Sadleir the manuscript of Ernest Milton's *Christopher Marlowe*, which she asserted had "genius."<sup>4</sup> It was accepted for publication in 1924. By July, she was thanking Walter de la Mare for agreeing to write a poem as prologue for the volume, joking about the similarity of Milton's initials to those of Eddie Marsh, known for his anthologies of Georgian poetry: "How good for you to say you'll write a little preface for E. M. Not the buxom Eddie, but a much stranger manifestation of the life force" (22 July 1923, Mare MSS). Besides sponsoring poets, Eddie Marsh was an influential figure in England's homosexual community. Naomi, in the cloisters of her correspondence with Binns, likely was commenting on the sexual persona of Ernest Milton.

By the beginning of 1924, according to her diary entries, Ernest Milton was attending her Thursdays at 2 Tedworth Square in Chelsea, sharing suppers *tête-à-tête*, sometimes late at night—sometimes at her place, sometimes in his rooms. One way or the other, they were together once or twice every week so long as he was in London. She designated him Gianello, his claimed middle name. A missive from Ernest declining an invitation to Holmbury showed his early affection for her: "I have been thinking of you & all your great understanding & sympathy. I can see you walking, walking, & taking a deep-lunged satisfaction from it. Didn't I go away nice the other night? And discreet? And wasn't it horrid of you to let me. Love to you. Love, Giannelo" (PMK 17 January 1924, Milton MSS). He spelled Gianello variously with one or two L's.

Ernest Milton was born in San Francisco on January 10, 1890. His theater biographical blurbs note that his heritage was part Jewish and part Italian. Friends saw him as a "lithe and ardent figure, with a face, half Jewish and half Italianate, which reminded you of Savonarola."<sup>5</sup> As it turned out, his father, Martin Milton, had been born in New York and his mother, Selma Milton [née Wolff], had been born in Prussia, emigrating to San Francisco with her family as a teenager in 1875; she was sixteen in 1880. Her mother's maiden name was Ultman in Monrovia, Austria. Her parents brought Selma and her brothers to San Francisco accompanied by one servant from Baden.<sup>6</sup>

Ernest Milton's birth records did not survive the San Francisco fire, and, remarkably, writer though he was, he left not so much as a paragraph about his American childhood or adolescent education or young manhood. It was almost as if he had sprung from the forehead of Lilian Baylis onto the stage of the Old Vic where for the second and beginning of the third decades of the twentieth century he reigned at the brilliant center of its repertory as both actor and director.

According to his 1915 United States passport description, Ernest was five feet ten inches tall, with blue-gray eyes, a cleft chin, dark curly hair, and an aquiline nose. Although it appears on his death certificate, he did not deploy "Giannello" on his passport application nor on his British naturalization papers in 1928, where his parents were named as Martin and Selina Lichtensteadter Milton.<sup>7</sup> There was nothing discernibly Italian in Ernest's documented heritage. He became a British citizen on May 31, 1928.

Ernest would have been seventeen years old in San Francisco when the 1907 fire destroyed its theaters. He may have experienced the explosive phoenix-like revival of drama, but there is only a hint of his theatrical interests in San Francisco. Ernest divulged to a friend that he had once had his singing voice trained.<sup>8</sup> His first recorded appearance on the stage was in 1912 on the east coast of the United States in Virginia.<sup>9</sup> His next venue was in New York City. Although he had a nonspeaking role in the lavish pageant *Joseph and His Brethren*, his performance herding one of the live camels around the stage was colorfully memorable in theater annals: "The First Camel Driver (a wild affair of whip-lashing and foot stamping) was Ernest Milton, a young Californian making his debut in New York."<sup>10</sup> He first played in London in a popular American-Jewish comedy, *Potash and Perlmutter*, in which he had a small part that was expanded when he joined in touring camp theaters during the First World War. It was unclear how he supported himself at this time when he had little paid work in the theater. Ernest returned to the United States for two years, traveling back to England in 1917 to tour the provinces, performing in Manchester and participating in a repertory season with the Players of the Gate. His fortunes changed in 1918 when he was tapped by Lilian Baylis. He joined the Old Vic company, playing a round of leading parts almost immediately, including Shylock, Benedict, Macbeth, Ferdinand

in *The Tempest*, Orsino in *Twelfth Night*, Biron in *Love's Labors Lost*, and the title roles in *Everyman* and *Hamlet*.

Naomi had been profoundly impressed by Ernest's performance of Hamlet at the Old Vic in 1921, all four hours and ten minutes of which she experienced with Frank Sidgwick on March 7; she brought H. B. Usher to another round a week later. By all accounts, Ernest's Hamlet was a significant achievement. The important critic J. C. Trewin placed Milton with the best stage actors of the twentieth century: "Such Hamlets, all differing, as John Gielgud, Ernest Milton, Laurence Olivier and Paul Scofield remain in my heart of hearts from the world's most celebrated play, its most contentious, above all its most exciting."<sup>11</sup>

Another critic Robert Speaight admired Milton's Hamlet. Ernest Milton's "supremely intelligent performance"

. . . was intuitive rather than rational, displaying Hamlet's morbidity, the sniffing out of contaminating evil, the preternaturally acute antennae, the embittered loves and poisonous hate, the sudden unguarded affections, the wariness, the stiletto-sharp repartee, and, above all, the consciousness of fate standing behind him like a skeleton—in a word, the impression of a man doomed to death and dooming others in his wake, the scapegoat and the scourge of an inescapable corruption [. . .]. (*Property Basket*, 61)

Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud, and later Alec Guinness eulogized Ernest Milton's acting, especially in the years before it became stylized, as some say can be the fate of those gifted with talent to deliver verse attentive to phrase and rhythm. Gielgud claimed that Ernest's Hamlet had "extravagance and flowery sinister power."<sup>12</sup> Both Gielgud and Guinness acknowledged Milton's influence on them. Decades later, Guinness recounted lines spoken by Ernest that had stirred the small hairs on the back of his head.

Milton's performance may have also stirred the small hairs on the back of Naomi's head and perhaps the tendrils of her heart as well. Her admiring attention enhanced his public persona. Denys Blakelock recalled her influence on Milton's reputation: "[. . .] her patronage of the Old Vic in its early days under Lilian Baylis and the tremendous spread she gave to Milton's Hamlet, and to his other performances too, in the *Westminster Gazette*, were greatly responsible for swelling the excited

audiences that flocked to the Waterloo Road night after night and who developed into the Old Vic's faithful public" (*Next Corner*, 79).

Ernest Milton, *Measure for Measure* reviewed by N. G. Royde-Smith, "The Theatre" in *The Queen*, 23 April 1924.

6

THE QUEEN

April 23, 1924

## THE THEATRE

THE ACADEMY OF DRAMATIC ART

By

THE FELLOWSHIP OF PLAYERS

N. G. Royde-Smith

## Private Societies

THE private play-producing societies are increasing upon us to such an extent that soon there will be a new play for every Sunday in the year, and two, if not three, plays for each Sunday in the Season. The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, which is letting its theatre to The Three Hundred Club for the production on Sunday evenings of plays by young and living playwrights, afforded the same privilege on two evenings last week to the Dramatic Players, a band of enthusiasts mostly out of Oxford, who put up a very young and tender performance of *Roméo and Juliet*. This, it is true, was a well-known extra, but on Palm Sunday the Fellowship of Players gave *Measure for Measure* at the Strand Theatre, and when the play was over, announced *As You Like It* for one Sunday in May. Let us hope it will not clash with the Three Hundred Club's opening night, also fixed for a Sunday in May, when Mrs. Geoffrey Whitworth will present a revision of a play by Frances Sheridan, executed by Mr. Aldous Huxley.

For nobody who cares for Shakespeare can afford to miss the increasing excellence of the Fellowship's work. Mr. Donald Cathrop, who in the briefest and most accomplished way drew *Cato* (found by poison, as though they had been teeth) from the audience at the Strand when the play was over on Sunday week, pointed out the minutely and heroically about this fine society. Actors, actresses and such well-known lovers of the drama as Mr. Arnold Bennett and Mr. Eddie Marsh (to take two names at random from a not over-long list of subscribers) have banded themselves together in order to remove from London the reproach of neglecting Shakespeare.

Shakespeare, who in Shelley's words, "is to be considered, on the whole, as the greatest individual mind of which we have specimens remaining," happened to be an Englishman, on both sides. And so, if you want to see Shakespeare put on with any kind of metropolitan dignity and circumstance you must go to the great theatres, not of London, but of Berlin.

The Fellowship of Players consists of people who feel this state of things so keenly that they make sacrifices of time, of effort, and of money (none of them as rich in anything but intelligence and enthusiasm) in order to play Shakespeare in the West End. As a natural, they have to go to the Old Vic and to Stratford-on-Avon for much of their material. The scenery and the Dromion of their first effort, *The Comedy of Errors*, were lent by Miss Baylis when, at the eleventh hour, it was found that none of Mr. Boucher's scenery would do and that Mr. Nelson Keyes couldn't manage one of the Dromion after all. Mr. Frank Cather and Mr. Edith Holloway, those finest of Mr. Bridges Adams' players, helped to make *The Winter's Tale* one of the Fellowship's successes; Mr. Edmund Millard played *Macbeth* for them in March, and *Measure for Measure* was produced by Mr. Andrew Leigh, who for some years was one of the Old Vic's brightest stars. But many other actors and actresses who have had little or no experience in playing Shakespeare are to be seen in the Fellowship's halls, and we are promised Miss Isabel Elton's Rosalind in due time. The single performances are crowded, and though by long waiting it is always possible to get into the gallery free on the Fellowship's Sundays it is wiser and far more comfortable to become a member and be entitled to two stalls or other reserved seats, which can be done by writing to the secretary at six, Grand Street, S.W.1, before the date.

## Roméo and Juliet

The Dramatic Players' Society manifestly exists for its own amusement, and lets education come if it can in the wake of its festivals. The company is composed

of undergraduates of both sexes and of gifted amateurs who happen to be their friends. These have made Mr. Glynn Baker their principal boy for some time past, and, full of delight in his prowess both in the *Roméo*, when he made his name, and in *Lysidamus*, and in *Hamlet*, which he played for the O.U.D.S., they brought him to town.

But Mr. Isham, though tall enough for anything, is not strong enough for London. He is still an amateur in the real sense of the word. He clearly loves poetry; he recites it well, with good feeling and a nice, clear diction and heaps of descriptive gesture. When he swears "by yonder blasted moon" he turns from the lady to point at the orb and goes on pointing at the



MR. ERNEST MILTON

silver-tipped frost trees; and his Juliet, opposite in the person of Miss Pauline de Bush, appears to have much the same ingenious notion of what hands are made for when she speaks her lines. They are very fresh and serious, these young players, and they have evidently worked hard to be worthy of the lovely thing they would interpret, and so their effort is all to the good. But if either Mr. Isham or Miss de Bush means to be a real player of Shakespeare he or she had better see Miss Lilian Baylis about it before her next season's company was filled beyond hope.

It is odd how a company which is as good as the Dramatic Players will miss, by its very efficiency, much of the effect which more ingenious amateurs can often get out of the best plays. I have known a company of schoolgirls all under eighteen keep all the magic in the less magical plays, which they dressed and rehearsed among themselves; whereas these older, more experienced and better trained young people made this quaintness of lyric beauty seem flat and dull. Even the death of Mercutio, a passage in which Mr. Eric Bush won deserved applause, seemed a dusty accident, and not the gay, flaming, inconsequent

tragedy which drew from Doctor Johnson the comment:

*It is observed that in Italy almost all assassinations are committed during the heat of summer.*

## Measure for Measure

The avoidable tragedy of *Roméo and Juliet* and the inconsequent comedy of *Measure for Measure* were both forced upon the dramatist by the existing play and poems from which he took his material, and one is arbitrary as the other. But, so little does the actual plot trouble the memory when it comes to Shakespeare, that *Roméo and Juliet* will always shine with the life beauty of its young passion, which rises above the accidental catastrophe as a moon sailing over hazy clouds of a forgotten storm, while the happy ending of *Measure for Measure* dissolves into a meaningless gaggle in the acid horror of its theme. Thus being so, I cannot help feeling that Mr. Andrew Leigh's otherwise admirable production of the bestness of Shakespeare's intentions should not have ended with the crowning of Isabella by the Duke as an illustrative gesture to accompany the line:

*What's mine is yours and what is yours is mine.*

I had wondered from the rising of the curtain on Act V what the crown was doing on the cushion which a marvellously rigid creature held as he counted them throughout the performance; and when I discovered its destiny the admiration for Mr. Leigh's work, which had been growing in my mind throughout the performance, received a severe but not a mortal check. For Mr. Leigh, whose Pezomy in the play is an unforgettable companion to the Balthasar of that generation when *Pericles* was put on at the Old Vic two years ago, succeeded in producing *Measure for Measure* most effectively that it seems possible anyone with so many difficulties as the producer of these single-night performances has to vanquish, could do.

With a company, many important members of which are engaged in playing all the week, full rehearsals of these Sunday plays must always be difficult, and Mr. Leigh was further handicapped by having to drive such experienced Shakespearean actors as Mr. Ralph Holloway, Mr. Frederick Larker, and Mr. Ernest Miles in harness with players whose methods were those of modern drawing room comedy: Mr. Earle Grey, who played the smiling Duke in disguise, spoke all his lines, even the magnificent "Be absolute for death" with which Shakespeare, and thus naturalistic method was followed by most of the other players, including Mr. Duncan Yarrow, who played Claudio, and Miss Geraldine Harvey, a young and very pretty, but by no means adequate, Isabella. Isabella is a difficult part, and one in which it is not easy to imagine any but a very great actress. Miss Edith Evans is the only lady I have ever wished to see in it. She has the overpowering physical vitality, coupled with great intellectual control which alone can enable an actress to interpret this indignant, passionate, determined novice. And she would play Isabella in the grand manner, as the part should be played and would not be obliterated as was Miss Hervey, by the extraordinary force of Angelo as played by Mr. Ernest Milton.

Mr. Milton's Angelo was one of the most remarkable and disturbing performances I have ever seen on any stage. *Measure for Measure*, as Hamlet has pointed out, seems, in spite of the important nature of its plot, to be written with more reticence than any other of Shakespeare's plays. Another critic, expounding the discovery, points out that "the entire character of Angelo is the expressive feature of the plot; it is nothing but a successful embodiment of the pleasure, the mischievous pleasure, which a warm-blooded and

Of course, no one was more responsible for his theater reputation than Ernest himself. Not only was his acting and interpretative acumen highly regarded, but together with Sybil Thorndike he directed well-received plays at the Old Vic before Robert Atkins took over. Ernest also pioneered in the new medium of radio broadcasting. The Old Vic's style of producing Shakespeare—clear, vigorous speech that was plainly understandable—would dominate how Shakespeare was spoken

in emerging BBC readings led by Ernest Milton, “whose genius often inspired the rest of the company to performances which were more than merely capable.”<sup>13</sup>

There exists a beautifully bound volume of the weekly issues of *The Queen* that Royde-Smith edited between March and the end of September 1924. According to family lore, the bound volume was a gift from her brother Graham. One issue, and only one issue, is missing from this collection—that of 23 April 1924, and tellingly it was the issue that starred Mr. Ernest Milton, displaying his photo portrait to great central effect. The missing issue raises the possibility of family censorship or perhaps Royde-Smith’s. He was praised in the column by N. G. Royde-Smith for his remarkable and disturbing performance of Angelo in *Measure for Measure*. In her column she described Angelo as a “tragic inverted character” at the moment when “the whole unconscious but profound hypocrisy of his life has overwhelmed his will and his reason, and, having shown him in utter disarray, sets him back in the security he has so irrevocably destroyed, and rewards him by means of the worst of all [Shakespeare’s] happy-ending marriages.” According to Naomi, “Mr. Milton succeeded in making Angelo a human being. His finest portrayal was not his conception of the ascetic’s downfall, but in the remorseful gesture with which, in the last act, he surrenders, not to the Duke’s will, but to Mariana’s established dominion.” Milton’s interpretation of Angelo, as understood by Royde-Smith, rendered the inverted—that is, homosexual—character “remorseful” as he submitted to marriage with a woman, the culmination of “the inevitable crisis through which he has been forced to pass.”

Naomi’s friendship with Ernest, her Giannello, twisted and tightened until after an enigmatic July diary entry—“midnight follies” attached to his name—he abruptly faded from intimacy although continuing to attend Thursdays in public light with others. Before he left to tour as Count Beppo in *The Lonely House*, she noted in her diary that he was “in a deep hole” (13 August 1924, NRS MSS). As for herself, after losing her position on *The Queen*, she abandoned London, retreating to seaside locations to write her first novel, *The Tortoiseshell Cat* (1925). She exulted in her diary after completing it late at night that Giannello was furious. It was clear that by this time he had become a singularly important person in her life. Royde-Smith’s novel was lesbian themed, with a protagonist who dramatically fled to safe but inauthentic



heterosexuality in the novel's final pages. Interestingly, Ernest was also beginning to contemplate writing a homosexually themed novel.

Ernest did not begin his novel *To Kiss the Crocodile* (1928) for another year. In it one protagonist (of two) fled the languor of British "invert" society, escaping to exotic regions and sacrificial death. Naomi was on Ernest's mind as he scribbled: "I wrote the most wonderful bit about *you* in "The Crocodile" last night" (8 December 1927, Milton MSS). In this fiction there were two women characters who may have been drawn from his relationship with Naomi: one was the wise woman who had the "priceless intuitive gift for discovering the essential *morale* of any human being" and sponsored weekly *soirées* to boot; the other was an unpleasant stalker who had written a play to be enacted by the actor who was object of her desire. The stalker was convinced that the actor must set himself up as an actor-director in order to thrive, and she insisted that he loved her without knowing it.

During 1925, Royde-Smith's novel *The Tortoiseshell Cat* was published by Constable in London as well as by Boni and Liveright in New York, and it sold so well that Michael Sadleir at Constable decided to publish her next novel sight unseen. She was writing *The Housemaid* at the seaside in Cornwall and also reviewing for the *Outlook*, *Time and Tide*, the *Daily News*, the *Guardian*, and the *New Statesman*. In February she leased for five years a couple of small rooms at 2 Mitre Court in the Temple in London, but by the beginning of the next year she had given them up because they were "too expensive and too cold for the season." She hired as her book agent James B. Pinker, and before releasing him from obligation, sent him a spat of short stories: "They're all about women who didn't marry. This is quite accidental—I noticed it when sorting out the tales."<sup>14</sup>

She and Ernest Milton saw little of each other during 1925, his name appearing just once in her diary: "EM to supper. He was very tired & nervous and extremely cross, captious and quarrelsome" (30 May, NRS MSS). It was a busy year for Ernest. In February he produced and acted in *The Lady from the Sea* at the Lyric, returning to the Old Vic in April as Hamlet and then Tom Wrench in Pinero's *Trelawney of the Wells* in June; in July he was at the Everyman in Pirandello's *Henry IV* and in October was Oswald in Ibsen's *Ghosts*; in November at the Ambassador he performed in *The Madras House*, and at the Scala in December in

*Arden of Feversham*. For BBC Radio he read Lysander in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (June 23) and Caliph in *Hassan* (November 8).<sup>15</sup>

The year 1926 opened to a round of collaborations between Royde-Smith and Milton that were organized around their professional interest in the theater. Royde-Smith, now residing at 4 Chester Gate, had written a play, *A Balcony* (1927), and wished to settle the contents of the last act with "Ernest." She no longer called him Giannello. While she was in Lynton in February with Mr. and Mrs. Spencer, she and "E. M." corresponded and spoke by telephone. Ernest was less overwhelmed with work. He found time to perform the lead role in *A Balcony* when it was produced on stage.

Her play *A Balcony* dramatized a husband's response to his wayward, frivolous wife, allowing her to tumble to her death moments after she chose her heart's desire over duty to husband. As a dramatization of feminine free will, it was meant to appeal to the growing number of working women who were crowding into London theatres. The larger historical frame was societal apprehension about the consequences of enfranchising those women who had not yet received the right to vote. In 1918, only women property owners who were over the age of thirty had been granted suffrage. Among male critics, there was "evident anxiety over what was perceived as the feminization of the theatre."<sup>16</sup> Naomi's play had a short run.

On May 7, 1926, Naomi wrote in her diary: "Sketched plan of campaign for E. M." What followed was a courting blitz: she walked, dined, and socialized with Ernest daily or nightly throughout May and June. On holiday during September she drew him into the bosom of her family in Wales.

After Margie died in August, Naomi invited Ernest to accompany her for a two-week holiday near Maenan Hall in Wales where her mother and father now dwelled in retirement. Her sister Leslie was also visiting. Milton "started 'The Crocodile'" on the twelfth while Royde-Smith worked on *Mafro Darling*, a play she was writing for him to perform. On the fourteenth she penned in her diary: "—Pussy's Proposal—." Ernest had asked her to marry him, although it sounded in this notation more like a proposed contract. This was the first recorded instance of her use of "Pussy" as a term of endearment. It became her private nickname for him, perhaps deriving from the plotted second part of the novel he was just beginning to write, the portion entitled "Ding, Dong, Bell," with origins,

if not in Shakespeare's songs, then perhaps alluding to the nursery rhyme, "Ding, Dong, Bell/ Pussy's in the well" and so forth. Speculation aside, "pussy" nearly always has feminine associations. His nickname for Naomi was Minchie, derived from the name of the indeterminately gendered cat Minchoulina in *The Tortoiseshell Cat*.

The actress Lilian Braithwaite returned Naomi's manuscript of *Mafro Darling*, agreeing to play Lady Susan if ever it was produced (although she didn't perform in it when it was actually put on stage). She thought Ivor Novello should be cast as Mafro. Novello was a popular actor who was widely known in theatre circles as homosexual.

During the interlude after Wales, Naomi pressed Walter de la Mare to finish his portion of *John Fanning's Legacy*. Having lost interest in the interrupted project, he transferred his rights to her. She wrote his last Quantock letter and finished the book in anticipation of her marriage to Ernest and her uncertainty about what might be de la Mare's response. While she was living in seclusion in Lynton at the Lee Abbey Hotel, writing what remained of *John Fanning's Legacy* and beginning *Skin-Deep* (1927), as well as finishing *Mafro Darling*, "E. telephoned at 3 o'clock to renew his offer" (27 October 1926, Milton MSS). By the end of November, she had obviously accepted whatever Ernest had offered, for she called on the vicar in Lynton. Ernest wrote longing for her comforting embrace rather than offering conventional masculine protective strength and urgency. "I am aching for the moment when I am in your arms as your *husband*. I think, I think 'Night's candles are burning out, and jocund *day* stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.' Darling!" He doodled a cartoon—the first of many in years to follow—of a suit-clad pussy cat, this one standing upright and flourishing a marriage license (8 December 1926, Milton MSS). Their vows were solemnized on December 15, 1926, in the Lynton Parish Church in Devonshire. Ernest, age thirty-six, gave Naomi's Chester Gate address in London as his own; Naomi used the Lee Abby Hotel in Lynton as hers.<sup>17</sup> She had not yet disclosed her age of fifty-one years to Ernest, for she claimed it as forty-eight on her marriage license. He was actually fifteen years younger than Naomi (not twelve). They married secretly, notifying friends and family only after the event. Naomi was jubilant in letters to friends: "[Ernest] came down & we were married on the longest night of the year with a red sun and a jade green moon when the sun set to celebrate the occasion—& the sea like glass."<sup>18</sup>

Shortly after they wed, Ernest gave Naomi a Christmas greeting card. It was a love note that was fronted by a slim, fluffily feathered very young woman in a pink satin form-fitting evening dress, slightly camp, with a printed message about memories of the past and wishes for the future, then more personally: “Gratitude, & a full sense of the beauty of the days before our marriage—& today,—a deeper, profounder & more amazed sense of love. Your husband, Xmas 1926” (Milton MSS).

Naomi countered Ernest’s seriousness with humor, terminating her diary for that year with one of her clever ditties: “She treads on velvet/ She eats the best/ She sleeps in diamonds/ And risks the rest.” During the weeks before marriage, she displayed a new sense of financial wellbeing by terminating her steady income reviewing for the *Outlook*, the *Observer*, the *Times* booklist, and *Time and Tide*. She kept her work for the *New Statesman*, for which she wrote over twenty book reviews during 1927.

Soon enough Naomi’s tone matched Ernest’s for gravitas, conveying love and respect: “I am only now beginning to realize how very lonely I was before we got married. You are my joy, and comfort and companion even when we are separated. I simply couldn’t do without you now. How I managed before, I don’t know” (June 1927, Milton MSS). Many decades later in a long narrative poem she had written to comfort Ernest once she died, she chronicled her personal history: her heart so alone, friendship and love, a short gleam of fame, her attempt to still desire, until she chose from phantoms

. . . a Prince of saddened mien—  
The man whom Shakespeare loved—  
Not till that moment had been  
In such a blaze of Glory seen—  
And in your shape he moved.  
[. . . .]  
Thy shrine is closed—The Altar Flame  
Burns—and will never die—  
Your voice has brought me Perfect Peace—  
Your friendship, Joy that cannot cease.  
God bless you—and Goodbye.<sup>19</sup>

Mr. and Mrs. Milton established their first home together in Naomi's Chester Gate flat. During these early months, she wrote a last will and testament to which was appended a codicil signed by Ernest agreeing to its contents. In this document, Naomi bequeathed £1,000 to Ernest, plus the rights to earnings from plays and books, except for royalties from *A Private Anthology* reserved for Walter de la Mare. Therein, among other gifts, Naomi bequeathed to her sister Maud all her property from the will of the late Edgar Frere, the man with whom she had a secret understanding before he left for the war front where he died in battle.<sup>20</sup>

Lilian Baylis came to congratulate the newlyweds, and after Ernest left early to play Herod, Miss Baylis quipped, "Come to me always in your sorrows dear or in your joys, but not otherwise. I've no time for chit-chat." Naomi's admiring reaction: "She's a great woman" (27 January 1927, Milton MSS).

Actual marriage did not noticeably change the pattern of their working lives during that first year. Naomi finished writing *John Fanning's Legacy*, read proof, and saw two novels and a play through publication: *Skin-Deep* (1927), *John Fanning's Legacy* (1927), and *A Balcony* (1927). She negotiated with Harper's for a £250 minimum to £600 maximum advance royalty on American sales of her next book (diary, 18 February 1927, NRS MSS). She was broadcasting weekly results of a "Problems" competition for the BBC. Before leaving in February 1927 by train for Wales to visit her mother, she asked de la Mare if his son Colin would help her with the BBC competition: "[. . .] if I have more entries than I can get through and may alter would he take £5.5- for a week's work on them" (8 February 1927, Mare MSS). Subsequently, she secured a job for Colin on the literary staff of the BBC. She was now on the "lecturing tread-mill," giving talks about such subjects as the "Difference between a Novel and a Play" and "Witches in Modern Fiction." Between March and October, she wrote the first of a trilogy of novels while residing in her usual seclusion in a tower overlooking the sea attached to the Lee Abby Hotel in Lynton: "The Lynds, Sylvia & Robert, are here in the hotel—and Clifford Sharp, so I do not lack for company if I want it, which I don't much, being very happy and alone in my tower writing away at my *Children in the Wood*" (October 1927, Mare MSS).

As for Ernest, in London he was cast in leading roles such as in *Daniel Deronda* in February at the Q, an experimental theatre in Kew, and *The Dybbuk* at the Royalty in April. During June, he squeezed with Naomi into a cottage at Lynton to work on his novel. During August and September, he traveled to the United States, attempting on the West Coast to edge into cinema work and also looking for stage roles in New York. He had already starred in an early silent film, *The Amazing Quest of Mr. Ernest Bliss* (1920), now a “lost” film. From October until the end of the year, he toured Egypt playing Shakespearean parts with Robert Aiken’s Company. Naomi and Ernest were not spending much time together; however, they began a lifelong habit of scribbling kind and loving letters to one another, sometimes exchanging two or three a day, made possible by frequent mail deliveries in Great Britain. Hundreds of letters between the two are stashed in the Ernest Milton Collection in the archives of the Victoria and Albert Museum at Blythe House in London. Most of the letters are from Ernest, for as a rule he did not save hers.

In London Naomi declared that she was tossing aside “oddments of work” to “start a short, sharp novel” that had begun “to buzz in the air” that she was breathing (30 January 1927, Mare MSS). The result was a novella, *The Lover* (1928). Her novel *Children in the Wood* came out in June. One of her short stories about spinsters, “The Visitors,” was anthologized by Hugh Chesterman.<sup>21</sup> Alone, she retreated during July and August to Wales, now composing the second novel of her projected trilogy. She continued to polish her comedy *Mafro Darling*.

By June 1927, she and Ernest moved their London dwelling to 72 Regents Park Road on Primrose Hill. Until that move, they were apart; she writing her novels on the Isles of Scilly and such places, he living in rooms at St. George’s Terrace in London. Nor did they stay put for long in the Primrose Hill location, unable to afford the new address, selling their—mainly her—extensive library, downsizing.<sup>22</sup>

Ernest returned to the Old Vic, playing a variety of Shakespearean leads. Lilian Baylis offered him £20 a week, generous by the standards of the Old Vic yet meager, far short of his West End earnings.<sup>23</sup> Besides a short run in *The Moving Finger* in August and a part in Cecil Lewis’s BBC production of *Montezuma*, Ernest had little West End work. His novel *To Kiss the Crocodile* received disparaging reviews, such as in the *Times Literary Supplement*: “Mr. Ernest Milton does not at present

possess the gifts that make a good novelist. ‘To Kiss the Crocodile’ is an untidy, hysterical book.”<sup>24</sup>

Their prolonged separations struck uneasy notes. While Naomi was in Wales for much of the summer, Ernest, at loose ends, sent a mock note of abandonment as if from the “Cock, Hen & Co., solicitors”: “Our client’s distress, which has now taken the form of loss of appetite & nocturnal dissatisfaction, & your failure in any other of your letters to clear up this point, in spite of frequent inquiries, has impelled him to consult us again; & we now respectfully inform you that failing your early return, we are empowered, on our client’s behalf, to bring an action against you for the restitution of conjugal rights” (30 July 1928, Milton MSS). Ernest enlisted his mother in San Francisco to write several letters imploring Naomi to return home to her “darling son.”<sup>25</sup> Naomi was not the only marital miscreant. Ernest went off on holiday to Paris in October without inviting her. From Paris, he apologized: “I am quite sick about it. I can’t forget your hurt look. But I didn’t realize you would feel like that. Though I know how rotten selfish I have been to come.”

Somehow, during this time of uncertain domestic connection, Ernest and Naomi developed a bold scheme that would pull them together in artistic—and what they hoped would be lucrative—partnership. The venture, ill conceived, was an unmitigated financial disaster.

Setting himself up as an old-fashioned nineteenth-century style actor-manager, Ernest leased the Queen Theater on the West End during January and February of 1929. It was a two-tier structure built to hold an audience of 1,200 surrounded by glorious white and gold walls and roof, green in the carpet hangings and upholstery, a handsome marble staircase. Apparently, the theater was not heated: “In the stage box sat Naomi Royde-Smith [. . .], who was one of the hearty ones who took off their coats. Perhaps enthusiasm kept her warm, but at all events she revealed an attractive red dress.”<sup>26</sup>

Ernest, producing, had just finished acting in his version of Pirandello’s *Henry IV*, renamed *The Mock Emperor*. After this well-received production, he produced and acted in Naomi’s comedy *Mafro Darling*. The character Mafro was depicted as an invert, a genius dancer who adored his lovely patroness, the widow Susan. Tricked into thinking that she had lost her fortune in the stock market, softheartedly he proposed marriage, kneeling and speaking ungrammatically as befitted a stereotypical Italian transplant: “Dear Susan, I love you. While you

are a rich woman it is enough that you have my love. But now that you are poor, my love is not enough. You shall have my money, too—and my art—and my life. You shall be my wife.”<sup>27</sup> His sacrifice to marriage was heart-rending martyrdom. Not surprisingly, he was alert to the first chance that came his way to abandon his altruistic offer, jumping ship the moment he ascertained that Susan still possessed her fortune. Mafro was absolutely certain that marriage would spoil his creative genius; financial necessity would compromise his artistic integrity. As for the production, *Mafro Darling* closed after four nights, a failure. Some reviewers approved of Milton’s performance as Mafro, noting that he played the part of the egocentric dancer by dodging the conventional flourish of effeminacy. Other reviewers were bluntly unsympathetic, even ridiculing his performance:

As a psychological study of a ‘fairy,’ her play has its points. The only trouble is that it is not really a play at all. To see what is outwardly a man behaving like a very petulant woman may be funny—but not for three acts. Mafro was created by the author to give Ernest Milton, her husband, a chance to reveal his skill in weird parts. In ‘The Mock Emperor’ he acted the tragedy of queerness. Now he has shown the comedy of queerness.<sup>28</sup>

Ernest strove to avoid total financial ruin by resuscitating *The Mock Emperor*. On this second go-around, it played to an empty house despite its reputation as one of the “most eloquent pieces of acting that the London Stage has seen for years, rich in quality and sensitive and imaginative to a degree that is almost startling.”<sup>29</sup> London dramatic taste in the 1920s did not extend to filling spacious theaters week after week with audiences keen for European experimentation. Many decades later, J. C. Trewin, drama critic for *The Observer* for over sixty years, lamented the passage of time that diminished reputations: “What does a new generation know of, say, Ernest Milton in Pirandello’s *The Mock Emperor*? Only such a note as Graham Robertson’s ‘I have seen nothing like it since Irving.’”<sup>30</sup> Speaking for himself, Robertson wrote in a letter: “I got up to the first night and was thrilled as I had never hoped to be in a theatre. Ernest is superb from his first entrance when the immense dignity of the fantastic figure with painted cheeks hushes the house with dead silence, to the last wonderful moment when it sits lovely



upon its high throne staring out into eternity.”<sup>31</sup> But even the supportive Robertson could find no redeeming qualities in Royde-Smith’s play. He expressed dismay, unable to see anything that would make for success on the stage, her talent “eminently untheatrical,” her “interest is just around the corner”: “[T]he present play, I fear, will do little for Ernest except show his uncanny versatility” (Robertson as quoted by Preston, 217).

As soon as these two theatrical productions closed, Naomi escaped to Land’s End in Sennen Cove, Cornwall, where, sitting in front of a bay window overlooking the Atlantic, she confided to her friend, Louise Morgan, that she was “all alone with her nerves which have gone to pieces for the moment.”<sup>32</sup> She was more informative in her lamentations to Walter de la Mare:

Ernest has had a puny aesthetic triumph with his play, & we shall have to sell up—but everything & live in a boarding house as from March 25<sup>th</sup>. I shall go down to Penn for a week or two or about April 5<sup>th</sup> to re-adjust myself & write a story and a play. Do try to get Herpes under control by then. It would do me a world of good to talk a little about Life & Letters and the great relief it is to get rid of belongings with you. Don’t be sorry for me. I am feeling quite extraordinarily free & buoyant now that I see the knife that cuts the painting—is this quite right—the simile I mean? (9 March 1929, Mare MSS)

Naomi’s use of the word “puny” expresses her disappointment, but she did not own up to her own hand in the fiasco. Nevertheless, from ashes she burst into personal freedom, apparently released from constructing an ideal of their life, an artificial construct—or as she temporized, a “painting.” Her thinking followed from the short story she was writing at the time. It was in fairytale mode titled “Once Upon a Time” about a princess who ridiculed men who courted her by embroidering satirical brocades of them until she was charmed by a prince who offered artifice. Once his art failed, the princess was able to establish her dominance in courtship and marriage: “‘And now, my Prince,’ said the Little Princess, ‘shall we go out into the real garden?’”<sup>33</sup>

Naomi rejected the task of establishing and judging problem competitions for *Everyman*, begging Louise Morgan to take them on.

At the same time, she continued to lecture, sometimes in Brighton, sometimes in Appledon, writing an amusing letter to de la Mare from Darlington, self-deprecating, chuckling at “the retreat of the local notables visibly relieved that their half-hour’s politeness is over; the rather more intimate talk that follows & then, at last, the conventional bedroom & the lurking suspicion that this faint headache & slip of sore throat may be Flu” (19 March 1929, Mare MSS). In person on the BBC on April 12, she debated Compton Mackenzie on the subject of broadcast radio drama. Mackenzie argued in favor of it on the grounds that it encouraged intelligence in its audience, making its appeal to the individual listener without the aid of previous criticism. Naomi spoke for the proposition that the broadcast play was an unsatisfactory form of art on the grounds that there was no reason to listen to several people speak, with intermittent distinctness, an abbreviated play “when you can either go to the theatre and see a play, or stay at home and read it in full for yourself.” She carried her resolution by a majority of three to one.<sup>34</sup>

In the wake of the Queen Theater debacle, Naomi and Ernest heaved from their Primrose Hill dwelling overlooking the northern reaches of Regent’s Park. Ernest remained in London, where he landed on his feet, taking up the role of Rupert Cadell in Patrick Hamilton’s *Rope*. It was a success, a flirtation with opposing attitudes toward homosexuality, a thriller that later would be captured in an Alfred Hitchcock film.

They leased The Spinney north of London in Hatfield, Hertfordshire, where they stayed put together off and on for three years, Ernest keeping a flat in London and commuting by train. Naomi had plenty of fodder for her amusing memoir about her relish for sloughing domiciles. In *Van Lords, or the Sport of Removing* (1934) she crowed that she had moved thirteen times since 1915, confessing that for her “removing is the breath of life”: “When I may not remove from one house to another I change the rooms in the house I have just arranged—always for the better—and I can never see an empty house without trying to get inside and planning how I could live there” (32–3). Her new palace was a “spacious Hut, less expensive,” with a study window overlooking an almond tree for her and with a train station three minutes from the door for Ernest. The house did not appeal to their friend and neighbor Robert Speaight, who remembered that Naomi and Ernest had settled into an “ugly white brick house on the unfashionable side of the railway.” Ernest decorated

his study in “funereal black from floor to ceiling with just a single vivid picture to relieve darkness” (*Property Basket*, 110). Naomi compensated for The Spinney’s exterior with her highly cultivated sense of color, line, and fabric, creating internal spaces that were “pulled together into a curious and unexpected harmony by the detail of lacquer-red curtain poles.”<sup>35</sup> Her friend Louise Morgan [Theis] appreciated Naomi’s decorating aesthetic.

Meanwhile, Ernest continued to flourish professionally, putting the Queen Theater fiasco behind him. On the heels of his success in *Rope*, he journeyed to New York to perform the same role in a production of the play, now renamed *Rope’s End*. He was acclaimed in the role, audiences standing in ovation. Unusually, Naomi accompanied him, settling into rooms at the Algonquin Hotel when living in New York and at various hotels in Boston and Philadelphia. Patrick Hamilton, the playwright of *Rope*, sublet their Hatfield house while they were abroad; he was writing *John Brown’s Body*, the lead part of which was written for Ernest, who would play the role of Roger Aslan during January 1931 in a very short run.

Before she departed for New York, Royde-Smith arranged with a young man to collaborate in writing an epistolary travelogue and art critique. Roger Hinks was art historian and assistant keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities in the British Museum. For his contribution to *Pictures and People* (1931), Hinks described his London social world, his partner John’s reactions, and the Italian Exhibition of paintings in early 1930. For her part, the lion’s share, Royde-Smith cut a wide swath across the northeast of the United States, viewing cityscapes, observing behaviors, describing paintings, sculptures, architecture, musical performances, and constructing verbal portraits of women central to the economic milieu of the American art world, each representing an aspect of herself. She admired the patron Mrs. Simon Guggenheim, who was the only woman in America she envied because she could give money to support artists and had the “power to release so much creative energy.” She also admired the helpful workaday journalist Sarah Lowrie and dismissed the scholar Gisela Richter, dunned for her unkind “paralyzing intelligence” (243–53).

In *Pictures and People*, Royde-Smith once again voiced antipathy towards art-for-art’s sake theories, just as she had voiced in her introduction to *A Private Anthology* (1924). She was governed by what

some later termed reader-response aesthetics. In America she toured art galleries, encountering bits and pieces of plundered art from the centuries, clinging to “the truth that the work is null without the recognizer” (138). It seemed that sociohistorical context had no place in her system, but unlike future reader-response theorists, she was flexible enough to amend her critical principles to acknowledge the significance of an artist’s intentions. After all, she herself had now created seven published novels. According to Royde-Smith, the “validity” of a work of art depended on the extent “to which it approximates to the artist’s initial and impulsive conception of the completed whole” (139). Neoclassical rather than romantic, she valued the importance of intellectual forethought and conception.

While in New York City at the beginning and end of her sojourn, Naomi shared a hotel room with Ernest. Before his performances, she would prepare soup for him on a mentholated spirit lamp. Experiencing seedy complicity fostered by prohibition, she was disconcerted. In order to procure an alcoholic drink for Ernest before performances, they had to endure the “insinuating voice over the phone toward midnight” (181–2). She thought drinking from a flask “disgusting.” Many of her observations about the United States were from the point of view of a British critic addressing curious British readers.

She returned to England in full-blown anthropological mode. While reacquainting herself with the blossoming almond tree in her garden and the familiar maze of shopping streets in Hatfield, she focused her objectifying eye on British newspapers with front-page articles about breeding horses and shooting woodcocks. She could understand how “baffled Wall Street and Fifth Avenue must be to find those two letters on the leader-page of *The Times* while the Naval Conference is sitting in London and the world is still tottering from the collapse in the Stock Market last autumn” (255–6).

Ernest was rushed into the hospital for surgery four days after they returned to London in April. His close friend Graham Robertson came as soon as he was allowed. The two shared a sexual sensitivity but not a sexual connection. Robertson’s interlocutor and editor of his letters took pains to describe Robertson’s purity: “It was not mere sexlessness but more like the protective virtue of chastity in a woman” (Preston, xiv). Nevertheless, Ernest had been Robertson’s weekend guest on several occasions before signing onto *Rope* in London. Helping to nurse Ernest

after his operation, Robertson reported that he had been “minding” Ernest because “Mrs. Milton was glad of time off as they only freshly arrived home from America and she has much to do and arrange.” He found Ernest “very fractious and restless and convinced he was much worse—all of which was most reassuring” (quoted by Preston, 236–7). Ernest recuperated slowly. He did not accept an acting part until July as Pierrot in *Prunella*, a whimsical fantasy at the Everyman. August he was home in Hatfield with a strain around the surgical wound. In October he was back on stage at the Arts, performing Alfred Allmers in Ibsen’s *Little Eyolf*.

Naomi nursed Ernest and also her sister Erica, who had “two ribs and one lung removed in Guy’s Hospital on Monday and on the same day Ernest took to his bed,” even as Naomi’s thoughts were never far from her next project: “I’m wondering when, if ever, I shall get my book started.”<sup>36</sup>

While in America, she had revised *The Island, a Love Story* (1930) for publication, and home again she fell immediately to writing a novel that had been incubating, *The Delicate Situation* (1931). She was also composing a play, *Mrs. Siddons* (1931), which was performed in 1933, and a novella, *The Mother* (1931). She was highly disciplined, writing between 1,500 and 3,000 words each day. Naomi did her best to shut herself away between 10:30 until 1:00 in the afternoon, and between 3:00 and 5:00. According to an interview with Louise Morgan, she accomplished most when Ernest was away. Sometimes she rented rooms for solitude. She confessed in the Morgan interview that when she reached the crisis of a book she could not risk interruption: “‘Then I have to leave my private life completely. I often go down to a hotel in Devon.’”

She also disclosed to Morgan in the *Everyman* interview that she could not begin a novel without knowing its first and last sentence. Her novels were completely clear in her mind before she commenced composition: “‘Yes, even to the furniture and the frocks. The scenes are all written in my head from the first to the last sentence. Some scenes are clearer than others. It’s terribly exciting when I get to them. I can hardly wait to reach them. [. . .] But what goes down is only a fragment of the real book, a mere shadow.’” Typically, then, she became self-critical: “‘I suppose that’s my greatest fault,’ she added, ‘What I’m describing seems too rich and full for me. There’s too much to choose

from, so I leave too many things in.” Louise Morgan used Royde-Smith’s insight into creative bounty as a metaphor to describe her life in general, abounding in “almost careless richness.” According to Morgan, Naomi had room for interests, inspirations, affections, angers, enthusiasms, housekeeping, obligations to family and friends, reading of poetry and French novels. Morgan found this wide-ranging humanism key to Naomi’s novels, which she noted displayed “an all-embracing human curiosity” about personality “apart from class or education or other extraneous circumstances.”

Louise Morgan did not get quite right Naomi’s attitude toward class. Royde-Smith clearly wrote with a point of view on matters of class status. The occasional duke or duchess or lord or lady who appeared as characters in her fiction were typically vapid, self-centered, and sometimes venal, although undeniably personalities in their own right. Regardless of their class origin, if not working for their keep, all of her characters were depicted as blind to the suffering of others and as users who employed servants without thought for their welfare. Her short story “Madam Julia’s Tale” was an example. Set in New York during class uprising and machine-gun wars associated with prohibition, a wealthy and pampered American woman, described in profile as a predatory eagle, snuggled under furs to recount a ghost story that revealed her unconscious desire for rescue by young men who thereafter, coincidentally, would die. The woman’s almost conscious apprehension of personal complicity was overlaid by ecstasy as she bade goodbye to her next victim, her driver: “Now, in the swiftness of a glance, her face had become radiant and smiling and yet a little awed—even alarmed, as though fear had met delight in her response to what she saw” (57). Royde-Smith’s disdain for those with unearned wealth marked her class critiques in *The Housemaid* (1926), *Skin-Deep* (1927), *David* (1933), *The Queen’s Wigs* (1934), *For Us in the Dark* (1937), and others, including several of her short stories.

Her critique extended even to her own class prejudices against unearned wealth. In “The Pattern,” a short story collected in *Madam Julia’s Tale*, she invented characters who returned from death in the human form of what had been despised in life, an exercise in humility and empathy. A woman character, for instance, who had reveled in chaste feminism returned as a man besotted by sex; a man character,

egalitarian, who thought only earned money fit to touch, returned as a privileged bishop.

Nearly always her longer works were explorations of sexual relationships, some between men and women, some between women and women, and in two novels, *David* and *Jake*, she portrayed attraction between men. Cast as romance, these tales, nevertheless, were more usually than not about failed desire, whether heterosexual or homosexual. Her novel *The Island, a Love Story*, for instance, depicted failed lesbianism. Quest, as romance plot curve, was usually realized in the nuanced recognitions of woman protagonists who, nevertheless, learned just small bits about themselves. Threading all of Naomi's output during the twenties and thirties was her tough recognition of the power of advertising and culture on the performative aspects of gender, the kind of analysis associated with late twentieth-century gender theorists such as Judith Butler. Precursor to gender theory, Naomi's vision enabled her to display how femininity was performed and also how homosexuality was performed, mixed as it was with artistic presentation, as with the dancer in her play *Maftro Darling*.

Lecturing on the subject of how to produce popular, bestselling fiction, Naomi, in notebook draft for the lecture, expressed a dilemma. She knew how to write a bestseller but could not manage to do it, because, she explained, she'd have to think like millions of others: "The best-seller writer must be fluent, platitudinous *and* sincere. If you, as I, try to copy such a one, we shall end in parody & failure." She warned that readers are "acutely sensitive to ridicule and are quick to resent the hint of intellectual superiority in another."<sup>37</sup> She was referring to her habit of writing tongue-in-cheek, as when she offered a story about a successful heterosexual love affair that culminated in marriage. She entitled it *Incredible Tale* (1932).

Whether her theory was correct or not about the importance of refraining from outpacing readers, Royde-Smith produced a bestseller in 1931, *The Delicate Situation*. It told the story of a failed romantic liaison that, nevertheless, resulted in pregnancy, and about the nonsexual spinster partners who protected the unwed mother. The novel sold 10,000 copies in the United Kingdom and went to a second printing. For this work, she had changed publishers from Constable to Victor Gollancz while continuing to be published by Harper in the United States.

Dorothy L. Sayers solicited short stories from Royde-Smith that she anthologized in widely read volumes, *Great Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror*. They went to many printings over the decades. Sayers pleaded for more stories from Naomi, hoping for something as “dreadful as the last scene of ‘Skin Deep,’” which made her “skin creep,” adding that she would be grateful for anything of a “gruesome nature.”<sup>38</sup> Royde-Smith’s “Proof” was included in Sayers’s first collection (1928), “Mangaroo” in the second series (1931), and “The Pattern” in the third series (1934). Gollancz had negotiated flat rates for all stories in order to avoid copyright issues. Unfortunately, Naomi earned merely £4 for “Proof” and then £5.50 for each subsequent contribution. Because Naomi retained the copyright in her name, she was able to collect these stories with others for a separate publication by Gollancz in 1932.

Naomi was writing in a white heat, barely able to keep pace with projected but not yet realized books tumbling forth fully plotted and imagined, awaiting composition. In 1931 four were published: a novel, *The Delicate Situation*; a biography, *The Double Heart, a Study of Julie de Lespinasse*; a novella, *The Mother*; and a play, *Mrs. Siddons*, which was performed in 1933. She was also now contributing a regular column that reviewed new fiction for *Time and Tide*. In 1932 three books were published: a novel, *The Bridge*; a collection of short stories, *Madam Julia, and Other Queer Tales*; and a novella, *Incredible Tale*.

She holidayed during May 1931 for two weeks in Sanary in Southern France with her friends Maria and Aldous Huxley. Provence in the decade after the First World War would become a setting for the novel *The Bridge* (1932). The antique, broken bridge at Avignon was its central trope.

The character Andra, the protagonist of *The Bridge*, thought of herself as a “bridge” between generations, neither at ease with conventional Edwardian values nor comfortable with sexual experimentation in the wake of the First World War, the iconoclastic behaviors of the 1920s. Andra, the third person narrator, like Royde-Smith herself, was versatile in historical detailing of centuries of British architecture dating from the Queen Anne period and also conversant with the fashions and relaxed mores of sun-worshipping expatriates living in Provence. Andra, married, had lived like a “nun” for twenty years since losing a baby and nearly her life during childbirth. Now middle aged and chaste, she followed the bridge of a new desire in Avignon to discover a particular



painting, brutal and suffering, a Pietà representing agony of the holy mother for her broken son. Concomitant with her religious quest, Andra plunged into a passionate, adulterous affair—one that also devolved into an agony of mother for lover imagined as son. Soon thereafter, she returned to her conventional role as the vicar's wife, no longer believing in Anglicanism for it was a “comfortable, muffled, soft religion” (188). She returned to her established life, now vitalized, stronger, and more productive, and “no longer wished very much for approbation nor did she fear disapproval. She took on more parish work than she had done for years” (304). Characteristically paradoxical, Royde-Smith portrayed her protagonist as a more conventionally engaged vicar's wife having now experienced an intense departure from village mores.

Naomi nestled in her usual Sussex hotel retreat during September 1931 while Ernest performed in *Grand Hotel*. There was a new note of longing in his letters: “Darling—So now you're not even going to write to Pussy. It's pretty bleak taking those trains to and from Hatfield—no Minchie in the home end at night.” The worldwide economic depression was affecting their day-to-day lives. Theaters producing serious drama were especially hard hit, and Ernest for the first time during their marriage was finding it difficult to earn a living. Money was at issue between them, prompting Ernest to reassure Naomi that he would be able to pay the Hatfield rent in about ten days, and that his reticence about money was not caused by hoarding and that as soon as possible he would increase her check.

Their financial hardships did not stop Ernest from writing loving letters to Naomi. He purred after they celebrated their fifth wedding anniversary: “My own darling. It isn't at all like five years. More like five days!—a beautiful life time with the most perfect wife, mistress & friend. Yesterday was impressively lovely—one of those divine moments. I couldn't bear to leave you. All my love, devotion, & gratitude. Your adoring *Husband*.” His sentiments suggested that after five years he and Naomi had grown closer and more trusting, fortunately so, given the strains of their financial decline. They gave up The Spinney in Hatfield and its almond tree—no longer affordable. Once again Naomi settled in London, sharing a flat with Ernest at 79 Swan Court in Chelsea.

Naomi was beginning to experience difficulties with publishers and book agents. She skirmished with Michael Sadleir, her once editor at Constable, having already split with Constable as publisher. She blamed

Sadleir for troubles she was having with Harpers over scheduling an American publication of her biography of Julie de Lespinasse, and inexplicably, she harangued him about a party game where a group of her friends had ridiculed her work. Sadleir had not attended the supposed party. He was stung: “What *do* you mean? Everyone in my office knows that I at any rate look upon you as one of our most important authors.” “I hate to feel that you are aggrieved—hence this private & prompt reply to your letter. Do send me a postcard if, as I hope, the misunderstandings are removed. You of all authors, to cry ‘Neglect’!”<sup>39</sup> Gollancz began to publish her works, and soon afterward Hamish Hamilton, a new publishing house.

With financially worrisome instability on the publishing side of her career, Naomi seemed painfully vulnerable to perceived slights, especially at the hands of friends she had aided and protected in her days as literary editor. Many years later, in 1943, she was still smarting, recalling an incident she had heard of that occurred at a Bruno Walter dinner party (as noted in chapter 3): “and the awful pencil game you [Viola Garvin] and Rose [Macaulay] and Humbert [Wolfe] and the Lynds [Sylvia and Robert] organized against my novel *The Bridge* on the eve of publication [. . .].”<sup>40</sup> In 1932 she even flashed with anger at her friend Louise Morgan, who now was literary editor of *Everyman*. Louise had written a glowing editorial about Naomi’s *The Delicate Situation*. Just a year later, Naomi offended her by complaining about *Everyman*’s slighting of *The Bridge*, signing off as “Your still indignant friend,” to which Louise answered: “I don’t mind how indignant you are (yes I do!) if only you believe in my friendship for you. That has never wavered, & will never.”<sup>41</sup> This marked the last of their archived correspondence. *Everyman* dissolved as a publication in 1933.

Naomi jousted with Curtis Brown, her book agent, who wanted 10 percent of the royalties from *The Delicate Situation* without having been the agent that had negotiated its publication with Gollancz. She verbally terminated her contract, and this termination was upheld by solicitors who arbitrated the disagreement for the Society of Authors. A year later, there was continued dispute, and again it resolved in her favor.

Once more, and for the last time, Ernest leased a theater structure for his own productions in an effort to increase his income. This risky arrangement as an actor-manager came to no better end than in 1929. During March and April of 1932, he leased the St. James Theatre, where

he produced *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* with himself in the lead roles. His *Othello* was a flop, castigated at length by the influential drama critic James Agate, who may have had other racial stereotypes in mind. He said he would not use the word “leonine” to describe Milton, “who in place of the noble, perhaps vacant, and certainly slow, unblinking majesty of the King of Beasts exhibits the eager, nimble-witted watchfulness of one of the lesser and more apprehensive cats.”<sup>42</sup> More kindly, Graham Robertson, reported that the performance fell far short of Ernest’s normal brilliance owing to his bad head cold.

Performing Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, Ernest contributed a significant interpretation that countered stereotyped perceptions of Jews. Between the end of the First World War and the beginning of the second there were at least twenty-nine separate productions of *The Merchant of Venice* in England: nine on the Stratford stage, ten in the West End, and ten at the Old Vic.<sup>43</sup> In 1939, deaf to rumors from Europe about attacks on Jews, John Gielgud played Shylock, in the words of an anonymous critic for the *New Statesman*, as “a dingy, rancorous, fawning creature of the ghetto, greyly redolent of slum and usurer’s attic.” According to Graham Robertson, Ernest Milton played the part “straight and to wonderful effect.” Notably, it was this performance that imprinted Alec Guinness as a schoolboy. He remembered “Ernest’s hair-raising reading of the ‘Hath not a Jew eyes’ speech” (*Blessings*, 171). Ernest’s *Merchant of Venice* received favorable notices but played to half-empty houses, and within weeks it was forced to close.

Sharing domestic space with Ernest was challenging for Naomi. When preparing a role, he would bring his character home. She was not always sanguine about Ernest’s creative merging into character, an action she termed a “violent eruption of Genius,” as when he was preparing his role of Lorenzino de’ Medici for *Night’s Candles*:

These [interruptions] took the form of millions of rehearsals, tryouts, revisions, explosions, solicitor’s letters, hysterics, illicit love affairs—gorgeous costumes & even more gorgeous but abortive designs—swirling and surging around in an ever greater and more terrific Ernest. It is months since he has been at all human. Tonight he is playing and even since the matinée finishing touches have been given.<sup>44</sup>

Naomi escaped, first to train travel for its own sake, then to Cornwall, on the prowl for quarters away from Ernest and the hurly-burly of London. She recorded her railway adventures in *Pilgrim from Paddington: the Record of an Experiment in Travel* (1933), claiming she found isolation that was therapeutic: “I began to take refuge in express trains with the definite object of getting away from telephone calls and other distractions; sometimes for a couple of days; sometimes for an afternoon only” (xviii). She secured space in which to write book reviews, to answer accumulated letters, and to sleep.

Royde-Smith was still in creative ferment and working long hours. She wrote a biography, *The Private Life of Mrs. Siddons* (1933), after her play in 1931 about the famous actress Sarah Siddons. Both biography and play dwelt on the exhausted, exploited actress pressed into providing support for family and friends. *Mrs. Siddons* opened and closed at the Apollo Theatre on November 29, 1933, for one matinee performance starring Sybil Thorndike. Naomi was undaunted as a playwright. Another of her plays, *Private Room*, opened at the Westminster on February 23, 1934, and ran for a respectable sixty-three performances through April. It was broadcast by the BBC on July 5. *Private Room* was a romantic comedy about a shop girl who was captivated by aristocratic manners, only to become disillusioned. Reviewers found the play amusing, and so did Graham Robertson, who declared it charmingly written and witty.

By the beginning of 1934, Naomi had established herself in another location, this time in Tor House in Wells, Somerset. Ernest kept their

Chelsea flat on Swan Way in London. There were no direct trains to Wells. Ernest was not pleased with the tedious commute by train and bus. The number of letters he wrote to her more than tripled during these years (from approximately twenty each year to eighty), an indication that they were living apart for greater stretches of time. When Tor House became uninhabitable because its ceiling was falling, Naomi removed to Clevedon at the seaside in Somerset, also inconvenient for Ernest, who maintained London rooms on Savile Row and then in Gray’s Inn Square. He needed to live close to work opportunities in London, but Naomi did not put herself in striking range until mid-1937.

Royde-Smith’s professional life actually achieved a degree of financial stability for a time. Henry Lovat Dickson, acting as intermediary, presented the publisher Harold Macmillan with the rough outlines of

the plots of five books proposed by Royde-Smith: “I see the prospect now of being able to get your work safely arranged on this side and on the other side of the water with the same company” (22 February 1934, NRS MSS). The result: she was contracted by the end of the year, which meant that her books would be published in London for distribution in Great Britain and also be distributed by Macmillan in the United States. At least through 1939, she was paid a £400 advance for each book so long as she continued to guarantee future novels.<sup>45</sup> In both London and New York, Macmillan published *Jake* (1935), *All-Star Cast* (1936), *For Us in the Dark* (1937), *Miss Bendix* (1938), *The Altar-Piece* (1939), *The Younger Venus* (1939), and *Urchin Moor* (1939). Thereafter, once the war severed publishing bonds with America, her books were published only in London: *Jane Fairfax* (1940), *Outside Information, being a diary of rumours together with letters from others and some account in the life of an unofficial person in London and Winchester during the months of September and October 1940* (1941), *The Unfaithful Wife* (1941), *Mildensee* (1943), *Fire-Weed* (1944), and *The State of Mind of Mrs. Sherwood* (1946)—a total of thirteen books under Macmillan auspices. Of these, all save *Jane Fairfax* and *The State of Mind of Mrs. Sherwood* were set in the twentieth century.

When Naomi began with Macmillan, she dropped the hyphen in her last name; thence to be catalogued as Smith rather than Royde-Smith in the British Library and other libraries, creating confusion that on occasion may have contributed to her disappearance from historical review. Ernest castigated her decision: “As you know, I have always been opposed to your dropping the hyphen for just such a reason as [the publisher’s index listing her now under Smith].” It was a fact that Naomi’s official name in 1880 census records was “Naomi Gwladys R. Smith,” the “R” standing for the Royde that had been invented by her mother as prefix to Smith for all of her children. Naomi’s father Michael Holroyd Smith died on June 22, 1932; her mother Anne “Daisy” Smith died on January 13, 1934. Perhaps family loyalties had been at stake; Naomi might have been freed by the death of her mother to align with her deceased father in 1935. Or perhaps Macmillan considered the surname “Smith” a better fit on the binding of books.

Ernest Milton was a tormented man. His intention late in 1933 to bring home money from New York, where he was acting in *The Dark Tower*, resulted in less than two hundred pounds. He explained to

Naomi that he had been fleeced by a fellow actor. Also, his resources were spread thin as he was also sending small sums to help support his mother in San Francisco. He noted that he was continuing to slog away at his role in the play although dissatisfied with the production; he felt it necessary, given their circumstances, to make as much money as he could. His torment went well beyond the financial. He was lonely and sexually agitated, longing for Naomi, as he expressed in a florid letter with emphatic underlining written on Hotel Algonquin stationery from New York:

I can't tell you how much I miss you. The nights are dreadful—my whole life seems suspended—purposeless. Also the celibacy is beginning to be dreadful. Last week I tried to be unfaithful to you in sheer physical self-defense, but I know I haven't succeeded. I shall probably go off into aberrations, & I aggravate myself by reading the pornographic masterpieces of Petronius, Catullus or Flaubert—& the mortal sexual pathos of Maupassant. But that isn't the worst. It's not *living* with you I can't bear. The mere sight of you sitting in a chair sewing, with the light in your hair, in your Cairo wrap or your blue dress, gives me a secure assurance & pulls my life together. To contemplate you—to know you are there is everything. There. Darling little Minchie,—don't let any of this disturb you. —but you *had* to know it because I couldn't keep it bottled up any longer. My own, *sweet little Minchie!* All [doodle of a cat's head]'s love, xxx. (28 December 1933, Milton MSS)

His career was evaporating. His style of acting, wrought, seemed more fitted to the fashions of a bygone stage, nor did it translate well into film, while contemporaries whom he had influenced—Gielgud, Olivier, and others—were establishing successful careers in that medium. If he managed to secure a film part, Ernest was relegated to character roles such as Robespierre in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1934) or bit parts in *It's Love Again* (1936). Desperate for work, in 1935 he wrote another play, *Paganini*, and acted the main character. It was considered experimental theater and led the critic James Agate to paroxysms of laughter, advising Milton “to lop off that ending in which the corpse of the maestro plays a ghostly fiddle to a posse of pussies.”<sup>46</sup> Graham Robertson, a boundless

admirer of Ernest Milton, declared in another context that one of Ernest's problems was that he was impossible to "produce" since he was too individual and "such a wonderful producer himself." Meanwhile, Ernest reported to Naomi the onset of bill collectors. He was woebegone over her reported depression, alarmed that things were going so slowly for him and that she was "carrying the whole thing" for the two of them. He sent his meager royalties from his published play *Christopher Marlowe* hoping it would pay a bill or at least part of one.

Ernest was not a quitter. By 1937, he had written a novella, *Sociable People*, which he tried unsuccessfully to place with the Hogarth Press and then Macmillan. It was never published. He also wrote unpublished and unproduced plays—one in the early thirties, *Third Marriage*, and another, *Best Seller*.<sup>47</sup>

Naomi may have suffered financially but her writing flowed undeterred. Her isolated domestic situation in Wells was propitious. There, living in Tor House, planting and maintaining a cherished garden, she wrote a novel that many reviewers called absolutely astonishing. *Jake* (1935) demonstrated another of her spheres of knowledge and aesthetic sensibilities—in this instance, her sensitive understanding of classical music, especially that of the violin and piano. In *Jake* she followed the rise of a violinist from boyhood into adulthood and fame, and she also captured in language the experience of music, pleasing even to the cognoscenti:

Then, as a sea-bird will, the violin soared slowly, higher and higher, while the piano beneath it sobbed down into a silence into which the bird descended in a long cadenza-like passage to mount up and out and back into the original key [. . .]. Then a long-drawn note, held for almost two slow bars, marked the entrance of the violin, no longer a bird tossed by wind and wave at the will of the throbbing tide and the swirling air above it; but a spirit, free in its own element, taking its own flight, not a creature of the earth but a visitant to it from a sphere beyond the reach of its dark magic. (333–334)

Jake—ash blond, blue eyed, clear browed—looked like a male version of her younger, more idealistic self. By the novel's end, he had eloped with a young girl, a genius mathematician in her own right. But on the

morning after their nuptials, they had neither slept in their unopened bed nor otherwise consummated their marriage. It had not occurred to them. As Jake explained, his wife had just given a mathematical paper in Edinburgh, and “Naturally she had to tell me about it” (445). His once tutor, the narrative point of view, dryly speculated that this was “an unusual way of spending a wedding night” and declared that his job was over: Jake had found what he wanted (446).

The actor and critic Robert Speaight considered *Jake* one of the best studies of a musical genius in English fiction. He wrote: “There are in fact two geniuses in the book; one was clearly inspired by Yehudi Menuhin, the other—only a little less clearly—by Ernest Milton himself” (*Property Basket*, 110–1). Naomi’s archives contain files of Menuhin’s newspaper clippings. He was a Russian-born Jewish-American violinist who began to perform in London in 1929 at age seventeen. “Menuhin didn’t just play the violin. Rather he seemed to regard music as a kind of prayer made audible, and mellifluous.”<sup>48</sup> A second musical genius depicted in *Jake* was Ladislav Ephimenko, who was portrayed as an orphaned Polish Jew. He had invented a Greek surname in order to distinguish himself in a field of virtuoso European pianists. The narrator-tutor swooned to the power of Ephimenko’s passionate interpretation of Schubert, hearing the piano give utterance under Ephimenko’s hands to a consummate expression of the urgency of human desire, pleading and sobbing: “His touch was like velvet on the keys; his pedaling like a strong leap of blood; it rose and hummed in the veins and died away to hold a note vibrating under the slow push of the syncopation that held the reiterated melody suspended with deliberate art when the violin had made its first brief protest, fainting under the attack (333). Ephimenko did his best to dominate Jake, to forge union through the power of his musically projected emotion: “‘I was in love with Jake,’ said Ephimenko simply, ‘I still am, that is why I sought one-ness with him. But he is not in love with me. He needed no one but himself’” (425). Jake had transcended the pianist’s offer of musical companionship and sexual passion; it would have required submission to his dominance.

In *Jake*, Naomi associated Jewishness with unruly homosexual passions, drive for dominance, and selfish ruthlessness. All, in her mind, might be ingredients of a type of creative genius. Both Jake, with a Jewish grandmother, and Ephimenko, full-blooded, shared narcissistic



tendencies, thoughtlessly taking from others what they needed to thrive in the name of art.

Naomi had not yet dedicated a book to Ernest. This would occur in her novel *Urchin Moor* (1939), published just before the Second World War. Curiously, in her fiction, Royde-Smith's portrayal of Jews remained stereotyped despite her marriage with Ernest.

*Urchin Moor's* narrative, set first in 1919 and finally 1939, framed her full awareness of political conflict between the two world wars and the sheer horror of the decimation of Jews in Europe. In the novel, Linda, a Jewish actress now a refugee, survived by entrancing a middle-aged husband and then by marrying his son in an unconsummated contract in order to secure a British passport so that she could travel to a safe haven. The son explained to his mother: "She had to choose between that and a Concentration Camp—her father died in Dachau—you know that, Mother" (484). He went on to proclaim that the world is so full of cruelty that "no-one who can help even one person to escape from it has any choice." The narrator, speaking through another character, forewarned, likening England and *Urchin Moor* to a "house of cards" that will be scattered: "You think—because she has gone, that the danger she brought with her has passed. But she is not the only person in the world whose ties are broken—who drifts and brings ship wreck, because she has no ties" (523). Those who had kept the house in order, opined Royde-Smith, belonged to a disappearing world of stabilities—of good faith and conventional morality.

The term "urchin," with origins in non-Saxon Middle English, was another word for hedgehog. They were animals believed in folklore to be no-nonsense, hardworking creatures (making them apt representatives for Isaiah Berlin's opposition of single-minded hedgehogs and multivalent foxes). *Urchin Moor* also may have received its name from the Urchin Wood near Clevedon in Somerset where Royde-Smith lived during those years when she was living in places difficult for Ernest to reach. The coast of Clevedon itself was the setting for the book.

The urchin-hedgehog in the novel was embodied in the character Julia, the betrayed wife who was totally and obsessively devoted to an unusual, ancient, beautiful house, sacrificing all her resources, financial and emotional, to its welfare—as had her mother-in-law and as would the daughter-in-law after the retreat of the artist Linda. Her wayward husband who had inherited the house had a trained singing voice, but

he sacrificed his musical talent when he chose to marry Julia, the urchin, in order to provide a mother for his son, to maintain the house, and to avail himself of the security of a safe relationship. His wife, the narrative point of view, was not interested in sex—in fact, was delighted to have her husband dwell in rooms distant from hers in the house. Upon falling in love with the visiting Jewish refugee, he rode his horse over a cliff to his death, attempting to follow her departing ship. Julia recognized that her coldness and inability to share his sensibilities had caused her husband's tragic death.

Around this time Naomi decided to situate herself in closer proximity to Ernest. In 1937 she made it possible for him to commute easily to her lodging, at least on weekends, by moving to 34 St. Swithun in Winchester, located on a main train line to London. He continued to keep a flat at 6 Gray's Inn Square. Television was a new medium, and he had work in a few ephemeral productions with lead roles in *Henry IV* (1938), *Julius Caesar* (1938), *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1939), and *Rope* (1939). With the advent of the Second World War, Naomi once again moved, now to a larger domicile in Winchester, 34 Colebrook, in order to have more room for Ernest. Both addresses were within a block or so of Winchester Cathedral.

In *Urchin Moor*, the son of the manor and hope for the moral future experienced an epiphany in a cathedral when he heard his father's pure, strong singing and recognized that "this marvel of sound was allied to the other marvels of form and color," and the mystery unveiled itself with a completeness that left him without defense against the emotion it aroused. The familiar words of the liturgy became flushed and vibrant, and he knew the peace of God that passed understanding, "a tumult and an exultation in which everything he had known and loved became one thing and was one with the blaze of sunset in the window he had seen yesterday [. . .]" (324–5).

The Second World War was now fully joined. Together with Ernest, Naomi would embark on a process of conversion to Catholicism.

# Chapter 7

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## Conversions, 1935–1964

On a September afternoon in 1940, Naomi locked the door to her cozy burrow on St. Swithun Street in Winchester and headed for the train station, laden with her luggage and a box of stage properties for Ernest. She was departing from an eccentric arrangement of rooms that wound in and out of a church, its kitchen once the guardroom that the Dukes of Buckingham had maintained at the King's Gate in the city wall and into which the rest of the house was now built. It provided the setting for her novel *The Unfaithful Wife* (1941). It was also designated as appropriate shelter in the neighborhood during German bombing attacks. If Naomi clambered up a narrow staircase to look out the little door on the roof, she could ascertain if the guns had stopped “popping” or not. That September day, she thought if she could catch the late afternoon train to London she'd be more likely to have unimpeded and timely travel, allowing her to arrive in time to dine with Ernest. Instead, she journeyed into a ferocious *blitzkrieg*.

At a major train terminus in London, along with those wayfarers arriving on each incoming train, she was forced to disembark, pushed unceremoniously into the safety of the underground. A young man helped her with just one of her pieces of luggage, the rest left to their fate on the platform. She sat on her suitcase leaning against the grimy, curved wall of the tube, grateful for the seat, sharing her cigarettes and chocolates, folding her one good London hat into a pillow and for a time holding a young woman, a complete stranger, for warmth: “Under the steady whiteness of the subway lamps the shadows were deep and the

outlines of each group of figures were well defined against the chequer of the tiled and curving walls. Goya might have grouped and coloured the figures that lay crouched together as if they were herded in some Spanish jail” (25). This incident was captured by Royde-Smith in her nonfiction account, *Outside Information, being a diary of rumours with letters from others and some account of the life of an unofficial person in London and Winchester during the months of September and October 1940*.

Released to finish her journey in the morning, she foraged in vain for breakfast in the Arts Club where she had rooms across from Ernest’s flat on Dover Street. Later, Ernest turned up, “pale with rage and anxiety” (29). He had written three separate letters forbidding her to come to London, but postal service had been disrupted by the bombing.

Ernest was rehearsing *All’s Well That Ends Well* at the Vaudeville. Conditions for the performance were helter-skelter: the first night had been cancelled, a bomb having cratered the street in front; players were abandoning their parts because it was too perilous to cross the city; the blackout meant that performances had to start early. When his building was bombed a week or two later, Ernest could no longer reside in his flat, the windows blown out. To Naomi’s relief he found rooms in The Strand adjacent to the Vaudeville so that he was less endangered by his commute on foot.

In *Outside Information*, Royde-Smith described the wreckage of war while collecting rumors and public propaganda to record aspects of social conditioning during national crisis. Her chronicle of home-front war stories and observations was heavily edited by the Censorship Office before Macmillan was allowed to publish it. Government censorship dictated obfuscation of all narrative sequences of dates associated with events, as well as the deletion of any mention of landmines and aerial torpedoes. She was required to delete precise locations of railway damage, and for an unexplained reason also to delete some of her anecdotal rumors even though they were acknowledged in the text as erroneous. As long as David Macmillan, her publisher, was conveying these regulations, he asked her to remove an unhappy reference to Vera Brittain on the grounds that she was one of their “very own distinguished authors.”<sup>1</sup>

Ernest’s mother wrote from San Francisco thanking her for what she called a “brain wave.” Naomi had transferred receipt of her US royalties to “Madre” in San Francisco.

Naomi was worried sick about Ernest's welfare in London, recorded in a flurry of letters between them. From her relatively secure bunker in Winchester, together with her nephew John, she listened to Ernest's BBC performance of *All's Well* and yearned to have him near: "I miss you—s'pecially by night in bed—like a Shulamite!" (16 August 1940, Milton MSS). Her ironic scriptural reference may be read in diverse ways. The Shulamite was the heroine of the Song of Solomon (Song 2:3), denoting a perfect love relationship. Some Christians have interpreted the relationship between King Solomon and the Shulamite woman as a typological parallel to Christ's relationship to his Christian followers. The Roman Catholic woman who took vows as the Bride of Christ resembled a Shulamite, epitomizing the Church in relationship to Christ. This was not the first time, nor would it be the last that Naomi had envisioned herself as a nun; she and Walter de la Mare had bantered before the First World War about her yearning for the peaceful seclusion and contemplative life of the convent.

Because of intensified bombing in London, she sought a more spacious flat in Winchester so that Ernest could share it in relative safety.

As she had in Wells and again in Winchester when first settling there, Naomi's penchant for cathedrals governed her search for a place to live. Number 34 Colebrook Street was located a few blocks from Winchester Cathedral near The Weirs on the River Itchen. She associated cathedrals with sites of aesthetic and emotional epiphany, witnessed by the transformation of one of her fictional heroes by stained glass and music in her novel *Urchin Moor*. In another novel, *Fire-Weed* (1944), she juxtaposed fireweed sprouting from bombarded relics with the "black lace-like tracing of glassless windows and the perforated roof of the nave of a thirteenth-century church" (2), testimony to the endurance of God's place of worship in love between a man and a woman. Fireweed flowers had been arranged by an artist's lover left for him to paint in still life just moments before her death by bombing.

For several years, Naomi's spiritual yearnings had tilted in the direction of Roman Catholicism. Although she had always been seriously interested in moral and spiritual matters, she did not leave a documentary record of her reasons for her Catholic inclinations. Her thinking must be extrapolated from examining her lifetime of combing through religious institutions and alternatives—and also from

her fiction. Eventually, Naomi Royde-Smith did become known as a Catholic author.

Although Nonconformism was her religion of origin, as she grew older, little in the practice of Protestantism gratified her emotional and aesthetic spirit—important components of her religious sensibility. Protestant habits of mind were more apparent in her intellectual predilections—her self-scrutiny, self-judgment, and penchant for protestation. Growing up, she had attended Congregational churches wherever she lived: in Warley in Yorkshire as a child with her family, in London under her Calvinistic grandmother’s tutelage and again in Clapham where her adolescent social life revolved around the youth activities of the Congregational church, in Geneva as a young woman, in Putney and Lynton with the Sir George Newnes family. Most all Sunday mornings of her young life had been punctuated with church attendance, noted in her daily diaries with citations of the inspirational scripture of the day’s sermon. Nevertheless, whenever she speculated about theology in her juvenilia, she was skeptical, as when considering the possibility of immortality:

It is very wicked and selfish and unphilanthropic, but try as I will I do not see why we should want an immortality. There are two arguments that are always thrown at me whenever I say so aloud, which is not often. The first is—If you don’t want it for yourself think of the thousands who can only look for happiness in another world! But I cannot see that. If a person, through his fault or the force of circumstance is absolutely unhappy in this world, he *must* be too tired to want a fresh lease on life. The other is—If you ever love anyone you will want to meet them again after death. Well I do love several people and it does not make any difference.<sup>2</sup>

It wasn’t that she was indifferent to human suffering. Far from it. As an adolescent, she had applied herself to bringing food, coal, and funds to those out of work, participating in the Young People’s Society of Christian Endeavor activities that provoked her father’s disapproval because it took her into unladylike circumstances. Her idea of helping was entirely materialistic in the present world; she was not interested in the rewards of an afterlife.

Once on her own, no longer living at home with her parents, Naomi became lackadaisical about attending chapel. During this span of time, it was only when she was in social circumstances that called for church going that she recorded religious attendance in her diaries. This changed when on holiday during August 1904 with the Newnes family, she encountered the charismatic and famous Reverend Reginald John Campbell, a guest of the family. He made a deep impression on her.

The Reverend R. J. Campbell was a Congregational divine devoted to the propagation of what was called *The New Theology*, the title of his 1907 publication, a treatise that attempted to harmonize Christian beliefs with “modern views.” Politically, he considered himself a socialist. He was accused of “belittling sin” because he taught that individuals should privilege duty toward their fellows over their standing with God. By 1905, Naomi, aged thirty, was attending all of Campbell’s Sunday morning services in the City Temple Church located in the heart of London and near her *Westminster Gazette* workplace. She also joined his congregation every Thursday morning. The lively audience was comprised of merchants, young clerks, shop people, ministers, students, social workers along with Labor members of Parliament, an occasional railway guard or engine driver, and women, “some who have to get their living in the City and some who make long journeys from outlying suburbs.”<sup>3</sup> Applause and vocal interjections were encouraged as means of keeping preacher and congregation in rapport. As testimony to Naomi’s commitment to Campbell, she attended services twice a week for two years.

In addition to Sundays and Thursdays at Campbell’s City Temple, Naomi began an association with Charles Silvester Horne, the Congregational minister at Whitefield Chapel at Tottenham Court Road. His chapel was located at a central junction in London, with numbers of wealthy families living to the west; to the east was a slum area inhabited largely by “foreigners.” It was Horne’s practice to see all and sundry after his midday service on Wednesdays, listening to sorrowful tales and offering succor. “He had no patience with the ‘little garden walled around’ conception of the church, and from the first he sought to make Whitefields a centre of applied Christianity.”<sup>4</sup> From 1910 onward, Horne also made Whitefields his platform for political work as a Liberal member of Parliament.

Silvester Horne recruited Naomi for service as writer and page editor of his chapel publication, the *Whitfield Signal*. He asked for her poetry:

“lines of greeting, or a good song of progress, anything you have” (n.d., NRS MSS). Ostensibly she accommodated, writing poetry and helping him achieve his goal of producing a newsletter “free from the ingrained vices of the church magazine” and “a vehicle for social propaganda & spreading ideas.” Although she produced articles and the “Year at a Glance” (early 1906), Naomi was disillusioned by her experience, judging from Horne’s response to a letter from her in which she may have asked for payment for her labor, or perhaps she had castigated him as a cynic. Horne wrote: “The criticism is grotesque. It is all in the Christian spirit & I quite fail to see where the cynicism comes in. What an accumulation of indebtedness I now owe to you. When the Signal begins to pay princely dividends you will find a small fortune awaiting you; meanwhile I can only send you a very large cheque in the Bank called Gratitude” (29 November 1905, NRS MSS). Naomi volunteered less and less to the *Whitefield Signal* during the ensuing winter and fall, then she quit. By 1906 she had also dropped Sunday observances at the Reverend Campbell’s City Temple, although she peripatetically went hither and yon to other services offered in constantly changing venues. According to her diaries, she still attended, albeit irregularly, Thursday mornings at City Temple through 1907. R. J. Campbell’s charismatic Thursdays were the only remnant of her Nonconformist upbringing that weathered the storm after the night she had dined with Margie Hamilton Fellows at 44 Princes Gardens and exclaimed in her diary, “BLOW!” As we know, for days after that disturbing event she attempted unsuccessfully to find solace in church. Without recording an explicit reason, she ceased Sunday observance altogether, and the Thursdays soon followed into oblivion.

Naomi’s ferment overreligious issues prompted Hulda Friederichs, her elder mentor at the *Westminster Gazette*, to call her “a theologian & mystic & searcher for the truth” (23 July 1906, NRS MSS). Naomi had urged her to read *The Light Invisible* by R. H. Benson, a collection of short fictions about the mystical supernatural. Hulda had shared Benson’s book with their editor J. A. Spender, and both had agreed that moral decisions would be made easier if one was “guided” in ways advocated by Benson although it would undermine the concept of predestination. Benson himself was in the process of converting at this time from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism (25 August 1906, NRS MSS).



R. J. Campbell remained an important early influence on Naomi's spiritual life even after she abandoned his congregation. In *A Spiritual Pilgrimage* (1916), he elucidated his disappointment with Protestantism:

Catholicism is not afraid of the supernatural: Protestantism is. Catholicism is consistently apocalyptic in its outlook. It dwells in mystery, breathes that air; recognizes and allows for it in all the relations of life. It takes life in its wholeness and views it as having spiritual significance in every part; it does not cleave a wedge between hither and yonder, material and spiritual, earth and heaven. (224)

Campbell preached his last sermon as a Nonconformist minister on October 14, 1915, and immediately took Anglican Holy Orders.

Naomi had already turned her back on all forms of practicing Protestantism although she did not turn away from a Christian concept of God. Eventually, she condemned Calvinistic and Anglican practices alike in novel after novel, including *The Island, a Love Story* (1930), *The Bridge* (1932), *For Us in the Dark* (1937), *The Altar-Piece* (1939), and *The Iniquity of Us All* (1949). The gist of her criticism was that these religious institutions failed to offer compassion and mercy to those in anguish—to those suffering sometimes from guilt derived from their bad treatment of the weak or sometimes as victims of venal rapaciousness practiced by others or sometimes as individuals suffering from what they considered forbidden sexual inclinations.

She abandoned organized religion about the same time as her journalistic work on the *Westminster Gazette* quickened in anticipation of her appointment as literary editor. Soon she began serious investigations of psychic phenomena. She had support along the way from some of her friends. Key to her ruminations was Helen de Gaudrion Verrall, close for a decade from 1912 onward. Helen became a regular at Naomi's weekly lunches with other writers who were reviewing for the *Gazette*. She was also a mainstay at Naomi's Thursday evenings, their relationship continuing after Helen's marriage to William Henry Salter, who became president of the Society for Psychical Research.

Helen was the daughter of the well-known nineteenth-century medium Margaret Verrall, who was at the center of a movement attempting to prove the reality of life after death; she participated in experiments conducted by the Society for Psychical Research. Helen

was thought to have inherited her mother's gift for automatic writing. In communication with an expanding cohort of living mediums and correspondents, she herself created tens of thousands of pages of documentation for annotation and analysis. During the period that she and Naomi became close friends, Helen was the assistant research officer of the Society for Psychical Research. Quite open to mystical experience as evidenced in her excitement over reading R. H. Benson's fiction, Naomi may have been drawn to Helen's psychic experiments.

Besides Helen, there was Theodora (Dora) Bosanquet, another dear and abiding friend who also became her Chelsea neighbor in 1912, residing on the same block, convenient for walking to Naomi's Thursdays, which she did regularly for years. Dora, as secretary to Henry James, had been delighted to meet his brother William James during his 1908 visit to Rye. William James had written a pioneering study, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, in which he had explored and categorized types of mystic states of consciousness. Dora talked at length with him about spiritualism and modern psychology, and then followed up with her own investigations, as demonstrated in her diary entries attached to her treatise *Henry James at Work*. She and Naomi "dabbled, somewhat seriously, in the occult, tarot cards and Ouija boards, spiritualism, and psychic phenomenon."<sup>5</sup> In her own daily diaries, Naomi often mentioned Dora in conjunction with "cards" during the years before the First World War.

Over time Naomi became more and more ambivalent about the validity of psychic phenomena, not to be confused with her appreciation of mystical visions. Her first published work, the short story "Proof" (1919), ended on a note of uncertainty about whether a dead husband would answer his crass wife's summons in séance to emerge from the afterlife where he may have already been reunited with the woman he had loved, adulterously, before her death. Naomi's novella *David* (1933), first written in 1922 as a play, exposed the fraudulent activities of a psychic medium who for all her cheating nevertheless possessed unexplained psychic gifts that were not refuted by the story's final turn.<sup>6</sup> Naomi tended to leave room for doubt in her treatment of the possibility that certain psychic mediums had access to spirits in another world.

By 1932 Naomi definitively rejected reports of communication with the dead in her "Author's Note" that introduced *Madam Julia's Tale and Other Queer Stories*, a collection of short stories, many of which,

like “Proof,” had been written during an earlier phase in her thinking. She noted that her four collected ghost stories had a “religious import in so far as they appear to offer support to the belief in the continuance of the human personality after death” (9–10). After raising hope in the possibility of the existence of an afterlife with this interpretation, she dashed it. She observed that when such psychic instances were well authenticated, they could usually be explained in terms of the subconscious mind and “its infinite susceptibility to stimuli not under the voluntary control of the persons who witness or experience the phenomena generally spoken of as supernormal or ghostly” (10).

From this point onward, Naomi did not change her mind: the origins of psychic phenomena were natural, not supernatural. Toward the conclusion of her life, she named the unconscious as the source of occult experiences. Writing her memoirs in 1958, age eighty-three, she described what she termed “extra-normal experiences” in her childhood (“Nine Lives,” 7, Milton MSS). She framed each instance with an explanation: one had been a hallucination during a bout of scarlet fever, another had been provoked by gossiping servants in an unfamiliar albeit historical house, a third had been the consequence of hearing *Little Estella* read aloud. Her conclusion: “My childhood was free enough from anything that could be classed as psychical phenomena” (10–11).

Naomi made a new friend in Evelyn Underhill, who began coming to Thursdays early in 1917. Evelyn wrote reviews for the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* and later would write essays for *The Queen* under Naomi’s editorship. While Naomi was recovering from her hysterectomy, she was constantly at her hospital bedside. After the war, Naomi reported that Evelyn had been her daily companion for over a year.<sup>7</sup>

Evelyn Underhill had written a popular book entitled *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness* (1911). In it, Underhill posited that “the mystical experience involves man in a unique spiritual adventure to which the nearest human analogy is the experience of falling in love.”<sup>8</sup> Later Underhill critiqued her own description of mysticism as too subjective, preferring to describe the Christian mystical experience as men and women in love with one another and God. She identified “the phenomenal world and human consciousness with the Absolute or Divine, of which there were but superficial manifestations” (as quoted by Armstrong, 204). Underhill believed that all human activities were sacred, including, in her case,

looking after her husband, social life, visiting the poor, taking extended European holidays, the stuff of everyday upper middle-class British life. All followed from her understanding of the incarnate in common life. Eventually she concluded that mysticism divorced “from all institutional expression of it tends to become strange, vague or merely sentimental.” In 1921, she became a practicing member of the Church of England, having lapsed from her childhood affiliation. She would have preferred to have converted to Catholicism, instead choosing to honor her husband’s request to refrain, for he did not wish the confessional to triangulate the privacy of their relationship. She became prominent in the Anglican Church as a lay leader of religious retreats; she was a spiritual leader for hundreds of individuals, as well as a practiced guest speaker and radio lecturer.

Underhill warned Royde-Smith that she was going to speak with “brutal frankness” about a draft of *Miss Bendix*, because “it is much too serious and beautiful a work to be insincere about.” In this 1938 manuscript version of the novel, Royde-Smith had created an unexceptional sort of spinster who experienced mystical fusion and self-revelation in the privacy of her bedroom at sunrise. Underhill took issue, finding that Royde-Smith had failed to convey Miss Bendix’s mystical vision of God, asking her to strengthen it somehow but not by expansion, wishing that Royde-Smith had “carried her theological adventures a bit further” (5 December 1937, as quoted by Williams, 262–3).

*Miss Bendix*, in its first incarnation in 1938 and more explicitly in its revision published in 1947, melded pantheism and Roman Catholicism and was heavily influenced by Underhill’s understandings in *Mysticism*. In the 1938 version of the novel, Royde-Smith’s spinster protagonist reveled in sunlight pouring through a window into the site of her bedroom. It was a moment of subjective enlightenment: “As the earth, performing the double circles of its journey, returns day by day and year by year to each myriad starting-point and is swept through another and a vaster curve in the orbit of the wheeling sun, so she, made aware of her own presence in the immeasurable journey, had been brought back out of darkness to see and become part of the light that lightens the world” (158). In the rewritten and republished version that Royde-Smith presented after her conversion to Catholicism in 1944, she described the sun smiting not a bedroom floor but rather an altar in a Catholic church. Her protagonist had a religious moment of recognition: “[...] she knew

body and soul as one entity and, implicit in the dissolution of the flesh, the entrance of the sinner to the place of purgation set between Heaven and Hell—between a darkness of burning and the illumination of the face of God” (113–4). Royde-Smith had heeded Evelyn Underhill’s critique of the earlier version and carried her “theological adventure” into explicit Catholicism.

Naomi and Ernest Milton joined a groundswell of literati converting to Catholicism, participants in what has been called the Catholic Literary Revival. The revival began around the turn of the century, becoming a recognized phenomenon by the time the Miltons were confirmed in the early 1940s. Evelyn Waugh, speaking for many between the wars, believed that the current phase of European history pitted Christianity against chaos. The loss of faith in Christianity during the nineteenth century and “the consequential lack of consequence in moral and social standards,” according to Waugh, “have become embodied in the ideal of a materialistic, mechanized state [. . .]. It is no longer possible [. . .] to accept the benefits of civilization and at the same time deny the supernatural basis upon which it rests.”<sup>9</sup>

Nancy Cunard, together with W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender, distributed a questionnaire to European authors, with 147 responding. They solicited opinions about the war in Spain, sharing their results, “Authors Take Sides in the Spanish Civil War,” in the *Left Review* (1937). Waugh’s beliefs about embattled Christianity resulted in his political support of Francisco Franco’s fascist revolt; he was one of a minority of five who were explicitly against the Republican government—in his case, alarmed because the Republicans had attacked and murdered Roman Catholic clergy. Naomi was on the side of the Republicans, somewhat equivocally, opining: “I am against FASCISM in any form and think the Spanish people should decide on their own form of Government without the interference from any other nation.” She tended to be nonpartisan when it came to political as opposed to ideological issues.

For Naomi Royde-Smith’s obituary in the Catholic publication *The Tablet* (8 August 1964), Robert Speaight spoke of influences on Naomi’s conversion to Catholicism. He himself had converted in 1930 at Farm Street under the revered guidance of Father D’Arcy. During the time of his conversion and after, he and Naomi had habitually strolled together through the gardens of Hatfield. He wrote that he’d known her before and after she became a Catholic and that he found nothing surprising

in her conversion given her Welsh mysticism and Yorkshire good sense. He continued: “She had learned a lot from Evelyn Underhill before she sat under Fr. D’Arcy at Winchester—an occasion of which she sent me a remarkable account. It was natural that Fr. Robert Steuart, S. J., should have helped her further her way.” Naomi’s guidance by Father D’Arcy may not have been the genial and positive experience that Speaight implied by calling it a “remarkable account.” She had read at least one essay by Father D’Arcy. She and Mary Butts had discussed a volume, *Orthodoxy Sees It Through* (1934), that contained an essay by him in which he castigated the unfortunate appearance of women in the workplace because it resulted in postponing marriage and motherhood, thereby producing women who were unnaturally phobic in their contemplation of childbirth, refusing “mankind’s burden and avoiding pain.” In his view, a patriarchal conception of society had created a strong and permanent culture and was the basis of all Western civilization.<sup>10</sup> In order to march to Father D’Arcy’s drummer, Naomi would have had to repudiate her professional and intellectual identity, and she did not do so.

In the same volume of collected essays, Naomi’s friend R. Ellis Roberts, in “Orthodoxy and the New Novel,” may have been directly criticizing Naomi when he speculated that modern novelists mistakenly used themselves “in the sense that all characters in the book are only facets of what the novelist believes his own character to be.” He praised Mary Butts and Walter de la Mare among a handful of others as the chief writers in English “whom we can hail, in their different ways, as advocates of the supernatural.” Indeed, about the time Roberts’s essay was published Mary Butts converted to Catholicism, having come to believe that humankind alone was insufficient and erred in thinking “that the process of evolution, by some unspecified virtue in itself, would carry mankind through to a ‘fantastic Utopia of easy money and easy virtue’, without reference to the original source of all his past well-being, his faith in God, his practice of disciplined virtue, his awareness of the supernatural.”<sup>11</sup>

In an entry derived from her submission of requested information for an essay in *Catholic Authors: Contemporary Biographical Sketches* (1952), Naomi acknowledged that both she and Ernest had been received into the Catholic Church by Father Steuart, S. J., at Farm Street. She made no mention of either Evelyn Underhill or Father D’Arcy.

The erudite Father Steuart was an appropriate mentor for he was an artist, a mathematician, and a master of several languages. In his youth he had written verse, both serious and humorous.<sup>12</sup> He was influential during the late 1930s, a figure in Naomi's and Ernest's social world, having given informal talks in Kensington to audiences composed of painters, sculptors, calligraphers, musicians, and artists of all kinds. In 1940 he was recalled to Farm Street in Mayfair, and it was during this time that they both sought his counsel. Father Steuart, a Jesuit, espoused mystical love of God via Christ enacted in an actively loving person.<sup>13</sup> He asked the faithful to live their mystical relationship with Christ *now* without regard for past activities, and unlike Father D'Arcy, he admitted the feminine in the form of the Virgin to his devotion. His theology would permeate Royde-Smith's subsequent novels.

Ernest, at Naomi's behest, converted in 1942. She was reported to have converted at the same time.<sup>14</sup> She was confirmed on Trinity Sunday in Winchester in 1944, a full two years later. Ernest was not by her side. He had chosen to remain instead by the bedside of Naomi's nephew, her brother's son John Graham Royde Smith, who was gravely ill, having received Extreme Unction. (He survived.) Ernest justified her absence to the gathered family in London: "I explained that you had wished to remain up this weekend on his account but I thought it would be serious for you to in any way ~~further~~ [his overstrike] obstruct the movement in Winchester for your confirmation in view of the misunderstandings that had gone before & the ecclesiastical pique that ensued" (28 May 1944, Milton MSS). Apparently, Naomi had balked more than once at taking the final step into Catholicism.

Ernest queried Naomi if he was required to believe in the Immaculate Conception. She sensibly advised him to confer with Father Steuart. Ernest Milton was not casual about his conversion; he had continuing qualms attempting to resolve his Jewish heritage with Christianity. He reminded Naomi that she, after all, had advocated for as long as he could remember a "God from whom one asks no tangible good or reward, but one just Loves." He continued:

I am, naturally, fertile ground, for the absorption of the concept of the Imageless God, because so I was trained (the completely new idea is the absence of reward, which, of

course, is Christian, too); but, alas, for my ‘progress’ in this direction I am following, it reinforces an early aversion from any image or statue—as being idolatrous, & very much, for the time being, at any rate, reduces the validity of the Word made *Flesh* [his double emphasis]. So who knows *where* I shall finish. The immediate thing is that the Imageless & the possibility of *Union* with it has made me, while it is lasting, feel altogether much better & happier. Am I to say all this to Father Steuart, I wonder? (5 February 1944, NRS MSS)

Ernest understood that his youthful experiences in Judaism had prepared him for understanding the Christian God as Holy Spirit, imageless, and the thought of union with the Holy Spirit had brought him “peace”; however, he was still wrestling with accepting Christ, “Word made Flesh,” attributing his difficulty to his aversion to worshipping idols. Naomi agreed that he should take his dilemma to Fr. Steuart, whose fluency in Hebrew might have helped Ernest resolve his difficulty.

Royde-Smith’s fictional writings conveyed her reasons for converting to Catholicism. Essentially, she found that Catholicism offered solace for human suffering as well as pathways to love-in-community. In a biographical essay for *Catholic Authors*, she described three of her novels as “intentionally and explicitly Catholic.” They were *For Us in the Dark*, *The Iniquity of Us All*, and *Miss Bendix*. *For Us in the Dark* was reissued by the Readers’ Union, which meant a sale of about 23,000 copies costing under one shilling each. Harold Macmillan asked Royde-Smith if she would accept £100 in a lump sum, which he asserted was equivalent to one penny per copy in royalties.<sup>15</sup>

*For Us in the Dark* sparked controversy when it appeared in 1937, especially after it was reissued by the Readers’ Union. In an author’s note introducing the work, Royde-Smith teased, noting that her story was based on “the published reports of a famous trial,” which was true enough, but she didn’t add that the trial had occurred several centuries before and that Robert Browning had retold its story in his 1869 long poem “The Ring and the Book,” a line of which she had cribbed as title to her novel. It was a sordid tale about sexual torture of a young woman victimized by greed and avarice—true in 1698 and also believable in Browning’s Victorian update and still current when Royde-Smith modernized his version. Nevertheless, the literary lineage was obscure to



almost all of her readers until she named her sources in a letter published in the Readers' Union's newsletter.

In *For Us in the Dark* a young woman was murdered. A young man who had loved her platonically became the guardian of her orphaned illegitimate child. For him, the mother was a saint, and he asserted that she had "lived in invisible light" and that her demise was necessary because "no human creature can be allowed to live, once the children of darkness have recognized its errand," that there was no salvation for mankind "huddled together in the heat of damnation," and that although churches persecuted their reforming saints, "the light is not quenched; it passes to another hand: the torch-bearer is chosen, his office is immortal" (638). Royde-Smith portrayed this raped and also adulterous young woman as a conveyor of light, a light that could be transferred to others because she embodied godliness. Not all readers understood Royde-Smith's Catholic message. In fact, one reviewer completely missed it, smirking that the author had winged "a barbed arrow at the target of the Oxford Movement," "not a bitter denouncement but perhaps more devastating because it is so slyly good-humored."<sup>16</sup> The Catholic publications the *Catholic Herald* and *The Tablet* did not review this novel.

Royde-Smith attacked Western religious institutions in *For Us in the Dark*. She leveled a withering denunciation against evangelical Protestantism that turned heartlessly away from suffering, fearing legal entanglements. She also presented a devastating depiction of Anglicanism riddled with misogyny and class prejudice. Nor did Catholicism escape her critique; she took aim at what she considered the Catholic practice of providing bromides in the confessional. In her novel various institutions and their avatars—religious and secular—collaborated in martyring the young woman, who in Royde-Smith's portrayal embodied innocence and mystical love. The young man, guardian of the babe and future, adored her.

Naomi's third Catholic novel, *The Iniquity of Us All*, finished in 1945 at the war's end, was rejected by Macmillan and not published until 1949.

Meanwhile, for some two years or so, Ernest and Naomi had little need to scribble letters to one another because they were living side by side in Winchester when Ernest was not touring as he did with the Old Vic in 1941. They no longer could afford separate domiciles. He

had considered asking Alec Guinness for help: "I'm going to *ask him to find me a job*. At least I *think* I am" (15 September 1941, Milton MSS). During the war, Ernest did not have much professional work save for a short stint at the Ambassador in 1942, and two years later as Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* in the Open Air Theatre and as Sir Giles Overreach in *A Way to Pay Old Debts* in Glasgow. He had small parts in two films, as the stationmaster in *The Foreman Went to France* (1942) and as Titus in *Fiddlers Three* (1944). Fortunately for domestic equilibrium, by mid-1943 Ernest found rooms again in London, at Burleigh Mansions in St. Martin's Lane, and Naomi began to make forays into the city, recording in her diary lists of clothing left behind for her next stay over.

In her fiction Royde-Smith scrutinized her relish for solitude. In *The Unfaithful Wife, or Scenario for Gary* (1941), she invented a woman character that was unfaithful to a husband away at war. She was unfaithful because she had ceased to think of him, preferring to write short stories for an imagined movie idol to perform, all a pathetic fantasy. The scribbling filled her solitude to overflowing, perhaps as Royde-Smith's prolific writing had once filled her weeks away from Ernest.

Her next book, *Mildensee* (1942), made use of her first novelistic foray in 1904. It had been written during the disappointing aftermath of her failed romance with the poet in Geneva, Henry Spiess. After he died in 1940, she resuscitated her old manuscript and framed it with fresh twentieth-century material about a venal music industry. Another novel, *Fire-Weed* (1944), picked up some of the same themes as *Mildensee* about the typical sloughing aside of woman-as-muse when she was no longer an artist's object of desire.

Once the war had started, Macmillan was no longer capable of distributing books in the United States, the lack of which was difficult enough on Naomi but also damaging to Ernest's mother in San Francisco, who counted on Naomi's US royalties. Then more bad news. Naomi learned from Lovat Dickson, now a Macmillan director, that not only were six of her books declared out of print despite the fact they were still selling, but that the publishers had also dispersed the type used for printing so that the books could not easily be reprinted in the future. Naomi was led to understand that it was demand for the metal needed for warfare that had prompted the destruction. It was cold comfort that the copyrights reverted to her, although it did free her to

find a new publisher after the war for her revised *Miss Bendix* (Hollis and Carter, 1947). Naomi did not want to quarrel with Macmillan given that so much of her financial survival depended on this continuing contract for her books.<sup>17</sup> Macmillan published two more, *Fire-Weed* (1944) and *The State of Mind of Mrs. Sherwood* (1946), and both sold well. For Christmas Naomi sent Walter de la Mare a copy of *Fire-Weed* together with *50 Faggots*, a collection of writings by “Julian,” an essayist who wrote regularly for the *Catholic Herald*. The volume included an essay about the type of flowers sprouting from bombed ruins, making it a fit companion for *Fire-Weed*.<sup>18</sup> As an added fillip, “Julian” was a pseudonym for Naomi’s sister Erica Juliet.

In the same letter, Naomi waxed nostalgic, reminiscing about the bitter weather during the Queen Theatre fiasco (Ernest’s performance of her play *Maftro Darling* and Pirandello’s *The Mock Emperor* in 1929) and the financial ruin it had wrought, in retrospect a devastation that she could now treat with ironic humor. She continued, tongue-in-cheek: “In fact the less money the better. I’m alarmed because *Fire-Weed* has already brought me into a four figure in sales” (21 January 1948, Mare MSS). When her study of Mrs. Sherwood came out, it sold 5,000 advance copies.

Despite these sales, Macmillan dealt a final blow in July 1946 when it turned down her novel *The Iniquity of Us All* without even reading it. With bitter irony Royde-Smith dedicated the novel to Lovat Dickson, her Macmillan liaison: “To Horatio Lovat Dickson who encouraged me to write this book.” Over the summer months, the book was rejected first by Jonathan Cape, then Heinemann, followed by Chatto. Naomi would have to make good on her joking braggadocio about “the less money the better.” She could no longer afford 34 Colebrook and expressed no desire to crowd into Ernest’s small London flat at 6 Gray’s Inn Square. Instead, she squeezed into two furnished rooms in a local Winchester hotel, all she could find on short notice. She wrote some of her friends, explaining why they might find their books with personal inscriptions on sale at Blackwells and pleading for their forgiveness.<sup>19</sup> She confessed to de la Mare that she was at least keeping the bound proof of *Memoirs of a Midget*, although little else. She lamented: “This uprooting of a past I thought would shelter me with its memories till the end—which can’t be far off—that is dizzy—but in a way this snail must be glad not to carry its house any longer—is glad indeed—first editions and

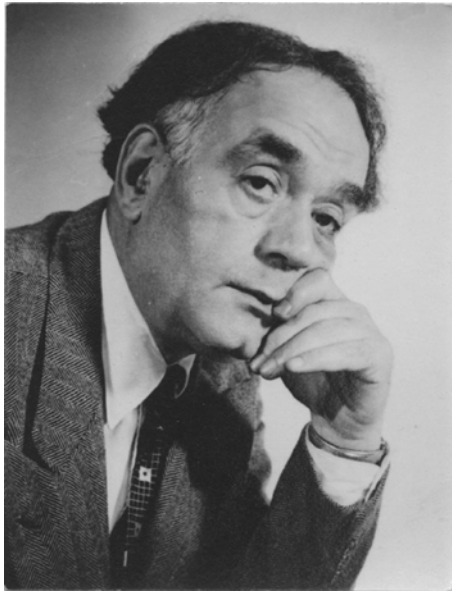
chandeliers don't much come to dust as gather dust to themselves in their unhelpful-unhelped days" (6 November 1946, Mare MSS). She was now seventy-one years old. Robert Speaight remembered an elderly Naomi who had speculated that she would die soon. She survived for nearly two more decades.

For a while following this postwar financial crisis, Naomi's books were published out of the order in which they had been written, including those inspired by her conversion to Catholicism. Ernest, too, had been mining Catholic themes, writing a play entitled *Mary of Magdala*, produced at the Garrick Theatre and published a few years later in 1949. In it, Mary Magdalen, a sophisticated socialite, converted to Christianity the day Christ died.<sup>20</sup>

Royde-Smith's *The Ox and the Ass at the Manger* (1945) was a translation from the French. It was a sweet, short tale by Jules Supervielle, a friend of Robert Speaight. In it, the mystery of Christ's birth was rendered homely, told from the point of view of an adoring, martyred ox.

Royde-Smith began her study of the nineteenth-century novelist and Protestant propagandist Mrs. Sherwood intending to expose mid-Victorian texts that had promoted commercial prosperity and social ruthlessness. She was influenced in her cultural criticism by the creed of Catholic "distributism," an economic ideology espoused by Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton that advocated for the widest possible distribution of property ownership. What she ended up writing instead was a diatribe against Mrs. Sherwood's prejudice against Catholicism, as well as Islam and Hinduism. In *The State of Mind of Mrs. Sherwood* (1946) Royde-Smith discovered she could map Sherwood's state of mind displayed in novels with settings drawn from her personally changing circumstances. It could not have been lost on Royde-Smith that the same was true of her own metonymic novelistic settings, nor could it have been lost on her that she, too, had been engaged in the kind of religious polemic that she found unsavory in Mrs. Sherwood's fiction. Royde-Smith had indulged in polemics in previous works, such as *For Us in the Dark*. If it spoiled Mrs. Sherwood's art, then it might well be spoiling hers. She saw herself in Mrs. Sherwood and ceased to attack Protestantism in her writings. Turning away from the negative, she began to rely on what she considered positive attributes of Catholicism.

Although it was not published until 1949, her next work, another translation from the French, was finished in 1947. It delineated positive aspects of Catholicism in a short biography of a nineteenth-century French poet who died young. This biography was enhanced by her translations of extracts from his sister's journals written in secret devotion to him while he lived and after he died. In *The Idol and the Shrine, being the story of Maurice de Guérin together with translated extracts from the Journal of Eugénie de Guérin*, Royde-Smith portrayed the "idol" as the brother and "the shrine" as his sister, who was articulate and erudite and who joyfully worshipped her brother as well as the Virgin Mary, establishing a little May-month altar in her room that she filled with flowers for the Virgin (214). Royde-Smith identified with the sister's Marian worship of the feminine and also with her secret journal writing to an inconsiderate brother, having herself written her own secret journal to Henry Spiess during several years in young womanhood. According to Royde-Smith's portrayal, the sister, Eugénie, would have preferred to take vows and would have done so except for her brother, "[. . .] the brother she continued to love as she saw him, over whose features she threw the veil she longed to take, the veil she had forgone because she believed Maurice had needed her prayers in the world where it seemed to her that her duty lay" (61).



Ernest Milton.



John Graham Royde Smith (left, Naomi's nephew), Naomi and Ernest Milton, Doris (Naomi's cousin), Gwen (wife of Naomi's cousin, Matthew Smith, the painter), on the occasion of the marriage of Ferylith Kenworthy to Sir Harold Hood in 1946.

Naomi's and Ernest's circumstances were dire after Macmillan cancelled her contract in 1946. She was seventy-one years of age, and he fifty-six. She had two unpublished book manuscripts sitting cold on the shelf and no prospects. Ernest had a couple of theater bookings, not enough to support himself, let alone Naomi. He was "sick with fear & anxiety & solicitude" thinking of her "in that freezing Hyde Abby house today" (12 March 1947, Milton MSS). She had moved from her temporary furnished hotel rooms to 4 Hyde Road, also in Winchester. In March the gas company disconnected Ernest's London gas fire and stove when he didn't pay his bills. They remained disconnected until June. He was desperately worried lest Naomi be struggling for "every morsel" (12 March 1947, Milton MSS). He felt deeply responsible for her financial plight:

If something does not *happen* to this play I shall feel fully defeated & condemned in my most primitive affections & obligations. I have failed to be of any real use to my mother—and I'm experiencing the same frustration as a husband. My gifts are a delusion or I could wish to be a paying mediocrity. I can see the whole cycle of my life repeating itself & I am

full of an unpardonably unchristian despair & hatred of myself & people. (13 July 1947, Milton MSS)

Ernest's despair intensified when he learned of tax delinquency. He managed to pay a "good solid third of the income tax demand" and to make time arrangements for the liquidation of the balance, plus he asked Naomi to forward her bills, and he deposited small amounts of money into her account. Just barely he stopped short of railing about lack of financial help from Naomi's sisters Dolly and Erica and pleading for money from Margie Hamilton Fellows's daughter Enid, now calling herself Claude, when he took her to lunch during her visit from California (13 August 1947, NRS MSS). He was driven to accepting a television role that made him feel ashamed; he played what he called a "blindish priest" in a Cocteau play.

Alec Guinness was fond of Ernest, having respected his talent from an early age, finding it "transcendental and very human, qualities which Ernest carried in the depth of his heart however absurdly he sometimes expressed them" (*Blessings*, 171). As far back as 1933, he had been "shattered" by Ernest's performance of Hamlet. When Guinness and Milton were cast together in *Love's Labour's Lost* at the Old Vic in 1936, their friendship deepened. Guinness devoted an entire chapter in his memoir *Blessings in Disguise* (1986) to wry, critically loving, eulogizing anecdotes about Ernest. He and his wife, Merula, took Ernest on holiday to Italy along with their young son. Guinness decked Ernest out in a beige cotton suit, a panama hat, and white shoes in what Guinness called Ernest's desire to strike a pose from *Death in Venice* (175).

Ernest attempted to capture his Italian holiday observations in a journal essay "Taken for Holiday: the Record of Sixteen Days Abroad from June 18<sup>th</sup> to July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1948" (Milton MSS). He wrote little about the Guinness family although they had generously paid for his travels; instead, he began with a morose self-lament about having been "marooned in a back wash of quasi-oblivion" as a "high-brow," which, as an actor, had not recommended him to managers nor increased his following. He went on to describe his impression of the architecture of St. Peter's, finding vulgar its vastness and amplitude of space and materialistic because it expressed human power: "Well, power had never appealed to me. Power is not to be confused with accomplishment or art or the spirit." His essay foundered on the perfection of eggs—"outsize,

lush, deeply flavoured, squanderingly rich, warm & squilchy yellow”—served for breakfast in Ischia.

The following winter in London, Ernest entertained the Guinnesses with a private, “magical” reading of *Macbeth*, so impressing them that Guinness decided Ernest’s talent should be displayed to his new friends Richard Burton and Richard Leech. The evening was a disaster. “[I]n short, for Lear, he presented an ingratiating old queen who was about to have the vapours.” The next day Ernest apologized for departing early, excusing his inability to take his eyes off what Guinness described as “the beauty of Burton’s head” and what Ernest described as the “damning eyes of the young” (*Blessings*, 178).

More anguish was the consequence of the demise of Kathleen Rees-Mogg, who died at age sixty-five on March 12, 1949, from complications resulting from debilitating asthma. Although respected by the villagers of Clifford Chambers, Kath’s life had become mournful after her son Tim died in inauspicious circumstances eleven years earlier in 1938 at the age of twenty-seven. He had become embroiled in a drunken fistfight over a bottle left on top his car after a dance, rich material for the public press. Kath lost heart. Naomi sought to comfort her by sending the first letter she had received from Tim as a child, but Kath, now bedridden, returned it, despairing: “My Tim’s letters may not even fall into the hands of one who loved him all his life, & may be just chucked out & burnt. Any how the fact that you have one just makes one more sweet link between *us* & also the dear days of long ago” (20 February 1940, Milton MSS). Naomi had already dedicated one book to Kath, *The Delicate Situation*; now she dedicated another, *Jane Fairfax* (1940), in which there are passages eulogizing the relationships of young women who mentor younger women. On her side, Kath was seeking comfort in memories of her more youthful days with Naomi: “Do you remember our drive through New Forest—when May was out & there were carpets of blue bells in their tenderest green leaves? That drive made one of the best pictures in my gallery of beautiful memories” (28 April 1948, Milton MSS). She was referring to the day after the anniversary in 1912 of her first husband’s death when she and Naomi had talked heart-to-heart while motoring in the environs of Miserden.

When Kathleen died, Naomi was shocked and bewildered that she was not designated heir of some small portion of Kathleen’s estate. Apparently, Kath had failed to tell her that she had revised her will



in July 1947.<sup>21</sup> According to Ernest's understanding, over the years Kathleen had verbally promised Naomi that she would leave a legacy in Naomi's name. It was left to Ernest to convey the bad news about the final will: "—not a cup or saucer or an inch of lace or a tablecloth is left to anyone—absolutely nothing to charity. Woe is me to be the one through whom you learn this barren, unbeautiful & afflicting news. I hardly dare to hope against hope that you will hear something better from your lawyer." He was determined to replace Kath in Naomi's expectations:

[. . .] from what I've told you of Kathleen's horrible Will, & you may find, to your very natural dismay—& with little in the past to justify encouragement—that there is but me, poor broken reed, to fall back upon . . . though at the moment, not only is there no prospect of making up to you what the phones have supplied or what you thought she would do; I cannot be allowed to fail you. (14 October 1949, Milton MSS)

Kathleen left £1,787,399 to the progeny of her siblings. Her hands may have been tied by her father's original 1909 will, as it was reported in *The Times* that her legacy was encumbered: "[a]fter exercising her power of appointment under the will of her father, she left the ivory crucifix given her by Bishop G. F. Browse, and the Rees-Mogg bed on trust to her husband for life, and then to the Victoria and Albert Museum."<sup>22</sup>

Naomi had tucked into a side crevice of her 1949 diary a letter from Ernest that described a diatribe he had received in the mail from Kathleen's husband, Rees-Mogg; it arrived in the wake of her death. Ernest wanted Naomi's approval for his response to Rees-Mogg's unsavory attack: "It was written in a frenzied elation of hatred for you & the first husband [Edward Douty], further accentuated by rising lines." Ernest planned to respond to Rees-Mogg in these terms: "'What a dreadful & tragic history you have recounted.'" He urged him "to forget these memories" and to take consolation from "the fortitude of her [Kath's] silences" (14 March 1949, NRS MSS). He did not argue with Rees-Mogg about the validity of the putative stories. Graham Rees-Mogg died unexpectedly eight weeks after Kathleen, and that "remarkable and well known early Jacobean four-post bedstead" was accepted by the Victoria and Albert

Museum and later was commemorated as a setting frame for a shallow, sickly, wealthy woman character in Royde-Smith's novel *The Iniquity of Us All* (1949).

True to his intention, Ernest went to the mat and down the rabbit hole for their mutual financial benefit. He took his voice, his lovely nuanced voice, and lent it to the White Rabbit puppet in Lou Bunin's film adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland*, released in 1949. He was paid £1,500 altogether plus his expenses, the latter a windfall because it was a French production filmed in France, living expenses paid. Ernest took this disembodied work in order to break into films and also, avowedly, for Naomi: "Still, it *is* a job at last & may really get me *in* to film work, but I'm thinking much more of *you* than of it" (3 December 1947, Milton MSS). From Nice on location, he wrote, noting that he'd prayed at a Catholic church, finding the film work "unsettling, exhausting, lethal, hateful & disgusting." He looked forward to returning with the "fruit of the engagement," yearning: "I do wish we could find a place in London to live together. Now that I'll be coming back with a few hundred it could be a start" (12 January 1949, Milton MSS). Sadly, Bunin's puppet production was deflated by a lawsuit mounted by Walt Disney in the United States in order to prevent competition with Disney's forthcoming animated version. As a result, distribution in the United States was squelched. Moreover, Bunin's representation of the Queen of Hearts was perceived as too close and unkind to Queen Victoria, which inhibited wide distribution in Britain. All this is now archived as film history.<sup>23</sup> Ernest was not launched into film.

Finally, Royde-Smith's novel *The Iniquity of Us All, a Prelude* (1949) was published by Samson Lowe. It followed her *Love in Mildensee* (1948). She had experienced trouble finding a publisher for *The Iniquity of Us All*. During the immediate aftermath of the war, few in England could have wanted to read about British complicity in Nazi experimentation on mentally disturbed patients and also in Nazi torture of dissidents and extermination of Jews. The design on the original dust jacket said it all: striped, conventional wallpaper, alternating red roses on gray with gray swastikas on pale yellow. The book accused the British boys public school system of blindly appreciating the German youth movement—a program of social conditioning—and accused British feminist-pacifism of bolstering Nazism by admiring its elevation of time-honored roles

for women, including adulation of unwed mothers on the grounds that motherhood in itself was a patriotic virtue

In *The Iniquity of Us All* Royde-Smith displayed British collaboration with the Nazis through the character of a *naïf*, a young Englishman studying language in Germany who saw—without allowing himself to understand—scenes in which his German hosts displayed willful ignorance of the carnage taking place in their communities. Triangulated in his affections, perhaps bisexual in his inclinations, this student of language was infatuated with a couple of young German lovers, a young man and woman. Once back in England, tangled in a web of upper-class Tory spy operations and out of chivalrous desire to protect the woman he had once adored, he silently participated in accusing a German Jewish socialite of subversion, condemning her to certain death. Compounding his sin of omission, he refused to return to Germany where he might have saved the young woman he claimed to adore. Callow, he had fallen out of love upon learning that she was pregnant—on the grounds that she was no longer pure. Royde-Smith’s portrayal of her protagonist was damning: he was dangerously self-ignorant, albeit bedeviled with conscience.

Perhaps *The Iniquity of Us All* was Royde-Smith’s most sustained effort to explain her own conversion to Catholicism. Claude, the malfasant young English *naïf*, was offered a way out of his guilty miasma by his younger brother, who after questing through various religions had converted to Rome, concluding that the present state of European iniquity was proof that man alone was not enough in conversation with himself. What was needed had to come from “*outside*.” Nor did he admire philosophers and theologians who buried themselves in books and thought that “by refuting the other chap, they’re serving God—and they’re really forgetting him” (172). However, even in the younger brother’s account, it was a terrific risk, “giving up everything in order to try to find something [God] that may not be there” (174).

Once this younger brother ascertained that Claude was suffering from guilt that he was attempting unsuccessfully to suppress, he advised consultation with a priest, “who would not be able to pass on what you had told him—to *anybody*” (211). His parting argument prompted Claude into the confessional, perhaps to convert: “People go to a psycho-analyst when they don’t know what their trouble is. You know what your trouble is, all right—but you don’t know what

to do about it” (213). According to Royde-Smith in *The Iniquity of Us All*, a priest would know what to do to relieve guilty suffering, because he enacted the historically gained knowledge of the Church; he would know how to listen and put matters of human anguish in perspective, and he was capable of rendering mute the power of secrets, which, untended, might fester into displaced mayhem and excruciating personal pain.

Ernest was fascinated with Catholic ritual. He shared his enchantment with Alec Guinness, who maintained that Ernest had contributed to his own conversion in 1956. Ernest had taken Guinness to mass at St. Etheldreda’s in Holborn where he “‘explained what was going on seriously, beautifully, tactfully and with great simplicity”” (*Blessings*, 178–9). As if to underscore their dedication to tradition, Naomi and Ernest had chosen affiliation with St. Etheldreda, one of two pre-Reformation churches in England that had been restored to Catholic use. According to lore, in the seventh century Ethelreda had married twice over, each time with a contracted understanding that she might remain virgin in wedlock. And when her second husband changed his mind, her marriage was annulled. Saintly, she continues to receive adoration in Mary worship.<sup>24</sup>

The fifteen-year age difference between Naomi and Ernest began to take a toll during the 1950s when she was approaching eighty and he was still in his mid-sixties. Naomi had become physically aged, and Ernest had not. At times, he was flooded with frustrated desires. In a sealed envelope, unopened until I unsealed it in 2007, Ernest placed two letters to her in which he confessed that he was on the edge of a dangerous abyss that threatened to destroy both of them. He found unendurable his continued economic failure, a strain at their age, but even worse—morally and spiritually—he was treading “too narrow an edge of equilibrium for any kind of safety” and feeling loneliness toppling him over “into psychic & irretrievable disaster: an answer either to fate or to prophesy to a soul unable much longer to cope with a frustrated life.” “My weakness & my power of resistance to the world that surrounds a complicated spirit, begins to fail.” He characterized Naomi as “cold” in her retreat at Lyme Regis. He yearned to rejoin his “Minchie” soon. A second unsent letter sequestered in the same envelope reiterated his fear of being “mysteriously attacked from within

& London swirls about me like a destroying monster” (17 and 19 November 1950).

As if to underscore the possibility of London as “destroying monster,” Ernest was sickened, taking to his bed in the wake of John Gielgud’s arrest in a Chelsea lavatory well known as one of London’s favorite homosexual meeting grounds. Gielgud was fined £10 and told to consult a doctor immediately, homosexuality considered a sickness in those days, and not to be forgotten, it was still considered illegal behavior between consenting adults until 1967. He had recently been knighted. Unfortunately, the incident was reported by the press, publicly humiliating Gielgud. It shook both Naomi and Ernest. She pasted a newspaper clipping that reported the arrest in her daily diary. Ernest recorded in detail the Catholic Hope Guild’s discussion about whether or not to request that Gielgud withdraw from acting.<sup>25</sup>

Denys Blakelock, a fellow actor and friend, identified with Ernest in his sexual turmoil. Blakelock’s advice was distilled from “shattering self-revelations” as a Catholic convert. Recalling exchanged confidences with Ernest in his Tavistock flat about what he termed their “urges,” Blakelock hoped that with the grace of God his own life would be less sexually complicated, and he hoped the same for Ernest. He concluded with emphasis that ““*Perfect* love casteth out *hate*,”” which allowed him to pledge: ““Dear Ernest, I love *you*”” (15 September 1953, Milton MSS).

In his memoir *Round the Next Corner: a Life Story* (1967), Blakelock, as had Guinness, also devoted a chapter to describing Ernest Milton. He had first encountered Ernest while acting in *The Mock Emperor*, that brilliant but ill-fated production in the Queen’s Theatre in 1929.

By the 1950s Blakelock and Eleanor Farjeon had become good friends of Ernest and Naomi. Ernest appointed Denys Blakelock executor of both his 1965 and 1969 last wills and testaments.<sup>26</sup> The writer and playwright Eleanor Farjeon, now elderly, had befriended Denys in 1949. They formed an intimate nonsexual relationship, Eleanor converting to Catholicism soon thereafter. Religion created a special bond between the two.<sup>27</sup> He was avowedly homosexual, unsuccessfully fighting the impulse according to his own revelation in his Farjeon biography *Eleanor: Portrait of a Farjeon* (1966). His self-loathing was recorded in poetry he gave to Ernest: “Lord, Lord, You know the truth/  
You only,/ The regretting and the ruth,/ The sin that was besetting.”<sup>28</sup>

Denys slept nights at Eleanor's in Hampstead nearly every weekend for well over fourteen years until he died. There was one unsuccessful attempt in 1959 to set him up in his own cottage near her domicile. Naomi and Ernest were invited along with some one hundred others to celebrate his house warming; however, he abandoned this new home almost immediately, returning with relief to his gloomy flat in Tavistock Square and to a middle-aged passion for an individual who came into his orbit.<sup>29</sup>

Naomi, plagued by pain in her feet and ankles, required surgery and institutional convalescent recovery. Moreover, she was going blind. Soon she would have to give over in midstream her project of writing her autobiography; however, she did leave behind some one hundred pages of typescript and numerous handwritten manuscript essays of her early memories. Her last novels were written laboriously on a contraption described by her grandniece, who as a teenager had witnessed Naomi at work. The contraption was a hinged, black metal book-like folder. Its front panel was an oblong rectangle cut to frame an inserted sheet of paper. This frame was strung with elasticized horizontal strands that guided Naomi's handwriting along lines left to right.<sup>30</sup> Almost unable to see, she composed her very last novel in 1959, age eighty-four. Early in the decade, Ernest attempted to dispel her chagrin about her increasing dependence, cloaking both their lives in artistic martyrdom: "And when you say you are a burden to me you kill me. We are slightly, each, burdens to ourselves alone—because our success had not been equal to our gifts & I suppose we either see things *too clearly*—and have let others *know* that we do—or that we're too real. *You are*" (25 July 1951, Milton MSS).

Adding to their misery in the 1950s, they were still experiencing substantial financial difficulties. Together in the year 1950 they earned a mere £522. Throughout the ensuing decade, each solicited friends for help. Ernest's request of a charitable handout from Graham Robertson's estate, a trust under the direction of Kerrison Preston, met with success. Ernest was asked to open both his own and Naomi's financial records with Preston's solicitor, and he was desperate enough to do so.<sup>31</sup> Ernest may have asked Lawrence Olivier for help. If so, he was turned down: "I pray that the bad patch (as you call it) has banished completely, and that you and Naomi are happily busy" (24 June 1953, Milton MSS). Theodora Bosanquet sent money to Naomi via Zoë Richmond (to NRS,

26 January 1955, Milton MSS). Claude [Enid] Kinnoull, Margie's daughter, distressed to learn that Naomi's lodging provided wretched food, offered a £300 subsidy.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps the offer was accepted without leaving a trace.

Ernest sold their Matthew Smith paintings, including one of tulips, two still lifes of fruit in dishes, and one of his portraits of Ernest. The portrait was valued at £450.<sup>33</sup> Two portraits of Ernest by Matthew Smith executed in 1950 are held by the City of London.<sup>34</sup>

Kerrison Preston had recently published Graham Robertson's letters, witness to Robertson's loving relationship with Ernest during the 1920s and '30s and also his loyalty to Naomi. Ernest was uncertain that Robertson would have approved of the publication of these letters: "I don't think he would like the disclosure of himself as an inactive epebe which the book in the round reveals—but perhaps he would" (4 June 1953, Milton MSS).

The Society of Authors caught wind of Naomi's situation in a "miserable bed-sitting room in a boardinghouse called Westacre, Sleepers Hill" in Winchester.<sup>35</sup> An intermediary, a friend of Naomi's, was queried and responded that it was true that for a long time Naomi had been the wage earner for both herself and Ernest, except for an occasional windfall on his side—"and then it melts away pretty rapidly—that I know first-hand. So there can be no question of anything having been put by," adding, "I hope you will be able to help her. She has worked damned hard to keep things going."<sup>36</sup> In October 1954, the Society of Authors gave Naomi a yearly annuity of £150.<sup>37</sup> Naomi and Ernest combined their resources in 1954, and she moved to London to abide with him for a year in a hotel on Lower Belgrave Street and then in the Abbey Court Hotel, a dreary boarding situation located at 15 Netherhall Gardens in Hampstead, where they resided together until she died. They shared a room furnished with two high double beds, according to her grandniece, and shared with others a water closet down the hall. Together their annuities and earnings amounted to an income of £923 by 1955.<sup>38</sup>

Ernest was hired to teach at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) in 1953. He joined the faculty in time to set his stamp on the early training of Peter O'Toole and Albert Finney. Finney recalled studying gramophone recordings of the old-school actors, perhaps including Ernest Milton, "picking up the way they linger on vowels

and their careful enunciation of every syllable.”<sup>39</sup> Ernest was paid very little for his work, donating his time, happy enough for recognition: “Television is going to do (privately) a sample of scenes from my RADA Merchant! I’m going to rehearse the people involved next week. Nothing in it for me—but still” (13 November 1953, Milton MSS). He continued at RADA, earning £199.11.36 in 1954–’55.<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile, during this period Naomi had signed a contract with Robert Hale, receiving advances of £350 for each novel. Hale published her last seven novels between 1953 and 1960.

Eleanor Farjeon contributed to the Society of Authors Pension Fund in 1958, requesting that Naomi’s annuity be increased to £200, noting that Naomi was nearly blind, “finishing what may be the last novel she can write because she also suffers from diabetes and has been told that this puts operations out of the question for her. She faces the prospect with utmost courage and humour even, and I feel for her an admiration which she won’t allow to be expressed in terms of compassion. A practical sign would be to make things a little easier for her.”<sup>41</sup> Eleanor’s plea to the Society of Authors was answered. Naomi’s pension was increased to £200. The Society interceded more and more on behalf of Naomi’s wellbeing, representatives taking her to lunch, finding her, age eighty-four, now totally blind although “extremely amusing, full of stories about Edith and Osbert Sitwell, Rose Macaulay, Charles Morgan, the boarding house she lives in and her husband.”<sup>42</sup> The Society of Authors asked for help from Naomi’s book agency Hughes Massie and her agent Norah Blackbarrow, “tremendously fond of N. R.-S.,” promised that her agency would send an advance to Naomi for *Love and a Birdcage*, not waiting to make sure that Hale would publish it. Naomi, bruised by what she considered Hale’s lack of enthusiasm for her works, wrote: “I am trying to hear of one of those convents which take in old women as boarders.”<sup>43</sup>

All of Royde-Smith’s last novels eschewed religious didacticism. Most of her characters lacked religious discipline or affiliation of any sort. Indeed, she no longer seemed interested in overtly expressing Catholicism in her novels. As a young woman, she had lectured about the “Growth of the English Novel,” commenting on the works of Mrs. Radcliffe, Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot.<sup>44</sup> On a spectrum she placed the Brontë sisters as “imaginative” and George Eliot as “purposeful,” asserting that her



intellect was stronger than her genius or artistic sentiment: “She can never let herself go entirely. She was not sufficiently inspired to be *sure* of herself.” Critiquing George Eliot, Naomi might have been describing the novels she herself would someday write. As a lecturer, she had written: “In Romance the interest centers in the story, in the Novel the interest centers in the characters. When the interest is taken away from the characters & the plot to some outside object, the novel fails *As Art*.” Royde-Smith’s last novels no longer promulgated what might be identified as orthodox Catholicism, the “outside object,” although they enacted forms of absolution.

In *Rosy Trodd* (1950), *The New Rich* (1951), *She Always Caught the Post* (1953), *Melilot* (1955), *Love at First Sight* (1956), *The Whistling Chambermaid* (1957), *How White is My Sepulchre* (1958), *A Blue Rose* (1959), and *Love and a Birdcage* (1960), she portrayed orphans and European Jewish refugees and others isolated without family support. Most characters were drawn from the working middle class, and all were vulnerable to exploitation without institutional protections in postwar British society no longer governed by class assignments of work and responsibility. Facing moral and ethical choices, some of her protagonists stumbled, failings for which they received secular, as opposed to religious, absolution: the orphan in *Rosy Trodd* secretly enabled a wicked man to die accidentally but was nonetheless rewarded by her community with status and riches; the woman protagonist in *Melilot* had an adulterous affair resulting in pregnancy and was saved by an older man, a nurturing sort of fellow who was not looking for sex with women. A Catholic refugee, pregnant from an adulterous relationship, was also saved by an elderly man who came to recognize his responsibility because she had elicited a spiritual rather than a sexual connection with him. In *A Blue Rose*, two middle-aged individuals married to others fell in love, sinning, according to the woman’s understanding, because they did not consummate their love, nevertheless sharing blissful moments of shared devotion worshipping at the site of the modified blue rose they had cultivated. In these last novels, Royde-Smith granted absolution, supplanting the institutional Church with her authority as author.

Entrenched with Ernest in the Abbey Court Hotel from 1956 onward, Naomi may have been unable actually to see the seediness mentioned by everyone who visited. Yet it would have been difficult

for her to miss the “repulsive” food. Some younger people who sought her counsel did not seem to realize that she was blind. Save for her grandniece, they did not mention it. Her social manner, her imperiousness, put them off. Jon Wynn-Tyson, stepson to J. D. Beresford, recorded that she had loudly complained to a boarding house companion that this young man had invited himself to lunch and that she had the burden of arranging vegetarian fare for him. Nor could he convince her that, on the contrary, she had invited him and that he was not seeking information about the famous people she had known. Still, he could not prevent her from confiding that J. D. Beresford had once made a love declaration to her and, among other bits of gossip about people long ago, that “Eddie Marsh was not a queer, but that paralysis had affected his organs.”<sup>45</sup> Theresa Whistler, Walter de la Mare’s biographer, met Naomi at least once during the last years of her life, recalling that Naomi had patronized by calling her “child.”<sup>46</sup> In Whistler’s opinion, Naomi had been disingenuous when she sought Eddie Marsh’s advice regarding publication of Walter de la Mare’s nine hundred letters to her, since she knew full well that she had promised de la Mare during the course of their courtship that she would destroy his clandestine missives. As it turned out, the letters were entrusted to Ernest after Naomi’s death, and he lent these intimate letters to Whistler who kept them for several months; she used them in her de la Mare biography. Later, in 1966, Ernest sold them to a New York agent for £2,800, and they came to rest in the archives of the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas. Thus did Ernest secure the money he so desperately needed to move away from the Abbey Court Hotel.<sup>47</sup>

With curiosity and compassion, Celia Denney, brother Graham’s granddaughter, would visit Naomi in the early 1960s. Celia, in her teens, would make her way across London, attracted to her “very interesting” great-aunt Naomi and great-uncle Ernest, who she characterized as a “generous man, gracious and slightly histrionic, who characteristically would pose with his head thrown back, profile presented.” Once she remembered climbing the stairs to their bedroom, where she witnessed a personal, kindly scene between them: Ernest was escorting a teetering Naomi to the water closet. Her feet were crippled, and she could barely walk; she was nearly blind. Celia overheard Ernest chiding Naomi for “taking off” when that “dear darling girl” had taken time to visit, and then he “took off himself” as soon as he could. Naomi daunted

the adolescent. For instance, preemptively she commanded Celia to share any passage of poetry that she might have memorized, which she was, thankfully, able to do. During her next visit, Naomi praised the schoolgirl for having committed to memory verse that had touched her emotions and had been difficult for Naomi to locate as reference, although she had persisted and eventually succeeded.<sup>48</sup>

Slipping into illness beyond Ernest's capacity to care for her, Naomi was hospitalized first at the New End Hospital in March and then in June at St. John and St. Elizabeth Hospital in the borough of St. Marylebone. Eleanor Farjeon once again asked for help from the Society of Authors. Although Naomi was suffering from lapses of memory, she reaffirmed her desire to be taken to a permanent home under the auspices of nuns. A representative of the Society of Authors secured brochures for nursing homes run by nuns but no room could be found for her. The hospital social worker said the chief issue finding a place for Mrs. Milton was that she was "a very difficult patient," who "will get out of bed and lie on the floor if she doesn't get her own way."<sup>49</sup> Until the end of her life, Naomi's willful commitment to the material present and her deep-rooted desire for control ran counter to her spiritual yearning for a life of contemplation in a nunnery.

Naomi Gwladys Royde-Smith, Mrs. Ernest Milton, died on July 28, 1964, of diabetes complicated by renal failure.<sup>50</sup> She was eighty-nine years of age. Requiem mass was said for her on August 5 at the church of St. Thomas More in Swiss Cottage. She was buried in the Hampstead Cemetery. Ernest's coffin, a decade later, was placed on top of hers in the same plot. Their gravesite is now untended, a single trough overgrown with weeds, the tombstone tilted and barely held upright by grassroots. After Naomi's death, her stone was inscribed, photographed by her grandniece:

In memory of  
Naomi Gwladys Milton  
(Naomi Royde-Smith)  
April 30, 1875 - July 28, 1964  
Erected by her loving husband  
Ernest Milton

For his burial a decade later, Ernest ordered an additional inscription embossed below his name:

Actor Supreme  
 ‘We shall not look upon his like again’  
 July 24<sup>th</sup> 1974  
 R. I. P.<sup>51</sup>

Naomi Royde-Smith, author, now under sod and under her husband, even in death supported—figuratively and literally—masculine prerogatives, hers little different from the fate of so many of her exploited woman characters.

Perhaps Naomi would not have taken umbrage over Ernest’s posthumous high-jacking of her tombstone. All in all, their marriage had been a success—mutually respectful, kindly, and caretaking on both sides. Alec Guinness recalled Ernest, who was yet abiding in that small dingy hotel in Hampstead, fondling a few keepsakes of Naomi’s as he “very tenderly” declared love for her (*Blessings*, 178). Naomi must have anticipated that Ernest would fall apart without her.<sup>52</sup> She left him something to cherish, appending a note to a long poem she had composed as goodbye, “Apologia Pro Vita Mea.” It was accompanied by two epitaphs, one a quotation from John Paul Richter, “Memory is the only Paradise out of which nothing can ever drive us” and the other was a passage from Ernest’s first published play, *Christopher Marlowe*.<sup>53</sup>

Her appended goodbye instructions were: “For Ernest Milton to be given to him with my amethyst ring in Chinese setting, and my Shakespeare’s Sonnets (Temple Classics Edition) in green cover with mauve wrapper.” In the green velvet covered volume of sonnets she had underlined particular passages for solace, such as, “XXX. But if the while I think on thee, *dear friend*,/ All losses are restored and sorrows end [her emphasis].” Some sonnets were dated according to Ernest’s reading them aloud to her. Others were commemorated with pressed violets. Naomi declared her love for Ernest in parting, conflating both Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* and Horatio over Hamlet’s corpse: “I love thee, Spirit, and love, nor can the soul of Shakespeare love thee more. ‘Goodnight sweet prince.’”

Naomi Royde-Smith was a generous woman—kind and profound. Her droll, cheeky ditty about procreation charmed BBC listeners in 1970 several years after her death:

The rabbit has a charming face:  
Its private life is a disgrace.  
I really dare not name to you  
The awful things that rabbits do;  
Things that your paper never prints—  
You only mention them in hints.  
They have such lost, degraded souls  
No wonder they inhabit holes;  
When such depravity is found  
It can only live underground.<sup>54</sup>

Frequently a muse—be-mused then avenging—Naomi Royde-Smith's final public sally may have simply amused.

# Works by Naomi Royde-Smith

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## A Chronological and Annotated Bibliography

- 1905 *Una and the Red Cross Knight and Other Tales from Spenser's Faery Queene*. London: J. M. Dent. Illustrated by T. M. Robinson. These are Spenser's stories summarized for young readers.
- 1906 *The Pillow Book, a Garner of Many Moods* [anthology]. London: Methuen & Co. Snippets of poems and sentences from novels written by women as well as men are arranged according to themes such as nature, time, love and death, renunciation, and so on.
- 1908 *Poets of Our Day* [anthology]. London: Methuen & Co. Entire poems by women as well as men arranged by national and literary categories: English in the classical tradition, Irish compared to French symbolists, and American in Whitman's spirit.

- 1908 *Westminster Problems Book, prose and verse compiled by N. G. Royde Smith from the Saturday Westminster Gazette Competitions, 1904–1907* [anthology]. London: Westminster. Poems chosen by Royde-Smith from winners of the competitions that had been set by her on the Problems page.
- 1909 *Second Problems Book, prizes and proximes from the Saturday Westminster Gazette, 1908–1909, edited by N. G. Royde Smith* [anthology]. London: Westminster. Works selected by Royde-Smith from winners of the competitions that had been set by her on the Problems page.
- 1924 *A Private Anthology* [anthology]. London: Constable & Co. Royde-Smith voices her theory of reader reception of poetry, especially lyric poetry, as key to its sustained vitality over time. Collected poems are arranged in eclectic categories such as “Birds and Trees,” “The Unknown,” “Nine Songs,” “Winter,” *etc.*
- 1925 *The Tortoiseshell Cat* [novel]. London: Constable & Co.; New York: Boni and Liveright. An older woman attempts to seduce a younger, more innocent woman, who is attracted to her before retreating in heterosexual panic. Lesbian themed.
- 1926 *The Housemaid* [novel]. London: Constable & Co.; New York: Knopf. A class critique, juxtaposing the fates of two women who are in love with married men. The working woman is martyred to the call of family need; the wealthy woman thrives. Both serve others, as does a side character, the housemaid. Cultural criticism.
- 1927 *Skin-Deep, or Portrait of Lucinda* [novel]. London: Constable & Co.; New York: Knopf. A satire flaying the beauty industry and its advertising influence, an attack on the idle, consuming rich and those who would emulate them. Cultural criticism.
- 1927 *John Fanning’s Legacy* [novel]. London: Constable & Co.; New York: Knopf. A murder mystery constructed as an epistolary exchange between caretakers of a literary man of genius who uses the lives of others as grist for his fictions. Much of the novel was written in 1913 and 1914 in collaboration with Walter de la Mare.

- 1927 *A Balcony* [play]. London: Ernest Benn; New York: Doubleday. An exposé of marital infidelity, depicting a shallow, materialistic wife whose cuckoldry is less wicked than her husband's intellectual game playing, his narcissism, and murderous lack of self-knowledge.
- 1928 *Children in the Wood* [novel]. London: Constable & Co.; *In the Wood*. New York & London: Harper & Bros. First of a trilogy of novels connected by the character of the middleclass Josepha and by using as one of its settings a rock cliff (Llandudno) on the sea coast of North Wales. Royde-Smith asserted that this book was drawn from her childhood. It depicts the victimization of young girls sacrificed to conventional marriage and parturition. Heterosexual themed.
- 1928 *The Lover* [novella]. London: Constable & Co.; New York: Harper & Bros. From the point of view of an artist, a man who remembers and relives a romantic, youthful interlude, the loss of which severed desire from creativity and left him prey to the commercial art industry. Cultural criticism.
- 1929 *Summer Holiday or Gibraltar* [novel]. London: Constable & Co.; New York: Harper & Bros. Second of trilogy. Prey to an older man, a young lower middle-class woman swoons in illicit love, eventually taking her life and his. Heterosexual themed.
- 1930 *The Island, a Love Story* [novel]. London: Constable & Co.; New York: Harper & Bros. Third of trilogy. Goosey falls in love with Flossie. They have an explicit on and off sexual liaison over decades, depending on Flossie's need of financial support. Flossie, bisexual, abandons Goosey more than once for men, leading to Goosey's tragic, poignant rejection of community. Lesbian themed
- 1930 *Pictures and People, a Transatlantic Criss-Cross between Roger Hinks in London and Naomi Royde-Smith (Mrs. Ernest Milton) in New York, Boston, Philadelphia during the Months of January, February March of the Year 1930* [travelogue]. London: Victor Gollancz; New York: Harper & Bros. Epistolary descriptions of exhibitions of art and music in the USA and London. Cultural criticism.



- 1931 *The Delicate Situation* [novel]. London: Victor Gollancz; New York: Harper & Bros. Spinsters living together harbor a pregnant young woman, recognizing they have censored sex from talk with one another—to their sorrow.
- 1931 *Mrs. Siddons* [play]. London: Victor Gollancz. Portrays the chaste romance of the famous eighteenth-century Shakespearean actress Sarah Siddons with the painter Thomas Lawrence, who also courted both of her daughters. Mrs. Siddons, overworked, is financially exploited by family and friends. Cultural criticism.
- 1931 *The Mother* [novella]. London: Victor Gollancz; New York: Doubleday, 1932. A mother experiences a moment of self-recognition full of disillusionment before she reconciles to self-effacement as her boys turn their affections from her to their father, a psychological allegory, anticipating Lacanian analysis of mother imaging and father language.
- 1931 *The Double Heart, a Study of Julie de Lespinasse* [biography]. London: Hamish Hamilton; New York: Harper. A biography of the eighteenth-century muse of the French encyclopedists. Lespinasse established a salon and shared her heart with several lovers simultaneously, having learned to “submerge her personality in pity, admiration and the plight of the other” to become “the influential friend of every young writer,” their muse. Cultural criticism.
- 1932 *The Bridge* [novel]. London: Victor Gollancz; New York: Doubleday, 1933. A girl married to an older man matures in a marriage where sex has been abolished to keep from endangering her with another untoward pregnancy. She holidays in Provence, has an affair of the heart, and returns to her role as a vicar’s wife, a productive participant in community. She bridges the Edwardian mores of her village and the experimental values of the generation that comes of age after the First World War. Religious and cultural criticism.

- 1932 *Madam Julia's Tale, and Other Queer Stories* [short stories]. London: Victor Gollancz. The first sequence of stories is devoted to psychic experiences, although Royde-Smith declares in her introduction that she does not subscribe to theories of life after death. The second sequence is devoted to queer-meaning-strange experiences; however, "The Pattern" is an example of "queer" connoting gender orientation.
- 1932 *Incredible Tale* [novella]. London: Ernest Benn. This is a story about successful romantic heterosexual love. The title refers to the impossibility of the success of this kind of fairy tale relationship.
- 1933 *The Private Life of Mrs. Siddons, a psychological investigation* [biography]. London: Victor Gollancz; New York: Viking. A biography of Sarah Siddons organized around eighteenth-century portraits painted by various artists: Gilbert Stuart, Sir Thomas Lawrence, Sir Joshua Reynolds, R. J. Lane, among others. Her home was in turmoil. For all her genius, she is, finally, a hardworking artist kept on the treadmill in order to support her extended family.
- 1933 *David* [novella]. London: Ernest Benn; New York: Viking. A story describing guilty regret over revealing details about other people, about secrecy and silence, about life beyond death in the psychic realm, nestled in a web of relationships that crisscross genders in passionate worship. Gender themed.
- 1933 *Pilgrim from Paddington, the record of an experiment in travel* [travelogue]. London: Arthur Baker. This is a travelogue about using the railway in order to secure privacy for reading and writing. Along the way she describes art and architecture. She attacks Walter de la Mare's *The Fleeting*. Cultural criticism.
- 1934 *The Queen's Wigs* [novel]. London: Victor Gollancz; New York: Macmillan. As if a fairy tale, this is as close as Royde-Smith comes to political analysis of choices between traditional monarchy-cum-conservative preservation of values and republican-democracy-cum-capitalism. A young and competent girl who comes of age perceives the flaws of both systems. She survives as a caretaker of culture.

- 1934 *Van Lords, or the Sport of Removing* [travelogue]. London: Arthur Barker. A witty travelogue of sorts that describes various relocations as Royde-Smith changes residency in homes and towns throughout England. Cultural criticism.
- 1935 *Jake* [novel]. London: Macmillan; New York: Macmillan & Co. Description of the early twentieth-century concert music industry and the production of genius artists who establish relationships with one another through the medium of music. Homosexual themed.
- 1936 *All-Star Cast* [novel]. London: Macmillan & Co.; New York: Macmillan & Co. A story about a produced play (plotted as a murder-mystery) that is framed by the reactions of a professional audience of reviewers commenting on playwrights, players, produced effects of costume and staging—satirizing both contemporary audiences and reviewers. Cultural criticism.
- 1937 *For Us in the Dark* [novel]. London: Macmillan & Co.; New York: Macmillan & Co. First Catholic novel. An unwanted girl is used for venal purposes; initially for the money she will bring to the woman who pretends to be her mother, then to her aging aristocratic husband who sexually abuses her. Francie is uneducated, aligned with nature, spiritual. The birth of her baby is associated with the birth of Christ. This book critiques consumer capitalism aligned with the aristocracy and state religion. It is based on Browning's *The Book and The Bell*. Religious criticism.
- 1938 *Miss Bendix* [novel]. London: Macmillan; New York: Macmillan; London: Hollis & Carter, 1947. Second Catholic novel. An essentially uneducated woman, who has lived like a nun serving her family, has a spiritual and aesthetic awakening in recognition of the solar system. She abandons state religion and identifies with God-cum-man in nature (1938). In the 1947 revision she has a religious conversion in a Catholic church on Midsummer's Day. Religious criticism.

- 1939 *The Altar-Piece, an Edwardian Mystery* [novel]. London: Macmillan; New York: Macmillan. A comfortable, loving married couple—he an Anglican vicar—overlooks their dislike of a newcomer who gives liberal gifts to the Church, which they accept, before she is unmasked as a insane murderer, her insanity triggered on her first night of marriage when she had been asked to perform “unspeakable acts.” Religious criticism.
- 1939 *The Younger Venus* [novel]. London: Macmillan & Co.; New York: Macmillan & Co. A young woman flirts with men who associate her mere image with Botticelli’s Venus. She is rewarded with priceless art and the promise of romantic marriage.
- 1939 *Urchin Moor* [novel]. London: Macmillan & Co.; New York: Macmillan & Co. Framed by the years 1919 then 1938, on the eve of the Second World War, this novel is historical and political and vividly conscious of the Jewish diaspora caused by Nazi exterminations in Europe. The woman protagonist creatively guards a beautiful house; she offers safety to her husband, appealing to half of his temperament. His other half, represented by a Jewish refugee, embodies passionate sexuality and creativity, which he follows to his doom.
- 1940 *Jane Fairfax* [novel]. London: Macmillan & Co. Expands the Jane Fairfax character in Jane Austen’s *Emma*, using Napoleon’s empire expansion in 1814 as a backdrop (an unspoken correlation with Hitler’s expansion in 1939). Royde-Smith shows compassion for the plight of middle-class women without resources who must either marry or work for their living.
- 1941 *Outside Information, being a diary of rumours together with letters from others and some account in the life of an unofficial person in London and Winchester during the months of September and October 1940* [travelogue]. London: Macmillan & Co. Vivid personal observations, her own and that of others, about propaganda, rumors, and witnessed accounts of the beginning of the German bombardment of London and Britain during the Second World War. Cultural criticism.

- 1941 *The Unfaithful Wife, or Scenario for Gary* [novel]. London: Macmillan & Co. A middle-aged American woman settles in a cathedral town in England while her British husband participates in the Second World War. She obsesses over a male film star. Her most significant betrayal, however, is caused by the activity of her imagination, which prompts her to write stories. Temperamentally, she is an artist and dies for her obsession. Cultural criticism.
- 1943 *Mildensee, a Romance* [novel]. London: Macmillan & Co.; London: SamsonLowe, 1948. The framesetting in 1939 portrays a woman virtuoso violinist who over the previous decades has been financially exploited by her husband in collaboration with a rich patron. The main story, set at the turn of the century, relates the use made of the young woman violinist as muse to a composer, a genius who fails to marry her. This inserted narrative is the novel *The Irresolutes*, which was written by Royde-Smith in 1904 and remained unpublished until the death of Henry Spiess, her once secret fiancé and subject of the novel. Cultural criticism.
- 1944 *Fire-Weed* [novel]. London: Macmillan & Co. The story is framed by 1941 then 1943 during the blitz that devastated London and other locations. The center of the book in a flash back takes place before and after the First World War. Its main focus is on a genius painter who is unable to love once he's painted his object of desire. A secondary focus is on the young woman who has been his muse. She leaves fireweed as her emblem, a flower that thrives in destroyed walls.
- 1945 *The Ox and the Ass at the Manger* [a short story translated from the French of Jules Supervielle]. London: Hollis & Carter. The birth of Christ told from the point of view of a modest and worshipping ox that recognizes that all of life is rendered sacred by the holy birth.
- 1946 *The State of Mind of Mrs. Sherwood* [biography]. London: Macmillan & Co. A biography of the early nineteenth-century writer of children's books and adult novels, many of which are polemical attacks on the Catholic church. Royde-Smith incorporated long quoted passages from books that are out of print. Cultural and religious criticism.

- 1948 *Love in Mildensee* [novel]. London: Sampson Lowe. A nostalgic description of girls' boarding schools in Geneva during the last decade of the nineteenth century and an exposé of the muddled veniality of two women who run the school. A young teacher forms a protective intimacy with a girl who has murdered. Both sets of women are corrupt. The crime and protagonist's consequent guilt after the fact could have been avoided if the culprit had been allowed Catholic confessional. Lesbian themed.
- 1949 *The Iniquity of Us All, a prelude* [novel]. London: Samson Lowe. Third Catholic novel. A description of Nazi youth conditioning leading up to Second World War, depicting willful ignorance of German citizens regarding extermination of mentally troubled persons, incarceration of Jews, and torture for scientific secrets. British institutions are indicted: the foreign service, the system of private schools, the feminist movement, among others. The protagonist's recognition of his collaborative culpability, his iniquity, drives him to Catholic confession and potential conversion. Religious criticism.
- 1949 *The Idol and the Shrine, being the story of Maurice de Guérin together with translated extracts from the Journal of Eugénie de Guérin* [translation]. London: Hollis and Carter. Biographical sketch of nineteenth-century French poet Maurice de Guérin and a translation of a portion of his sister Eugénie's journals written to him in secret before his death at age twenty-nine and addressed to him after his death. Eugénie was devoutly Catholic, worshipping her brother's works, one shrine; another was her Mary shrine.
- 1950 *Rosy Trodd* [novel]. London: Sampson Lowe. Living in the mid-nineteenth century on the west coast of England, the orphan Rosy falls in love with her mistress, supplanting the husband in the bed, accidentally killing an abandoned baby (the husband's from a liaison), and enabling his death. Rosy is rewarded with riches and community stature, although she avoids religious observance forever.

- 1951 *The New Rich* [novel]. London: Sampson Lowe. Set in the 1950s in a boarding house for aging wealthy people who can no longer afford servants to run their homes. A woman discovers that she must overcome her class-bred reticence about interfering in the lives of others and become a responsible human being in a new and classless world.
- 1953 *She Always Caught the Post* [novel]. London: Robert Hale. Two working young women are doubled, one groomed but shallow and another plain but erudite. They share a portion of a London mansion, including a ballroom. The former is a popular journalist; men fall in love with her although she is, finally, not interested in men. The literate woman, the first-person narrator, has courted her double's lover by pretending in letters to speak for her glistening double. Cultural criticism.
- 1955 *Melilot* [novel]. London: Robert Hale. Melilot (the English word for sweet clover) is secretary to an elderly novelist and also lover to a young poet, functioning as his muse. He buzzes on to another flower. She keeps her pregnancy secret, although her career is ruined. She marries a man for his help; their relationship is nonconjugal.
- 1956 *Love at First Sight* [novel]. London: Robert Hale. Three generations of a family share a tendency to fall in love at first sight, a bane that is revealed as mindless adoration of masks unrelated to the moral and intellectual qualities of individuals.
- 1957 *The Whistling Chambermaid* [novel]. London: Robert Hale. Set in the 1920s in the London theater world of reviews, song and dance extravaganzas, a male Welsh orphan is exploited for his voice and talent for reinterpretation of traditional songs. His final muse is an Eastern European refugee who whistles her native music, never sharing that she has transcribed and embellished them. Both die.

- 1958 *How White is My Sepulchre* [novel]. London: Robert Hale. The first person point of view, Richard Lingard, is a character, now twenty years older, derived from his appearance in Royde-Smith's novel *Jake* (1935). He experiences telepathic understanding with a young woman, a refugee during Second World War. After she is abandoned by her younger lover and has given birth to twins, Lingard recognizes his responsibility because he and she have loved the same man.
- 1959 *A Blue Rose* [novel]. London: Robert Hale. A sexually innocent woman, now aging, is victimized by her handicapped husband. She owns a boarding house for impoverished elderly people, a philanthropic venture. She and her handyman share nonconjugal love and telepathic thought as they connive to grow a blue rose, which they succeed in doing, although both are dead by the time it blooms.
- 1960 *Love and a Birdcage* [novel]. London: Robert Hale. The plot is derived from *Cinderella*: an orphaned, victimized young woman marries a French aristocrat; two caged birds mate and produce an egg, and religious differences are resolved by Huguenot (French Protestant) ancestry.



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- Private Room*. MS [n.d.]. Milton MSS; performed 1934.
- Mrs. Siddons*. London: Victor Gollancz, 1931; performed 1933.
- Verdict for Mary*. MS [n.d.]. Walter de la Mare Papers. Stanford University Library.

### Plays by Ernest Milton

- Best Seller*. MS [n.d.]. New York Performing Arts Library.
- Christopher Marlowe*. London: Constable, 1924.
- Mary of Magdala*. London: Religious Drama Society, 1945.
- The Mock Emperor*. Translated and revised by Ernest Milton from Pirandello’s *Henry V*; performed by Milton in 1929.
- Paganini*. Pseudonym “David Wells.” Performed by Milton in 1935. Milton MSS.
- Third Marriage*. [n.d., written in Hatfield between 1929 and 1931]. Milton MSS.



## Archives

Henry Spiess Collection. *Bibliothèque publique et universitaire, Genève: papiers personnelle, correspondences, oeuvres, papiers littéraires, photos, coupures de presse, papiers de famille.*

Ernest Milton Collection. Victoria and Albert Theatre and Performance archive. Blythe House, London.

Naomi Royde-Smith Collection. Rare Books and Manuscripts. Paley Library. Temple University. Philadelphia.

Walter de la Mare and Naomi Royde-Smith correspondence. Harry Ransom Center. University of Texas, Austin.

Naomi Royde-Smith in special collections at the University of Reading of Jonathan Cape, Hogarth Press, Chatto & Windus, and Nancy Astor; in the Gollancz collection in the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick Library, Coventry; in the Berg collection, the New York Public Library.

Naomi Royde-Smith and Ernest Milton. Society of Authors collection. The British Library Manuscript Room.

Louise Morgan [Theis] Collection and Mary Butts Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Yale University. New Haven.

## Unpublished Papers and Interviews

Beresford, J.D. "Memories and Reflections." [Written: Kildare, Sydney Gardens Bath. Somerset.] Courtesy of Jon Wynn-Tyson, author of *Finding the Words: a Publishing Life*, who possesses a copy of Beresford's unpublished memoir, Fontwell, West Sussex.

Denney, Celia [née Royde-Smith], grandniece to Naomi Royde-Smith, correspondence with author, June 6, 2007, onward; interviewed by author, September 19–21, 2007, in Salvatierra de los Barros, Spain.

Royde-Smith, Elizabeth, niece by marriage to Naomi Royde-Smith, interviewed by author on April 15, 2007, in London.

Royde-Smith, Michael, nephew to Naomi Royde-Smith and son of her brother, Graham, letter from Northampton dated June 14, 2007; interviewed by author on September 27, 2007, in Northampton, England.

# Endnotes

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## Introduction

- <sup>1</sup> Naomi Royde-Smith, *Mildensee* (mainly written in 1904, published in London by Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1943). One of her fictional protagonists, a disguised version of herself, actually dies when she “had fallen with her head on the steps leading up to the Temple of the Muses” (277).
- <sup>2</sup> Jill Benton, “Stella Benson,” “Winifred Holtby,” “Storm Jameson,” “Rosamond Lehmann,” “Naomi Mitchison,” “Rose Macaulay” with a side-bar on “Naomi Royde-Smith,” *Women in World History, a biographical encyclopedia*. Edited by Anne Commire and Deborah Klezmer (Waterford, Connecticut: Yorkin Publications, 1999).
- <sup>3</sup> Denison and Honnold Libraries, The Claremont Colleges, California.
- <sup>4</sup> Catherine Clay in *British Women Writers 1914–1945: Professional Work and Friendship* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2006) acknowledges her debt to the work of Anthea Trodd in *Women’s Writing in English: Britain 1900–1945*. Both agree that by the 1920s the category of middlebrow was invented to distinguish between highbrow modernism and lowbrow output of mass culture. Clay and Trodd concur: the influx of middlebrow women writers at this time “radically reshaped the literary market, with important consequences for the production and reception of women’s writing,” generating “literary and interpretive communities that created new categories of writing that were explicitly, if not consistently, gendered” (15–16).
- <sup>5</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume Two 1920–1924*. Edited by Anne Olivier Bell assisted by Andrew McNeillie (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), (2 March 1921), 122–3; (19 February 1923), 236.

- <sup>6</sup> Walter de la Mare to Naomi Royde-Smith, n.d. December 1911, Mare MSS, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin.

## Chapter 1 Victorian Middleclass Girls' Education, 1875–1895

- <sup>1</sup> Naomi Royde-Smith, "Nine Lives of My Own [100 pages, an unpublished, incomplete typed autobiography, years 1875 to 1904]," MS, Ernest Milton Collection, Victoria and Albert Theatre and Performance archive, Blythe House, London (hereafter cited as Milton MSS). Hereafter Naomi Royde-Smith will be cited as NRS in documentation.
- <sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this biography, I will use "Naomi Royde-Smith," although, strictly speaking, this was not always her name. She used her first name "Gwladys" and surname of "RoydeSmith (no hyphenation and no space)" until in her twenties living in Geneva, at which time she began to use her middle name as her first and to hyphenate her surname as in "Naomi Royde-Smith." In 1935 she removed the hyphen to become "Naomi Royde Smith," and thereafter her books were catalogued in the British Library authored by "Smith." After 1926, she occasionally identified herself as "Mrs. Ernest Milton."
- <sup>3</sup> Matthew Smith as quoted by George H. Smith, *The Smiths of Halifax*, Transaction of The Halifax Antiquarian Society, 1 November 1949, 75.
- <sup>4</sup> A. Winstan Bond, *Michael Holroyd Smith*, Transaction of the Halifax Antiquarian Society, 7 December 1971, 134.
- <sup>5</sup> Royde-Smith, "My Most Unforgettable Character," MS, Milton MSS.
- <sup>6</sup> Royde-Smith, "Rue St. Leger III," MS, Milton MSS.
- <sup>7</sup> Royde-Smith, "Trains as my Grandmother Knew Them," *The Radio Listener's Weekend Book*, edited by John Pringle (London: Odhams, 1950), 162-163.
- <sup>8</sup> June Purvis, *A History of Women's Education in England* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1991), 77-80.
- <sup>9</sup> Julia Hess [Dooly] to Royde-Smith, 23 February 1887, archived incorrectly in Walter de la Mare Collection, Harry Ransom Center, the University of Texas, Austin (hereafter cited as Mare MSS).
- <sup>10</sup> Royde-Smith, "Rue St. Leger III," 7. Naomi recorded her memory of her adolescent trauma surrounding her mother's stillbirth in a notebook in which she was recalling Sundays after the First World War when the circle around Kenneth and Zoë Richmond "prattled of Fixations and the Id, and read Havelock Ellis & Freud and Adler and began our own experiments in auto-suggestion." She continued: "In looking back on what now have become almost commonplaces of popular psychology it shines out that, so far as I know, and my reading was at

no time at all thorough or systematic, no theory was based on, and no examples were drawn from the emotional disasters which can arise when an adolescent girl's fixation is maternal. The Greeks had no name for it and the situation has not been explored in any French, German or Italian novel I have ever read" (4). She censored a further rumination, over-striking: "Sometimes the mother will deliberately set out to alienate her child from the father. I have seen this done in more than one family. The consequence has been the same in all cases: the adoring daughters have either remained unmarried or have been married very late in life though they have left home and made their own way in the world; their fathers all retreated to become phantasies in the background of their lives," 4.

<sup>11</sup> David Rubinstein, *A Different World for Women: the Life of Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 107.

<sup>12</sup> Josephine Kamm, *Indicative Past, a hundred years of the Girls' Public Day School Trust* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1971), 145.

<sup>13</sup> Royde-Smith, journal, 29 August 1894, MS, Milton MSS.

<sup>14</sup> Kamm, 163, 165. Clapham High School no longer exists, having merged in the mid-1930s to become the Clapham and Streatham Hill Training College, selling its premises when that district of London began economically to go down in the world. In 1953 the edifice became the Philippa Fawcett Training College.

<sup>15</sup> Theodora Smith (1874–1849) was the daughter of George Henry Smith (after 1913, known as Sir Fisher-Smith), Mayor of Halifax (1885–87). She did not marry. After attending Clapham High School, she returned to Halifax with unrealized ambitions of studying medicine in Geneva. She wrote scientific papers, which she read to the Men's Literary Society (to Royde Smith, 7 January 1896, NRS MSS). Her published experiments about ants are described in *Nature*, Vol. 59 (9 February 1899), and she also wrote an essay about insects, "Field Work in Spring," *The Halifax Naturalist*, Vol. 4, 104–5.

<sup>16</sup> Ethel Winifred Austin (1873–1918) devoted the greater part of her life to providing literature for and in other ways ameliorating the disabilities of the blind. In 1912 she officially took charge of the National Library for the Blind. From 1913 she wrote a regular column in *Librarian and Book World*. Unmarried, she had promised to wed Louis Stanley Jast, librarian of the Croydan Public Library, once the First World War ended. She died unexpectedly before the end of the war on 17 May 1918, under anesthesia, perhaps during an operation for appendicitis

<sup>17</sup> Royde-Smith to her cousin, Elsie Smith, 2 February 1995, Naomi Royde-Smith Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Paley Library, Temple University, Philadelphia (hereafter cited as NRS MSS).

<sup>18</sup> Royde-Smith, journal, 4 March 1894, MS, Milton MSS.

- <sup>19</sup> Royde-Smith, “Zurich—1894,” MS, Milton MSS.  
<sup>20</sup> Winifred Austin to Royde-Smith, 16 October 1895, NRS MSS.  
<sup>21</sup> Royde-Smith, journal, 19 May 1894, MS, Milton MSS.  
<sup>22</sup> Royde-Smith to mother, Anne (Daisy) Smith, 20 October 1894, Milton MSS.

## Chapter 2 Be-Mused by a Poète Genevois, 1895–1904

- <sup>1</sup> Royde-Smith, “Vidant and Vancher,” MS, Milton MSS.  
<sup>2</sup> Royde-Smith, journal to Walter de la Mare, MS, ca. 1913, Milton MSS.  
<sup>3</sup> Royde-Smith, “The Most Unforgettable Character,” MS, Box 13, NRS MSS.  
<sup>4</sup> Royde-Smith to Daisy Smith (her mother), February 1897, Milton MSS.  
<sup>5</sup> Royde-Smith to Daisy Smith, 12 September 1898, Milton MSS.  
<sup>6</sup> Royde-Smith, “Genevan Spring,” MS, Milton MSS.  
<sup>7</sup> Royde-Smith, “Gambart I,” MS, Milton MSS.  
<sup>8</sup> Royde-Smith, “Gambart II,” MS, 3 February 1953, Milton MSS.  
<sup>9</sup> Ernest Gambart to Frederic George Stephes, 12 August 1898, as quoted by Jeremy Maas in *Gambart: Prince of the Victorian Art World* (Europa: Barrie & Jenkins, 1975), 275.  
<sup>10</sup> Henry Spiess to Royde-Smith, 17 March 1902, Henry Spiess Collection. *Bibliothèque publique et universitaire*. Geneva (hereafter cited as Spiess MSS). Royde-Smith and Spiess corresponded in French; moreover, Royde-Smith kept a dated journal in French. Unless otherwise indicated, passages are translated by the author from French into English.  
<sup>11</sup> Royde-Smith, “Zofingien I,” MS, Milton MSS.  
<sup>12</sup> Royde-Smith, “1899 Dolly and Daisy,” MS, Milton MSS.  
<sup>13</sup> Henry Spiess, “*Sur le lac. . .*,” *Le silence des heures* (Geneva: Eggimann, 1904), 33. Translated from French to English by Monique Saigal-Escudero, Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures, Pomona College, Claremont, California.  
<sup>14</sup> Royde-Smith, French journal, MS, 9 September 1899, Spiess MSS. Translated from Latin to English by Stephen Glass, Professor of Classics, Pitzer College, Claremont, California.  
<sup>15</sup> Royde-Smith, *The Island, a Love Story* (London: Constable & Co Ltd, 1930), 56; “sonnet (May 3, 1899),” MS, NRS MSS).  
<sup>16</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge as quoted by Royde-Smith, French journal with this passage composed in English, MS, 1 September 1900, Spiess MSS. The quotation is a portion of a notebook entry kept by Coleridge that continues, “As in the Polar spring the sun is seen in heaven sixteen days before it really rises,

and in the Polar autumn ten days after it has set; so Nature, with hope and recollection, pieces out our short summer.”

<sup>17</sup> Henry Spiess married in 1914, divorcing within the year. His second marriage, age forty-eight in 1922 and after his mother’s death, lasted until he died in 1940. He was childless.

<sup>18</sup> Lord Curzon, “Les Mains (from the French of Henry Spiess),” *The Westminster Problems Book: Prose and Verse*, introduction by N. G. Royde-Smith (London: the Westminster Gazette, 1908), 311.

<sup>19</sup> Papers of Rupert Brooke, Poems from the *Westminster Gazette*, Kings College, Cambridge.

<sup>20</sup> N. Royde-Smith, “Proof,” *Great Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror, 1<sup>st</sup> Series*, edited by Dorothy L. Sayers (London: Gollancz, 1929; New York: Harcourt, 1929).

<sup>21</sup> Henry Spiess, “Le silence,” “*Je rêvais de fixer pour vous l’ insaisissable. . .*” (I dreamed to establish the elusive for you). See “Proof”: [magick7/MoonlightStories/1/1037.htm](http://magick7/MoonlightStories/1/1037.htm)

### Chapter 3 Working Muse, 1904–1925

<sup>1</sup> Hulda Friederichs, *The Life of Sir George Newnes, Bart* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911); reprinted Memphis, Tennessee: General Books, 2010), 3–4. The eighteenth-century Congregational chapel in Warley was closed in 1977 and converted to housing, called Chantry House in 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Royde-Smith, 17, 25, 26 January and 2, 4, 24, 27 February 1900 [diary terminated in April], NRS MSS.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Koss, “Introduction,” *The Rise of the Political Press in Britain: The Twentieth Century*, Vol. II (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 1–14.

<sup>4</sup> Friederichs to Royde-Smith, 23 July 1906, NRS MSS.

<sup>5</sup> J. D. Beresford, MS, “Memories and Reflections,” [ca. 1946], still possessed by Jon Wynne-Tyson in 2015, 179.

<sup>6</sup> J. A. Spender, *Life, Journalism and Politics* Volume II (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1927), 146–7.

<sup>7</sup> Lovat Dickson, “Miss Naomi Royde-Smith: Novelist, Biographer and Playwright [obituary],” *The Times*, 30 July 1964, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Rupert Brooke, as quoted by Christopher Hassall in *Rupert Brooke: a biography* (London: Faber and Faber limited, 1964), 171,

<sup>9</sup> Grimwood Mears to Royde-Smith, 13 July 1959, Milton MSS.

- <sup>10</sup> Royde-Smith, *The Housemaid* (New York: Knopf, 1926), 191.
- <sup>11</sup> Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Remembering My Good Friends* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944), 138.
- <sup>12</sup> Henry Wilson Harris, *J. A. Spender* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1946), 41.
- <sup>13</sup> D. H. Lawrence to de la Mare, 13 March 1912, D. H. Lawrence Collection, Manuscripts and Special Collections, The University of Nottingham.
- <sup>14</sup> De la Mare [autograph notation on envelope containing “German Sketches”], D. H. Lawrence Collection, King’s College Library, University of Cambridge. The rejected manuscript, “In Fortified Germany: How a Spy is Arrested,” was not published until collected in *Twilight in Italy and Other Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- <sup>15</sup> D. H. Lawrence to de la Mare, 12 October 1913, D. H. Lawrence Collection, Manuscripts and Special Collections, The University of Nottingham.
- <sup>16</sup> Christopher Hassall, *Rupert Brooke: a biography* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1964), 391–2.
- <sup>17</sup> Rupert Brooke to Edward Marsh, as quoted by Linda Hart in *Once They Lived in Gloucestershire: A Dymock Poets Anthology* (Lechlade: Green Branch, 1995).
- <sup>18</sup> Graham Greene as quoted by Marie Françoise Allain in *The Other Man: Conversations with Graham Green* [translated from the French by Guido Waldman] (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 115, and by W. J. West in *The Quest for Graham Greene* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 11.
- <sup>19</sup> Although the daily publication retained the name of *Westminster Gazette* until it failed in 1928, the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* would change its name twice before its demise in 1926. The names were *The Weekly Westminster Gazette* (February 1922–1923) and *The Weekly Westminster* (January 1923–1926). Royde-Smith was retained as literary editor of *The Weekly Westminster Gazette* but did not continue with *The Weekly Westminster*.
- <sup>20</sup> “Princes Gate and Princes Gardens: the Freake Estate,” *Survey of London*, Volume 45, chapters 51–54, 191–210. Accessed 17 May 2015. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>. The domicile at 44 Prince’s Gardens was demolished in 1956 to make way for residence halls for the Imperial College of Science and Technology.
- <sup>21</sup> Sybille Bedford, *Aldous Huxley* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1985, first published by Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 137–8.
- <sup>22</sup> Rose Macaulay to Jean Smith, 2 August 1920, as quoted by Martin Ferguson Smith in *Dearest Jean: Rose Macaulay’s Letters to a Cousin* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 78–9.



- <sup>23</sup> Royde-Smith, "Rue St. Leger III," MS, Milton MSS, 3. "Rose Macaulay and I shared a flat for some months and were at home to our friends on Thursday evenings in the year when *The Vortex* presented the Œdipus complex as the mainstream of a new and very daring play. The discussion of mother love, the conflict between father & son were our intellectual masters. A great many of us suffered from mental & spiritual indignation."
- <sup>24</sup> Dorothy Brooke to Royde-Smith, 26 January n.d., NRS MSS.
- <sup>25</sup> Storm Jameson, *Journey from the North*, Volume I (London: Virago, 1984), 160–1.
- <sup>26</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume Two 1920–1924 (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 93.
- <sup>27</sup> Morgan Forster to Leonard Woolf, 18 August 1921, as quoted by Victoria Glendinning in *Leonard Woolf, a Biography* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 234.
- <sup>28</sup> Royde-Smith to Alfred Henry Watson, 14 November 1921, NRS MSS.
- <sup>29</sup> In 1970 *The Queen* amalgamated with *Harper's Bazaar*; until the twenty-first century it was published in the United Kingdom as *Harper's and Queen*.
- <sup>30</sup> Royde-Smith as quoted in "New Editor of the 'Queen': Miss N. G. Royde-Smith's policy," *The Weekly Westminster*, 12 January 1924.
- <sup>31</sup> "The Editor's Notes," *The Queen*, 12 March 1924, 2.
- <sup>32</sup> Irene Lavington, "Letter to the Editor," *The Queen*, 7 May 1924, 29.
- <sup>33</sup> Royde-Smith, "An Apology," *A Private Anthology* (London: Constable & Co, 1924), xiv.
- <sup>34</sup> Royde-Smith, "The Theatre," *The Queen*, 19 March 1924, 6.
- <sup>35</sup> Anonymous, "A Balcony [review]," *The Times*, 26 August 1926, Issue 44360.
- <sup>36</sup> Royde-Smith, "The Theatre," *The Queen*, 26 March 1924.
- <sup>37</sup> Aldous Huxley to Royde-Smith, 7 June 1936, NRS MSS.
- <sup>38</sup> Royde-Smith, Diary #24, 8 December 1924, NRS MSS. She continued, "Giannello furious." Giannello was Ernest Milton who would become her husband in two years. Perhaps they were competing over who could first complete a novel?

## Chapter 4 With Women, 1900–1949

- <sup>1</sup> Linda Singer [grandniece of Margaret and Kathleen Wills] to author, 15 April 2008 PMK, speculated that Margie received Tanglely in her divorce settlement; however, newspaper sale advertisements indicate that she bought the estate: "Auction Sales," *The Times*, 15 June 1907: 24 and "The Estate Market," *The Times*, 14 January 1911: 12.

- <sup>2</sup> Edmée Sprecher to Royde-Smith, 28 September 1902, Milton MSS.
- <sup>3</sup> Melisande, *From December to December: The Day Book of Melisande* (1905), as quoted by Royde-Smith, diary, “End notes” 1906, NRS MSS.
- <sup>4</sup> “The Bonfire” by Mrs. F. [Hamilton Fellows], Box 14, Folder 6, NRS MSS.
- <sup>5</sup> Anonymous, “Fiction: Old and New Fashions,” *The Spectator*, 30 May 1925:896.
- <sup>6</sup> See Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Man: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women, from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1981), 346, 351.
- <sup>7</sup> Royde-Smith has misquoted, crushing together two lines from Algernon Charles Swinburne’s “Sapphics” stanza 3 and two lines from stanza 19, changing the lines: “By the grey sea-side, unassuaged, unheard of,/ Unbeloved, unseen in the ebb of twilight,/ Ghosts of outcast women return lamenting,/ Purged not in Lethe.”
- <sup>8</sup> William Wordsworth, “To H. C. [Hartley Coleridge], Six Years Old,” as quoted by Royde-Smith, diary, memo after 22 June 1907, NRS MSS.
- <sup>9</sup> Arthur Symonds, “The Lovers of the Winds,” quoted by Royde-Smith, memo after 31 August 1907, NRS MSS.
- <sup>10</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, [from] *In Memorium XXXIII*, quoted by Royde-Smith, diary, 3 October 1907, NRS MSS.
- <sup>11</sup> Royde-Smith, “Margaret Anwyl,” MS, Box 13, Folder 1, NRS MSS.
- <sup>12</sup> “Wills and Bequests: Sir Frederick Wills’s Estate,” *The Times*, 23 April 1909, 12.
- <sup>13</sup> Pamela Cooper, *A Cloud of Forgetting* (London: Quartet, 1993), 43.
- <sup>14</sup> de la Mare to Royde-Smith, Easter [16 April] 1911, Mare MSS.
- <sup>15</sup> The one exception in which Naomi recorded in her diary that she had “slept” with someone was in reference to May Spender, the wife of her editor J. A. Spender.
- <sup>16</sup> Royde-Smith, diary, 4, 5, and 6 June 1911, NRS MSS.
- <sup>17</sup> R. A. Taylor [review of *The Lover*], *Spectator*, 13 October 1928:501.
- <sup>18</sup> Royde-Smith journal to de la Mare, n.d., Milton MSS.
- <sup>19</sup> Anonymous, “Dark Star [review of *The Island*], *New York Herald Tribune Books*, 28 September 1930:16.
- <sup>20</sup> Anonymous, “*The Island* [a review],” *New York Times*, 21 December 1930:59.
- <sup>21</sup> Radclyffe Hall to Royde-Smith, 15 November 1928, NRS MSS.
- <sup>22</sup> Margaret Hamilton Fellows to Royde-Smith, 17 and 28 September 1917, NRS MSS.
- <sup>23</sup> Celia Denney interview with author, 19 September 2007, Salvatierra de los Barros, Spain. The Countess of Kinnoull, Enid, gave birth at 44 Prince’s Gardens in 1904 to a baby, who was, according to family lore, Naomi’s godson; he suffered a “nursery death” the following year, and Enid was divorced by 1927.

- <sup>24</sup> Sarah LeFanu, *Rose Macaulay* (London: Virago, 2003), 79.
- <sup>25</sup> “Rose Macaulay,” *Coming to London*, edited by John Lehman (London: Phoenix House, 1957), 158.
- <sup>26</sup> Le Fanu, 94. In 1912 Rose Macaulay won a £600 prize for best novel of the year awarded by the publisher Hodder and Stoughton. According to her biographer, Rose had entered her novel for competition without informing John Murray, the firm that had published her previous five novels; Murray was stung by her lack of consideration, just as Royde-Smith would be stung years later by Macaulay’s perceived lack of loyalty.
- <sup>27</sup> Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Remembering My Good Friends* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944), 133.
- <sup>28</sup> Macaulay to Jean Smith, 29 November 1919, transcribed by Martin Ferguson Smith, editor of *Dearest Jean: Rose Macaulay’s Letters to a Cousin* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2011), 60.
- <sup>29</sup> Royde-Smith to de la Mare, dated “Royal Wedding” [28 February 1922], Mare MSS.
- <sup>30</sup> Blog about the history of Clifford Chambers. Last accessed 16 May 2015. [http://cliffordchambers.co.uk/wiki/index.php?title=Clifford\\_Manor&printable=yes#Clifford\\_Manor](http://cliffordchambers.co.uk/wiki/index.php?title=Clifford_Manor&printable=yes#Clifford_Manor)
- <sup>31</sup> Margaret Hamilton Fellows to Royde-Smith, 5 January 1925, NRS MSS.
- <sup>32</sup> “Mrs. Hamilton-Fellows, Estate of £1,965,000,” *The Times*, 7 October 1926, issue 4496, col B.
- <sup>33</sup> Anonymous, “Everyman Theatre: ‘A Balcony’ [review], *The Times*, 26 August 1926:8.
- <sup>34</sup> Royde-Smith to Viola Garvin, 20 September 1943, Viola Garvin Correspondence, Cambridge University.
- <sup>35</sup> Royde-Smith to Louise Morgan [Theis], 31 July 1939, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Yale University.
- <sup>36</sup> Royde-Smith, “Mary Butts,” *Time and Tide*, 20 March 1937, 378.
- <sup>37</sup> Royde-Smith, “The Crystal Cabinet,” *Time and Tide*, 5 June 1937, 756.

## Chapter 5 With Walter de la Mare

- <sup>1</sup> Royde-Smith, “The De La Mare I Remember,” *John O’London Weekly*, 24 April 1953, Vol. LXII, No. 1, 502.
- <sup>2</sup> De la Mare letter to Royde-Smith, [n.d., probably July 1911 for he calls her “Ann,” which he essentially stopped doing in August 1911], Mare MSS.

- <sup>3</sup> Royde-Smith letter to de la Mare [n.d. “but before January 1912, according to Theresa Whistler”], as quoted by Theresa Whistler in *The Life of Walter de la Mare: Imagination of the Heart* (London: General Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1993), 199. In her biography of de la Mare, Whistler quoted several letters from Royde-Smith to de la Mare that are not located in NRS MSS, Mare MSS, or Milton MSS and may be lost, so that I cannot independently assess them. These lost letters are cited on Whistler’s pages 187, 199, 219, and 232. Many hands were laid upon de la Mare’s and Royde-Smith’s papers after Royde-Smith’s death in 1964. After Ernest Milton generously loaned Royde-Smith’s uncatalogued and undated correspondence with de la Mare to Whistler from January to mid-November 1965, he sold the collection via Sotheby’s to the Harry Ransom Center in Texas in 1966 (Mare MSS). Royde-Smith’s nephews John Graham and Michael Royde Smith culled some of Royde-Smith’s papers for sale to the Paley Library in Philadelphia in 1970 (NRS MSS). What was left of her papers was tossed along with Milton’s into the Victoria and Albert Theatre and Performance archives after his death in 1974 (Milton MSS).
- <sup>4</sup> John Bayley, “Not Just for Children [review of Alison Lurie’s *Boys and Girls Forever: Children’s Classics from Cinderella to Harry Potter*],” *The New York Review*, 27 March 2003, 4-5.
- <sup>5</sup> Royde-Smith, “Unrequiting,” MS, [n.d.], Milton MSS.
- <sup>6</sup> Royde-Smith, [untitled poem], MS, [1914], Milton MSS.
- <sup>7</sup> Royde-Smith, “Any Woman to Her Lover,” MS, Milton MSS.
- <sup>8</sup> De la Mare, poems June 27–28, 1912, MS, Milton MSS.
- <sup>9</sup> UK, De Ruvigny’s Roll of Honour, 1915–1924 record for Edgar Frere, 127. Ancestry.com.
- <sup>10</sup> Royde-Smith to “Binns,” autograph journal fragment, dated Whitsunday morning, [10 May 1913], Milton MSS.
- <sup>11</sup> Royde-Smith, diary, 15–19 March 1918, NRS MSS; de la Mare to Royde-Smith, 23 February 1918 PMK, Mare MSS.
- <sup>12</sup> Royde-Smith, “The De La Mare I Remember,” 503.
- <sup>13</sup> Perhaps at this time Naomi spoke to the Beresfords about her lack of sexual involvement with de la Mare. According to Whistler, she wrote to de la Mare about her frank talk: “A plain knowledge of the truth is never dangerous as misinterpretation of very hard facts can be. Please try to see it a little from my point. I had to clear myself *and* you and it was no use piling up lies when the truth was so simple and so clearing.” Royde-Smith to de la Mare, [lost letter] as quoted by Whistler, 232.
- <sup>14</sup> Royde-Smith, diary, 6 September 1914, NRS MSS. My translation from German to English of “*Herrschaft*” follows from the definition provided by Peter Brener

in *Max Weber and Democratic Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), footnote 129.

- <sup>15</sup> De la Mare to Royde-Smith, [n.d. August, 1924], as quoted by Whistler: “Somehow the obvious Jewishness of [Heinemann’s] proposal sticks in my throat—though just now he may be justified in ignoring an obligation” (234).
- <sup>16</sup> Royde-Smith, both beginning and end notes, diary 1914, NRS MSS.
- <sup>17</sup> De la Mare to Edward Marsh, 9 October 1914, Berg Collection, New York Public Library.
- <sup>18</sup> Edgar Frere to Royde-Smith, 22 September [n.d.], Milton MSS.
- <sup>19</sup> Clara Smith wrote a novel together with Theodora Bosanquet, *Spectators* (London: Constable, 1916).
- <sup>20</sup> Frere to Royde-Smith, 7 February 1915, Milton MSS.
- <sup>21</sup> Royde-Smith, draft poem, “Miscellaneous Manuscripts,” NRS MSS.
- <sup>22</sup> Royde-Smith letter to Edward Marsh, 14 November 1914, Berg Collection, New York Public Library.
- <sup>23</sup> Royde-Smith journal to de la Mare, [n.d.], Milton MSS.
- <sup>24</sup> De la Mare’s letters to Royde-Smith during the early months of 1915 contain troves of information about literary figures in the Georgian movement.
- <sup>25</sup> De Ruvigny’s Roll of Honour, 1914–1924 record for Edgar Frere, 127. Ancestry.com.
- <sup>26</sup> British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920 record for Edgar Frere, Ancestry.com.
- <sup>27</sup> Sir Henry Paget-Cook, solicitor, to Royde-Smith enclosed in a letter from Edgar Frere’s mother, 1 November 1916, Milton MSS.
- <sup>28</sup> “Last Will and Testament” of Royde-Smith [ca. 1924], Milton MSS.
- <sup>29</sup> Grimwood Mears’s wife died in 1943 (Naomi herself was married by this time), and he remarried in 1951. Mears and Naomi continued to correspond; he from India until 1932, albeit more and more rarely. His kind and loving last letter was dictated on July 13, 1959, when he was ninety and she eighty-four. Mears’s letters to Royde-Smith are located in NRS MSS, and one letter, Milton MSS.
- <sup>30</sup> The full title of *Land and Water* was *The Country Gentleman and Land & Water*. Electronic copies are not available for 1919, although they exist for the war years 1914–1918.
- <sup>31</sup> Whistler, 296. “Pretty Poll” was included in *The Connoisseur* (1926), a collection of short stories by de la Mare.
- <sup>32</sup> Anonymous, “Land & Water Short Story Competition: The Judges Awards,” *Land & Water*, 12 June 1919, 16.
- <sup>33</sup> Royde-Smith, “The De La Mare I Remember,” 502.
- <sup>34</sup> Poem, MS, to Royde-Smith, [ca. July, 1911], Mare MSS.

- <sup>35</sup> Royde-Smith in *Pilgrim from Paddington* favorably reviewed four books, all by women: Lady Rhondda's *This Was My World*, Margaret Storm Jameson's *No Time Like the Present*, Elizabeth Cambridge's *Hostages to Fortune*, and Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*, 61-64.
- <sup>36</sup> Whistler in her biography attempted to normalize de la Mare's anti-Jewish sentiments by commenting that such attitudes were prevalent in Great Britain before the Second World War and noting that de la Mare's "grumbles" about Jews "are a part of a bundle of not very serious but quite definite personal prejudices—he did not love dogs as a race, nor the Japanese, nor the Americans (much as he loved individual American friends). On this level of feeling, he did not like Jews either" (365).
- <sup>37</sup> Whistler reported in her biography that by 1918 the relationship between de la Mare's wife, Elfie, and Naomi had turned cordial. When de la Mare became infatuated with Ruth Manning-Sanders, his protégée, Elfie consulted Naomi, "but Naomi scorned such alarm. She would not let herself be disturbed, and judged this attachment a thing that would pass—in which she was right [. . .]," 288.
- <sup>38</sup> Cecilie Leslie, "Motherhood a Whole-Time Job?" *The Evening Standard*, 19 October 1932.

## Chapter 6 With Ernest Milton, 1923–1964

- <sup>1</sup> Royde-Smith, "Lilian Baylis: an Impression," *The Weekly Westminster* (January 12, 1924), 340.
- <sup>2</sup> Clive Barker, "Theatre and Society: the Edwardian Legacy, the First World War, and the Inter-War Years," *British Theatre between the Wars 1918–1939*, edited by Clive Barker and Maggie B. Gale (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 7.
- <sup>3</sup> As quoted by J. C. Trewin, *The Gay Twenties: A Decade of the Theatre* (London: Macdonald, 1958), 15.
- <sup>4</sup> Royde-Smith to Michael Sadleir, 28 May 1923, Constable Correspondence, Paley Library, Temple University, Philadelphia.
- <sup>5</sup> Robert Speaight, *The Property Basket: Recollections of a Divided Life* (London: Collins & Harvill Press, 1970), 60.
- <sup>6</sup> United States Federal Census Record for Selma Wolff, 1880.
- <sup>7</sup> Ernest Milton's Certificate of British Naturalization, Milton MSS.
- <sup>8</sup> Denys Blakelock, *Round the Next Corner: A Life Story* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1967), 79.

- <sup>9</sup> “Milton, Ernest [entry],” *Who Was Who in the Theatre, 1912–1972. Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Directors, Playwrights, and Producers of the English-speaking Theatre* compiled from volumes 1–15 (Detroit: Gale Research, 1978).
- <sup>10</sup> Malcolm Morley, “Fragmented Autobiography: The Millionaires’ Theatre,” *Theatre Survey*, 12.1 (1971): 68–78.
- <sup>11</sup> J. C. Trewin, *Five & Eighty Hamlets* (New York: New Amsterdam, 1987), xii. Trewin had been drama critic first for the *Observer*, then for *Punch*, and after that for the *Illustrated London News*.
- <sup>12</sup> John Geilgud, *An Actor and His Time* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1979), 81.
- <sup>13</sup> As quoted by Alan Beck in “Shakespeare in the 1920s,” *The Invisible Play: B.B.C. Radio Drama 1922–1928*, 1.8.1. Last accessed May 29, 2015. <http://www.kent.ac.uk/sdfva/invisibleplay/Body/1a8.html>.
- <sup>14</sup> Royde-Smith letter to James B. Pinker, 1 October 1925, Berg Collection, New York Public Library.
- <sup>15</sup> Beck, “Invisible Play.”
- <sup>16</sup> Maggie B. Gale, “Errant Nymphs: Women and Interwar Theatre,” *British Theatre between the Wars 1918–1939*, edited by Clive Baker and Maggie B. Gale (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 113–134.
- <sup>17</sup> Certificate of Marriage, No. 96, 15 December 1926, Milton MSS.
- <sup>18</sup> Royde-Smith letter to Louise Morgan [Theis], 3 January 1927, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven.
- <sup>19</sup> Royde-Smith, “Apologia Pro Vita Mea—Ad Hamlet—I Hora Motis Meae—ave atque vale,” MS, Milton MSS.
- <sup>20</sup> Royde-Smith, “Last Will and Testament” [ca. 1926], Milton MSS.
- <sup>21</sup> Royde-Smith, “The Schoolmarm’s Tale: The Visitors,” *The New Decameron: the Fifth Day*, edited by Hugh Chesterman (New York: Brentano’s, 1928), 139–163.
- <sup>22</sup> “Catalogue of books at Primrose Hill,” Box 16, Folder 16, NRS MSS.
- <sup>23</sup> Lilian Baylis letter to Milton, 21 October 1927, NRS MSS.
- <sup>24</sup> Anonymous, *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 August 1928, 582.
- <sup>25</sup> Selma Milton letter to Royde-Smith, 8 August 1928, Milton MSS.
- <sup>26</sup> Anonymous, *Sketch*, 6 February 1929, Milton MSS.
- <sup>27</sup> Royde-Smith, *Mafro: A Comedy*, MS, University of Waterloo Library, Canada, Act III, 8.
- <sup>28</sup> Anonymous, *Empire News*, 3 March 1929, Milton MSS.
- <sup>29</sup> Anonymous, *The Observer*, 3 February 1929, Milton MSS.
- <sup>30</sup> Graham Robertson as quoted by J. C. Trewin, *The Gay Twenties: a Decade of the Theatre* (London: Macdonald, 1958), 122.

- <sup>31</sup> Robertson, 12 February 1929, as quoted by Kerrison Preston, Editor, in *Letters from Graham Robertson* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), 215–5.
- <sup>32</sup> Royde-Smith to Louise Morgan [Theis], 29 April 1929, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven.
- <sup>33</sup> Royde-Smith, “Once Upon a Time,” (illustrated by Arthur Rackham), *Women’s Journal*, December 1929, 5:26, 41–44, continued, 168–9.
- <sup>34</sup> Anonymous, *The Listener*, 24 April 1929, 555, as quoted in “Val Gielgud’s Reputation,” last accessed 31 May 2015 in *Val Gielgud and the BBC*, <http://www.irdp.co.uk/GIELGUD/>
- <sup>35</sup> Louise Morgan, “Naomi Royde-Smith: A Novelist who Knows No Class Barriers,” *Everyman*, 2 October 1930, 295–6, 297.
- <sup>36</sup> Royde-Smith to Louise Morgan, 31 August 1930, Louise Morgan Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven.
- <sup>37</sup> Royde-Smith, “Notes for a Lecture on the Best-Sellers,” MS, n.d. [internal dating ca. 1930], Milton MSS.
- <sup>38</sup> Dorothy L. Sayers to Royde-Smith, 13 January 1931, Gollancz Collection, Modern Records Centre, The Library, The University of Warwick.
- <sup>39</sup> Michael Sadleir to Royde-Smith, 31 March 1931, Constable Correspondence, Paley Library, Temple University.
- <sup>40</sup> Royde-Smith to Viola Garvin, 20 September 1943, Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge, in response, according to Martin Ferguson Smith, to Garvin’s request for information from Naomi for background information for a talk at the English Association in Alliance Hall, Westminster, entitled: “Two Observer Reviewers: Gerald Gould and Humbert Wolfe.” Royde-Smith’s letter was first transcribed by Constance Babington Smith and then corrected in transcription by Martin Ferguson Smith.
- <sup>41</sup> Royde-Smith letter to Louise Morgan, 14 October 1932, Beinecke Library; Morgan to Royde-Smith, n.d., NRS MSS.
- <sup>42</sup> James Agate, *First Nights* (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934), 89.
- <sup>43</sup> John Gross, *Shylock, a Legend Its Legacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 184.
- <sup>44</sup> Royde-Smith to Mary Butts, 23 September 1933, Mary Butts Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.
- <sup>45</sup> Harold Macmillan to Royde-Smith, 24 May 1934, NRS MSS.
- <sup>46</sup> James Agate, “Paganini. A play by David Wells, 25 January 1935” [David Wells was Ernest Milton’s pseudonym], *More First Nights* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1937), 103-5.
- <sup>47</sup> Roberts to Leonard Woolf, 9 June 1937, and to Ernest Milton, 15 July 1937, collected in “Ernest Milton and his wife Naomi Gwladys Royde Smith’s letters 1933–1955,” Society of Authors Archives, British Library. Ernest Milton,



“Sociable People,” MS, Milton MSS; Ernest Milton, *Best Seller*, MS, [n.d.], New York Performing Arts Library.

<sup>48</sup> Christopher Hope, “Introduction, *Yuhudi Menuhin*. Last accessed June 2015. <http://www.menuhin.org>.

## Chapter 7, Conversions

<sup>1</sup> Macmillan to Royde-Smith, 20 January 1941, NRS MSS.

<sup>2</sup> Royde-Smith, journal “Geneva,” MS, 24 October 1895, Milton MSS.

<sup>3</sup> R. J. Campbell, “Preface,” *Thursday Mornings at the City Temple* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908), v.

<sup>4</sup> W. B. Shelbie, M. A., D. D., *The Life of Charles Silvester Horne, M. A., M. P.* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1920), 185.

<sup>5</sup> Lyall Powers, editor, “Introduction,” *Henry James at Work* by Theodora Bosanquet [memoir together with selected diary entries] (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>6</sup> *David* [a play in manuscript] by Royde-Smith, Walter de la Mare Papers, Special Collections, Stanford University Library.

<sup>7</sup> Royde-Smith, “Rue St. Leger III,” MS, Milton MSS, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Evelyn Underhill as quoted by Christopher Armstrong in *Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941): an Introduction to her Life and Writings* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eardmans Publishing Company, 1975), 114.

<sup>9</sup> Evelyn Waugh, “Rome: Why It Has Happened to Me,” *Daily Express*, 20 October 1930, as quoted by Joseph Pearce in *Literary Converts: Spiritual Inspiration in an Age of Unbelief* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 166–7.

<sup>10</sup> D’Arcy, Fr. S.J., “Orthodoxy and the New Morality,” *Orthodoxy Sees It Through* (London: Arthur Barker, Ltd., 1934), 62.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Butts, review of *Orthodoxy Sees It Through* for *Time and Tide*, as quoted by Nathalie Blondel in *Mary Butts: Scenes From the Life* (Kingston, New York: McPherson and Company, Publishers, 1998), 363.

<sup>12</sup> Katharine Kendall, *Father Steuart: Priest of the Society of Jesus, a Study of his Life and Teaching* (Great Britain: Burns Oates, 1950), v.

<sup>13</sup> Father Steuart’s words as recorded by Katharine Kendall (collector), *Spiritual Teaching of Father Steuart, S. J.* (Westminster, Maryland: the Newman Press, 1952), 26, 55, 83–4. Fr. Steuart taught that the redemption of the world began with the present moment: “God’s first demand on us is that we should believe that He loves us. Anxiety about our past life, the use made of grace, fear about our sins, craven fear, looking back: none of this is good.” He had little patience

with theological debates, wanting to teach the ordinary person to live in the mystical approach to God by prayer. He taught that “[l]ife means a supernatural, spiritual life. I am alive in God’s eyes according as, looking at me, He sees me as Christ, Christ as me.” The ordinary person may mystically incorporate Christ by imbibing him during the ritual of Holy Communion and thus also takes within the Holy Ghost. Anyone may incorporate Christ and the Holy Ghost. (“Ghost” was a word that has been supplanted by the term “spirit” during the course of the twentieth century.) According to Fr. Steuart, through participating in Holy Communion, one also assumes His Mother as mother: “As she gave Christ birth, so she did for the historical Christ, she is to do for the Mystical Christ,” and by doing so she becomes “Patroness of the whole Body of Christ and the Church.” Fr. Steuart invoked her as his “Queen” and “Mother,” calling upon her, now internalized, to defend him.

- <sup>14</sup> Matthew Hoehn, editor, “Naomi Royde Smith (Mrs. Ernest Milton),” *Catholic Authors: Contemporary Biographical Sketches* (New Jersey: St Mary’s Abbey, 1952), 542–4.
- <sup>15</sup> Macmillan Publishing telegram to Royde-Smith, 6 January 1939, NRS MSS.
- <sup>16</sup> Anonymous, “Hard to Digest” [review of *For Us in the Dark*], *Montreal Gazette*, 20 November 1937.
- <sup>17</sup> Royde-Smith to Mr. Roberts, 24 May 1943, “Correspondence of Naomi Royde-Smith, 1926–1964,” Society of Authors Archive, British Library.
- <sup>18</sup> “Julian” [Erica Juliette Royde Smith], “Zinnias,” *50 Faggots* (London: John Mills, 1944), 62–3.
- <sup>19</sup> Royde-Smith to Marie Belloc Lowndes, 6 September 1946, Berg Collection, New York Public Library.
- <sup>20</sup> Milton, *Mary of Magdala* (Published for the Religious Drama Society by S. P. C. K., 1949), 6–67.
- <sup>21</sup> “Katheen Mary Christina Hamilton Rees-Mogg, Last Will and Testament,” Court Service: York Probate Sub-Registry.
- <sup>22</sup> “Will and Bequests: Mrs. Kathleen Mary Christina Hamilton Rees-Mogg,” *The Times*, 11 October 1949.
- <sup>23</sup> *Alice in Wonderland* (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0042189/>) Internet Movie Base (<http://www.hulu.com/watch/135848/alice-in-wonderland>)
- <sup>24</sup> <http://www.marypages.com/Etheldreda.htm>.
- <sup>25</sup> Regarding John Gielgud’s arrest for soliciting a man, Milton wrote to Royde-Smith, 27 October 1953, Milton MSS: “During the proceedings [of the Catholic Hope Guild] a letter was read from John Maude, Q.G., asking the Guild to write to Gielgud, suggesting that he withdraw from public appearances. This the Guild turned down on the grounds (1) that he is not a Catholic, (2) that the law

deals with morals & (3) that it must be left to public opinion. R. A. D. A. means to be solidly behind him (as their prize product, I suppose)—for Miss Pilgrim, who is secretary there, said at the C Hope Guild meeting—she is a Catholic—when this subject was discussed that John was the head of the profession—that if Sybil or Lewis rallied round him etc.—that morals & art etc.—George Baker said he was no *longer* the head of the profession etc., etc.—In any event the Guild refused to act officially & I think this reasonable enough.” It appeared that Gielgud was more naive and less lucky than Alec Guinness, who according to his biographer Garry O’Connor had been arrested for the same kind of offence in a similar type of site in Liverpool in 1946. He escaped notoriety at the time by giving his name as Herbert Pocket, a character he had played in the film version of *Great Expectations*. Apparently Guinness’s bisexuality, although known to his family and close friends, was not reported until after his death.

- <sup>26</sup> “Last Will and Testament of Ernest Milton,” 1965 and 1969, Milton MSS.  
Blakelock died in 1970; Ernest Milton drew up his last will in 1973.
- <sup>27</sup> Annabel Farjeon, *Morning Has Broken: a biography of Eleanor Farjeon* (Great Britain: Julia MacRae Books, a division of Franklin Watts, 1986), 278.
- <sup>28</sup> Blakelock, “Lovest Thou Me . . . ?” [poem], MS, [n. d.], Milton MSS.
- <sup>29</sup> Blakelock, *Eleanor: Portrait of a Farjeon* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966), 131.
- <sup>30</sup> Celia Denney [née Royde Smith] interview with author, 19 September 2007, Salvatierra de los Barros, Spain.
- <sup>31</sup> Kerrison Preston to Ernest Milton, 28 and 31 October 1952, Milton MSS.
- <sup>32</sup> Claude Kinnoull to Royde-Smith, October 1958, Milton MSS.
- <sup>33</sup> Harry Tatlock Miller, for the Redfern Gallery, to Ernest Milton, 20 March 1953, Milton MSS.
- <sup>34</sup> Matthew Smith (painter), portraits of Ernest Milton, 1950, records 12210 and 12211, Mathew Smith Collection, Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London.
- <sup>35</sup> Anonymous, 17 August 1954, Correspondence of Naomi Royde-Smith, 1926–1964, Society of Authors Archive, British Library.
- <sup>36</sup> Molly Capes to “Betty”, 26 [n.d.], Correspondence of Naomi Royde-Smith, 1926–1964, Society of Authors Archive, British Library.
- <sup>37</sup> Denys Kilham Roberts to Royde-Smith, 25 October 1954, Correspondence of Naomi Royde-Smith, 1926–1964, Society of Authors Archive, British Library.
- <sup>38</sup> Tax payment, income and expenses 1954/55, Milton MSS.
- <sup>39</sup> William Geist, “Arts and Leisure Desk [interview of Albert Finney],” 4 December 1983, *New York Times*, Section 2, page 11, col 1. A vinyl recording of Ernest Milton, “To be or not to be,” is located in Milton MSS.
- <sup>40</sup> Tax Payment for 1954–55, Milton MSS.

- <sup>41</sup> Eleanor Farjeon to Ms. Leighton, 14 September 1957, Correspondence of Naomi Royde-Smith, 1926–1964, Society of Authors Archive, British Library.
- <sup>42</sup> M. E. B. memo to Norah Blackbarrow, 28 April 1959, Correspondence of Naomi Royde-Smith, 1926–1964, Society of Authors, British Library.
- <sup>43</sup> Extract from Naomi Royde-Smith’s letter to M. E. B., 4 May 1959, Correspondence of Naomi Royde-Smith, 1926–1964, Society of Authors, British Library.
- <sup>44</sup> Royde-Smith, “Notes of Six Lectures on English Women Novelists,” MS, October 1903, Milton MSS.
- <sup>45</sup> Jon Wynne-Tyson, diary, 8 October 1960, MS, 16 April 2007.
- <sup>46</sup> Theresa Whistler phone interview with author, 10 June 1999.
- <sup>47</sup> Theresa Whistler to author, 7 July 1999. Regarding sale of the Walter de la Mare letters, see “American Telephones and Buys Eight Paintings,” *The Times*, 14 July 1966, Arts and Entertainment, 13.
- <sup>48</sup> Celia Denney interview with author, 19 September 2007, Salvatierra de los Barros, Spain.
- <sup>49</sup> Anonymous representative of the Society of Authors notes of conversation with the Almoner [social worker], Hospital of St. John and St. Elizabeth, Marylebone, 24 July 1964, Correspondence of Naomi Royde-Smith, 1926–1964, Society of Authors, British Library.
- <sup>50</sup> “Certified Copy of and Entry of Death [482],” Metropolitan Borough of St. Marylebone, London.
- <sup>51</sup> Naomi Gwladys Milton and Ernest Milton burial plot, P8 13B, Hampstead Cemetery, London.
- <sup>52</sup> Ernest Milton (1890–1974), lonely and destitute, suffered after Naomi’s death in 1964. Money was an immediate issue, witness his record of funeral expenses in his diary the day after Naomi’s death: “grave for 2 £25, removal to church £5.10, coffin £90” (Milton MSS). By August, his desperate financial straits had come to the attention of the British Prime Minister Edward Heath, who gave him a “strictly confidential” grant of £500 in recognition of “distinguished service to the theatre.” It was a non-reoccurring grant that did not require report for income tax purposes (John Hewitt to Milton, MSS). The next year Ernest was distressed to learn from his accountant that he had higher than expected 1965/66 income taxes because he had lost the benefit of excess expenses over earnings that had related to Naomi’s profession as author (Milton MSS). In addition, he was required to pay income on his newly assigned Civil List Pension (£100 annually) and also on 3 ½ percent in war stocks he had inherited from Naomi, ostensibly her legacy from Edgar Frere, who had been killed in the First World War. According to Alec Guinness in *Blessings in Disguise* (1986), after

Naomi's death, Ernest's "life became accident-prone, embittered and querulous; he suffered dreadfully from the actor's disease of persecution mania. He never told me of Naomi's death and barely referred to it in later years, but one day when I visited him at a small hotel in Hampstead he showed me a few keepsakes of hers and very tenderly said, 'I loved her'" (178). Later he became a resident of Denville Hall, a pleasant home for retired actors in North London. This fortuitous relocation in 1970 was likely enabled by the Sotheby sale for £2,800 in 1966 of Walter de la Mare's letters to Naomi. No guest at Denville was charged more than £21 a week, and for many it was less, according to means. Age eighty-four years, Ernest died on 24 July 1974, almost ten years to the day after Naomi. Alec Guinness and Albert Finney attended the Catholic memorial service for him: "We were, I believe, the only actors present. [. . .] Ernest should have been sent to his rest to the sound of a full choir, with boys' treble voices, clouds of incense and surrounded by dozens of beeswax candles" (*Blessings*, 180). In his 1969 last will and testament, Ernest bequeathed his grandfather clock to Alec Guinness and to Albert Finney his Macbeth ring that had formerly belonged to Edmund Kean (Milton MSS). John Gielgud wrote in eulogy: "Ernest Milton had imagination, mystery, and charm. He could be menacing, passionate, or witty. [. . .] At the Old Vic in the early twenties his performances of Hamlet, Shylock, and Richard the Second, were an inspiration to me. I salute the memory of a dear man and great artist" (*The Times*, 1 August 1974, 16). Naomi's diaries and general correspondence, culled by her nephews John Graham Royde Smith and Michael Royde Smith, were sold in 1978 several years after Ernest died; the Paley Library at Temple University in Philadelphia bought her papers for \$1,200.

<sup>53</sup> Ernest Milton, *Christopher Marlowe* (1929): "And when I/ Have travelled down the long & darksome way,/ I shall look back upon the one fair flower/ That you've caused bloom in this my heart tonight,/ And the kind of breeze of memory shall bear/ Its perfume to me whereso'er I be./ I pray to heaven I may requite thee yet." (Milton MSS)

<sup>54</sup> BBC to Ernest Milton, 19 March 1973, thanking him for permission to broadcast Naomi Royde-Smith's poem, "The Rabbit." (Milton MSS)

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*Avenging Muse* is the biography of Naomi Royde-Smith, a powerful early twentieth-century British literary editor who discovered and published the first works of such writers as Rupert Brooke, Rose Macaulay, and Graham Greene. Beginning at age 50, she became in her own right a prolific author of more than thirty novels in addition to plays, biographies, and cultural critiques posing as travelogues. She writes about fin de siècle Geneva, about London and working women between the wars, about journalism and theater, about artists and their promoters, about banal culture, about social class in disarray, about a world that lacks spiritual center.

Bravely Royde-Smith also writes about the lives of women loving women, men loving men, and tales about ordinary men and women in love—or not. The historical environment surrounding her writing, as well as those about whom she wrote, was morally and legally hostile to exploration of sexualities. Her fictions, witty and empathetic, emerge from her own experiences.

Royde-Smith enjoyed her work as a professional muse—literary editor in London of the prestigious *Saturday Westminster Gazette* and then *The Queen*; however, she did not enjoy being cast by writers, such as Walter de la Mare and Henry Spiess, as their personal muse. Indeed, in certain of her novels, she retaliated against men who trespass, attacking their self-absorbed use of women in the name of art. Her personal story corresponds with an increasing historical realization of women's rights, a realization that undermines romantic and neoromantic reverence for conventional muses. Her writings anticipate current literary and feminist theories of performative gender.

## AVENGING MUSE



Jill Benton, Professor Emerita of English and World Literature, taught twenty-two years at Pitzer College, one of the Claremont Colleges in California. Her writing of biographies about British women writers between the wars began with her first book *Naomi Mitchison: a Century of Experiment in Life and Letters* and continued with writings about Stella Benson, Winifred Holtby, Storm Jameson, Rosamond Lehman, and Rose Macaulay. This study of Naomi Royde-Smith was prompted by a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to participate in a seminar devoted to "Literary Biography: Fictionality, Presence, and Speculation." Professor Benton enjoys sleuthing archives for

documents that have not been discovered, found in abundance for this biography in Philadelphia, New York, Austin, London, and Geneva.