

MIXED MEDIA:
FEMINIST PRESSES AND PUBLISHING
POLITICS IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY
BRITAIN

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1999

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– Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas (1938)

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ABSTRACT

The high cultural profile of contemporary feminist publishing in Britain has previously met with a curiously evasive response from those spheres of academic discourse in which it might be expected to figure: women's studies, while asserting the innate politicality of all communication, has tended to overlook the subject of publishing in favour of less materialist cultural modes; while publishing studies has conventionally overlooked the significance of gender as a differential in analysing print media. Siting itself at this largely unexplored academic juncture, the thesis analyses the complex interaction of feminist politics and fiction publishing in twentieth-century Britain.

Chapter 1 – “ ‘Books With Bite’: Virago Press and the Politics of Feminist Conversion” – focuses on Britain's oldest extant women's publishing venture, Virago Press, and analyses the organisational structures and innovative marketing strategies which engineered the success of its reprint and original fiction lists. Chapter 2 looks back to Elizabeth Corbet Yeats's early-twentieth-century Cuala Press, a prominent element in the Irish literary revival and debates around women's relationship to nationalist agendas. The experience of The Women's Press, Black Woman Talk and Sheba Feminist Publishers constitutes the crux of Chapter 3 – “ ‘Books of Integrity’: Dilemmas of Race and Authenticity in Feminist Publishing” – which reads these presses as challenges to the early-second-wave women's movement insistence on the primacy of sisterhood for women's identity politics. Chapter 4 investigates feminist publishing's historical involvement in Edwardian suffrage politics and the vexed role of men within feminist publishing enterprises. Radical feminist and lesbian publishing is scrutinised in Chapter 5 – “Collective Unconscious: The Demise of Radical Feminist Publishing” – which centres upon Onlywomen Press, Sheba and Silver Moon Books, and explores the problematic nature of the collective principle for women's media enterprises. The concluding chapter – “ ‘This Book Could Change Your Life’: Feminist Bestsellers and the Power of Mainstream Publishing” – assesses the impact of feminism on mainstream post-war publishing. It critiques the ways in which mainstream houses' commissioning, design and marketing of canonical feminist texts have frequently militated against their oppositional content.

Central to the analysis as a whole is the dynamic tension arising from the conjunction of radical politics and the commercial market-place, a relationship in which the contesting exigencies of political progressiveness and business solvency create an energising – though volatile – dialectic.

for Helen
whose this both is,
and is not

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I should begin by declaring, not an interest, but a lack of initial interest in another sense: a feminist publishing house is not a cause to which my heart responds. There are surely few occupations which can claim to need a sexist back-up less than novel writing? It is almost the only respected, paying art at which women have been busy nearly as long as men and with a comparable degree of success. Nor, contrary to a widespread modern myth about the Awful Lives of women in the past, did they once have to be George Eliots to get away with it. . . . In our own century the numbers of successful women writers (successful in the sense of being published, read, enjoyed, remembered, not necessarily well-paid of course) must be equal, or nearly so, to the numbers on the male side. Neither young nor old nor women nor men nor homosexuals should, if they are good at *writing*, need to occupy a professional reservation as if they were an endangered species. (Tindall, 1979: 144)

How green were our bookshelves, how black and white our lives, those long-gone days when sisterhood was global and every remotely right-on household sported the distinctive spines of Virago and The Women's Press. Once those bottle green and striped covers were a passport to the front lines. Now you might well find your favourite feminist author on the Penguin shelf, and grab your next blockbuster from the railway Virago stand.

In a word, feminist publishing has succeeded. (Briscoe, 1990b: 43)

In the ideological and temporal distance which separates these two statements it is possible to trace the outlines of the most significant development in late-twentieth-century British publishing: the emergence and infiltration into the cultural mainstream of feminist presses. Gillian Tindall's observations, extracted from a 1979 New Society review of Virago Press's fiction list, query the very *raison d'être* of a feminist publishing house, reading the past success of individual female novelists as evidence of a publishing industry gender-neutral in its operations and scrupulously apolitical in its self-conception. Her confident assertion that women novelists have been as well "published, read, enjoyed [and] remembered" as their male counterparts has, since the time of Tindall's writing, been so thoroughly challenged by feminist analyses of canon-forming practices and the widespread erosion of the concept of critical neutrality that her

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observations now read as wishful thinking rather than as irrefutable analysis. Yet, to focus solely on Tindall's flimsy evidence of the careers of individual authors is to take aim at a straw man, leaving unanswered her larger, more unsettling, question: what is the political or literary justification for a feminist publishing house, and how may oppositional analyses derived from the modern women's movement be applied to an industry which in its structure and operating practices is intrinsically capitalist? The twin goals of political commitment and profit-generation might be expected to pull any such feminist publishing operation in incompatible directions.

The ease with which Joanna Briscoe in her article alludes to the distinctive green spines of Virago books and the black and white insignia stripes of The Women's Press's standard covers (43) signals a cultural sea change during the intervening period over the idea of a publishing house geared towards writing by women. Over the course of the decade which separates these two quotations, feminist publishing successfully engineered the cultural percolation of its politico-cultural programme into mainstream public consciousness. At the epicentre of this profound change in British literary culture stand the numerous feminist and/or womanist publishing imprints which emerged in Britain between 1972 and 1999¹: Virago Press, The Women's Press, Onlywomen Press, Sheba Feminist Publishers, Stramullion, Feminist Books, Black Woman Talk, Pandora Press, Honno, Aurora Leigh, Urban Fox Press, Silver Moon Books and Scarlet Press. While varying enormously in their political priorities, internal organisation, profitability and longevity, all of these imprints were united in their perception that the act of publishing is, because of its role in determining the parameters of public debate, an inherently political act and that women, recognising this fact, must intervene in the

¹ The term 'womanist' is preferred by some women of colour as a means to avoid the white, middle-class connotations of the word 'feminist'. It was coined by African-American novelist and critic Alice Walker in the title essay of her volume of collected essays, In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose (1983). For a fuller discussion of the interface between feminist thought and issues of racial identity refer Chapter 3.

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processes of literary production to ensure that women's voices are made audible.

The high profile of feminist houses in the periodical media and printed ephemera of the 1970s and 1980s women's movement might well have been predicted, but what distinguishes recent British feminist publishing from similar presses internationally is the extent of its penetration into the mainstream broadsheet press. The political and commercial metamorphoses of various British feminist presses have been widely (if not always rigorously or representatively) reported in the broadsheet press almost since Virago Press's inception at the height of women's liberation activism in 1972. High points in public awareness of feminist publishing include the success of Virago's Modern Classics series throughout the 1980s, the twentieth anniversary celebrations of The Women's Press in 1998, and – most prominently – the sale of Virago to Little, Brown & Co. of the Time Warner media group in November 1995. The tone of this reporting, with its penchant for depicting ideological divergences between individual women as feminist feuds, its concentration on Virago and The Women's Press over smaller – often more politically radical – imprints, and its perpetual doom-laden prophesying of feminist publishing's imminent demise, is revealing in its partisanship. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the general integration of feminist publishing into the mainstream of British cultural life has been widespread and far-reaching. The names of individual feminist imprints have become cultural signifiers, alluded to without need of explanatory information. They have become incorporated into the vocabulary of the culturally competent.

Events during the decade since Briscoe's article appeared represent the apotheosis of this trend towards mainstream cultural incorporation: in December 1997 former Virago author Fay Weldon's novel Big Women was published in hardback by the HarperCollins imprint Flamingo, and was broadcast in a four-part BBC screen adaptation

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on Channel 4 in July 1998. By means of the curious Möbius-loop effect of modern media, Virago Press, widely recognised as the model for Weldon's fictional publishing house, Medusa, had passed from being a purveyor of fiction to itself constituting a fictional protagonist (Lister, 1997; McCann, 1997; Sawyer, 1998). From the status of fringe cultural anomaly at the time of Tindall's article, feminist publishing had so migrated towards the mainstream of cultural recognition by the early-1990s that Briscoe hints at the pre-feminist publishing era as a type of distant dystopia, a strangely inconceivable and itself culturally anomalous period before "the rebel-rousing [sic] days" when the "floodgates for a mass of theory and fiction" were opened (1990b: 43). Arguably, Weldon's broad-brush satire on feminist politics and its curiously hostile portrait of women's collective endeavours can be read, paradoxically, as encoding an unintentionally progressive subtext: satire, in order to hit its mark, presupposes a high level of public recognition for that which it targets. Public lampooning ironically also testifies to public recognition.

In analysing the principles and practices of twentieth-century feminist publishing in Britain I am concerned chiefly with those presses, established and administered by women since the advent of the public agitation for women's rights in the late-1960s, which took as their project the production and republication of women's writing. To stipulate such a definition is immediately to call into question its parameters: what of women's historical involvement in publishing; how do self-described feminist presses relate to the women's studies lists established by mainstream publishing houses; does a women's press owned or funded by non-feminist sources cease to qualify as a feminist press *per se*? To institute any inflexible definition of what constitutes properly feminist publishing practice is fundamentally to misconstrue the nature of that practice. Shifting ideological allegiances, blurred organisational boundaries, problematic funding and historical feminist publishing precedent lie at the heart of the contemporary British

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women's press experience, and so demand a fluid and protean conception of what constitutes feminist publishing. Through concentrating chiefly upon the imprints of Virago, the Yeats sisters' Cuala Press, The Women's Press, the early-twentieth-century suffrage imprint The Woman's Press, and radical/lesbian/women of colour-identified imprints such as Sheba Feminist Publishers, Onlywomen and Silver Moon Books, I provide case studies of varieties of feminist publishing practice, but juxtaposed always with mainstream corporate feminist publishing, for which feminist imprints represent both cultural precursors and commercial competition. Given the percolation of feminist ideas throughout the modern publishing industry as a whole, the field under discussion threatens to become impossibly unwieldy. In order to focus this study's analysis, I therefore concentrate upon fiction, rather than non-fiction and academic women's publishing, as it is the realm of feminist fiction which the women's presses were the first to develop – for some years leaving the academic and non-fiction sectors largely to the energies of mainstream houses and their women's studies imprints.²

The publishing industry landscape is nevertheless too complexly intermeshed to support the idea that 'independent' feminist houses exist in isolation from their mainstream rivals: within the course of its trading history a press may change from being an independent to being a fully-owned corporate subsidiary, to a company sharing

² The first of the feminist imprints devoted solely to non-fiction was Pandora Press, established in 1983 under the editorial and financial control of academic publisher, Routledge and Kegan Paul. Its first list included poetry by Marge Piercy, (Stone, Paper, Knife, 1983) and, intriguingly, Lynne Spender's indictment of the intellectual and political control wielded by the mainstream publishing industry, Intruders on the Rights of Men: Women's Unpublished Heritage (1983a). The energies of Pandora's editorial advisor, Dale Spender, saw the 1986 launch of a reprint fiction series entitled Mothers of the Novel (the title borrowed from one of Dale Spender's own literary-critical works). In a challenge to Virago's domination of the reprint market in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century fiction, the Pandora list featured predominantly late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century novelists such as Maria Edgeworth, Charlotte Lennox, Mary Hays and Mary Brunton. With the notable exceptions of the Mothers of the Novel list and the house's discovery of Jeanette Winterson (whose Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit Pandora published in 1985), Pandora concentrated upon the non-fiction and academic textbook markets. After a period spent under the aegis of Rupert Murdoch's HarperCollins Publishers, Pandora was sold in January 1998 to the small-scale North London independent, Rivers Oram Press.

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publicity and distribution networks, to a public company with majority directorial shareholding. Virago's history is in this instance ideally illustrative. No single unifying factor, aside perhaps from complexity itself, adequately encapsulates the feminist publishing experience.

The conveniently-invoked shibboleth of “independence” is an especially inadequate formula by which to judge what does and what does not constitute a properly “feminist” organisation, because it assumes an organisational autonomy at odds with the financially interdependent reality of the publishing sector. Many of the most prominent feminist houses have at some point, or have since their inception, been partially or entirely owned by non-feminist media multinationals; most have at some time derived funding from mainstream banks or local government authorities; all have sold their publications to the general public and hence, presumably, also to male consumers. So inextricably interlinked are feminist presses with the realms of international media, corporate finance and mainstream book distribution that any such attempt to define feminist publishing activities by reference to a would-be separatist criterion of fully autonomous female endeavour must fail at the outset. Such an approach is not only massively exclusionary, but it defines out of existence that which it would seek to analyse.

CONSPICUOUS BY ITS ABSENCE: THE MARGINALISATION OF FEMINIST

PUBLISHING WITHIN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

To move from the arena of public literary debate to the realm of academic discourse is to experience a jarring discontinuity, for the high public profile and imprint recognition enjoyed by feminist publishers in the print media at large is, in the more exclusive sphere of academic publications, seemingly entirely unfamiliar. A curiously anomalous

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situation reigns whereby a deep-seated shift in the dynamics of British literary culture much remarked upon in the publishing world remains virtually undetectable through the written academic records – the monographs, anthologies, theses, journals and conference papers – by which the academic world monitors its changing interests. This absence of extended discussion about feminist publishing makes itself felt in a variety of ways. Frequently the subject is simply omitted entirely from discussions of women and literature, or, equally problematically, where publishing *is* referred to it is assumed to constitute a neutral link in the communications chain. The up-shot of this widespread academic obliviousness to the dynamics of feminist publishing has been a curious analytical hiatus when considering the processes by which individual authorial impulse is transformed into publicly available text. The pre-publication phases in the communication network are analysed by a complex variety of methods, and, equally conscientiously, the multifarious interpretations of written texts by readers are exhaustively monitored. Yet the act of making a text public which resides at the very centre of the literary communications circuit remains obscured by an unprofitable intellectual opacity. The intricate political interconnections which web the production of literature appear, according to such a schema, magically to unravel at the exact point of publication – an ironic situation, given that political judgements and cultural value are, in decisions over publication, frequently at their most potent and explicit.

Over the course of the last decade the commonly encountered academic obliviousness to the politics of feminist publishing has begun to be replaced by a subtler form of academic dismissal: the glancing acknowledgement. Many critics, perceiving that their failure to address the politics of the publication process undermines their assertion that *all* forms of communication are inherently political, have nodded in the direction of the women's publishing boom of the last 25 years, but in terms generally so brief and glibly congratulatory that they fail to engage with the complex debates and

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dilemmas which infuse this sphere of feminist media intervention:

The remarkably successful way in which [women's] silences have been filled in the last decade or two almost masks the magnitude of the achievement. Women's studies is now a force and a market: publishers such as Virago and the Women's Press [sic] are commercially successful and feminist criticism is an academic force carrying with it career possibilities. (Minogue, 1990: 4)

While not wishing to challenge Sally Minogue's rosily optimistic diagnosis of the state of academic feminism merely out of churlishness, I believe that glancing judgements of this nature leave begging important conceptual debates in the area of women's studies, thereby doing a disservice both to the discipline and to the practitioners of feminist publishing themselves.³ It is exceptional that a field such as women's studies, which has paid rigorous attention to the means by which academic disciplines are constructed and imbued with intellectual authority, should have failed to address in-depth attention to the political and commercial realities which have underpinned its own development.

The academic phenomenon which Dale Spender and Cheris Kramarae term the "explosion" of feminist knowledges over the last 30 years rests upon the substratum of the feminist presses, which both republished out-of-print texts with which feminism archaeologically unearthed its own history, and made available to women the works of contemporary feminist thinkers (Kramarae and Spender, 1992). Without prior evidence of such texts' profit-making capacity, mainstream publishers would have been unlikely to have sponsored their own feminist lists, thereby expanding the access to the world of publication which feminist writers now enjoy. Dale Spender, perhaps because of her own publishing experience in co-founding the non-fiction feminist imprint Pandora

³ Similarly glancing acknowledgements of feminist publishing's emergence and profile occur in one-sentence summaries in Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell's Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation (1987: 44, 226) and in Vicky Randall's Women and Politics: An International Perspective (1987: 246). Echoing Minogue's brief mention, Randall's terse discussion also misspells the names of both The Women's Press and Onlywomen Press, and in addition misdates the foundation of Virago to 1976 (246) – rather betraying the peripherality of feminist publishing to her critical concern.

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Press, is a rare exception amongst critics in drawing attention to feminism's own analytical blindspots:

The feminist knowledge explosion has been inextricably linked with the emergence of women's publishing ventures, and what is surprising is that this fundamental feature of Women's Studies' growth and achievement has attracted so little research attention within Women's Studies – which has such a commitment to examining its own processes. (Kramarae and Spender, 1992: 17)

Feminism's casual obliviousness to the crucial role which women-run presses have played in ensuring the movement's success is open to challenge both on ideological and on practical political grounds. Firstly, it is intellectually inconsistent for any politico-cultural movement committed to investigating the partisanship of all rhetorical acts to overlook the policies and practices which facilitate its own pronouncements. Despite having brilliantly illuminated the gender prejudices and inequitable selection policies which inform the mainstream publishing industry, feminists have so far largely remained comfortably silent on the gatekeeping policies of their own presses. If the act of publishing is in all circumstances informed by ideological factors, have feminist publishers themselves not played a crucial role in setting the parameters of feminist debate, privileging certain strands of feminist thought over others? If, as the maxim has it, the power of the press belongs to he who owns one, presumably – when circumstances permit – it belongs to *she* as well. On the basis of intellectual consistency alone, feminism is obliged to explore the political ramifications of its own control over the printed word.

In overlooking its own publishing history, feminism is, moreover, failing to inform its increasingly sophisticated media critiques with the benefits of practical experience. Taking as its initial rallying cry “the personal is political” – a public nailing to the mast of its faith in the political validity of individual life experience – academic feminism has, since the mid-1980s, engaged in increasingly rarefied philosophical

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debates as to its nature as a movement and its political priorities. Such self-analysis has been intellectually profitable for feminism, and perhaps represents an indispensable self-reflective stage in any evolving social movement. Nevertheless, it remains true that feminist theory must grow out of a dialectical relationship with feminist practice, and that by overlooking the publishing experience of its own presses feminism is ignoring a rich source of potential theorising on its own doorstep. Nor would the women who founded and who continue to run feminist imprints feel unduly burdened by any such academic attention. For as feminism in a sense retreated into the academy during the economically stringent and politically conservative period of the 1980s, many feminist publishers were left feeling abandoned by a movement which, on one hand, castigated them for cashing in on oppositional politics and, on the other, often relied upon their presses to further the academic careers of movement figures. As the most consistently successful of women's interventions into media production since the 1960s, feminist publishing has vast potential to reinvigorate women's studies' theorising around communication. The question that remains is why a sphere of media activity so successfully breached by feminism and about which so much first-hand knowledge exists should have been relegated to an academic no-man's land – fruitfully explored neither by publishing history, nor by women's studies, nor by that powerfully interdisciplinary force in contemporary humanities research: cultural studies.⁴

⁴ The phrases 'cultural studies' and 'media studies' are used throughout this Introduction as largely interchangeable terms. Whether, in fact, they denote distinct fields of academic research or, more specifically, variant trends within a single area, has proven fodder for much critical debate over the foregoing three decades (Marris and Thornham, 1996). The task of definition is made particularly difficult by the fact that cultural studies, almost as its founding gesture, rejected the concept of disciplinary boundaries and their associated critical and methodological baggage (Turner, G., 1996: 4-5). For the purposes of this study, however, I perceive a distinction between cultural studies – a broad field encompassing virtually any form of social practice which can be analysed for meaning – and media studies – which has tended to concentrate its critiques around the print and broadcast media and, in recent years, the Internet. The distinction may be as much one of critical intent as it is of subject matter. Cultural critic Graeme Turner remarks that the purpose of cultural studies is “to examine the power relations that constitute . . . everyday life and thus to reveal the configuration of interests [their] construction serves” (1996: 6). Media studies, by contrast, in some of its guises presents descriptive rather than politically-informed accounts of media industries – describing the state of contemporary British journalism, for example, without necessarily adopting an oppositional stance (see Bromley, 1995).

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SEARCHING FOR WOMEN IN THE HISTORY OF THE BOOK

The academic sphere in which feminist publishing studies might be expected most easily to reside is the broadly interdisciplinary field of research clustered under the banner of the history of the book. This field of academic inquiry began with an impulse which harmonises well with the sociological-political impetus of feminist publishing – scholars in Britain, the United States, France and Germany sought to reinvigorate traditional modes of bibliography by analysing book production against a variety of sociological, political, economic and philosophical frameworks. Furthermore, the chronology of this discipline’s emergence would appear to coincide productively with the academic institutionalisation of women’s studies: building upon foundation 1950s French studies in *histoire du livre* such as Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin’s *L’Apparition du Livre* (1958), book history gradually consolidated its position within British academia during the 1970s, and evolved into a recognised field of research during the 1980s, receiving perhaps its most sought after imprimatur with the launch in 1989 of the Cambridge University Press-sponsored Project for the History of the Book (Sutherland, 1988; Darnton, 1990; Jordan and Patten, 1995). Yet the enormous potential for cross-pollination between book history and feminist research has remained largely an opportunity lost, in part because of book historians’ predilection for the seventeenth- to nineteenth-century period – centuries in which the embryonic nature of organised feminist politics necessarily resulted in fewer feminist publications (Myers and Harris, 1983, 1985; Chartier, 1989; Darnton, 1990; Anderson and Rose, 1991). But this absence is due also to book history’s unjustifiable latent conviction that publishing history and women’s studies represent mutually exclusive fields of inquiry. Book historian Nicolas Barker, writing in *The Book Collector*, is perhaps unintentionally revealing in his assumption that the two disciplines are set on diverging paths: “Work is there, wherever

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you can find it; it will continue to exist when the searchlight of fashion has moved on from the history of the book to, say, women's studies" (1990: 24).

One of the history of the book's most prominent practitioners, cultural historian Robert Darnton, characterises the inchoate diversity of the field as "interdisciplinarity run riot" (1990: 110), a situation in which novelty and openness to innovation might be expected to facilitate a cross-disciplinary project such as feminist publishing studies. Perversely, this has not been the case. In so far as the field of publishing history can be said to have its nuclei, they operate without substantial reference to the findings and interests of feminist academics, resulting in a field at once fraught with the feared fragmentation of interdisciplinarity, yet at the same time unified in its resistance to broad-scale feminist intervention.⁵ Enumerating briefly the main categories of research in book history, I propose to demonstrate feminism's failure to intervene decisively in the field before turning to one of book history's proposed ordering schemas, Darnton's "communications circuit", to illustrate that even in its suggested avenues for further research, book history has thus far encoded implicit gender preferences.

The classic genre for tracing the impact of the book in Britain has been the nationalist history: a chronicle of the development of printed texts in Britain (predominantly understood as England) from William Caxton to the paperback revolution, usually ceasing before the phase of large-scale rationalisation and

⁵ Very recently there have been signs that feminist academics are becoming increasingly restive with book history's gender-blind theoretical underpinnings. In the Autumn 1998 newsletter of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (book history's international network), Leslie Howsam argues forcefully for book history practitioners "to make use of the powerful theory and flexible methodology of feminist analysis when we think about and investigate the history of books" (SHARP News: 2). In the same edition of the newsletter, Maureen Bell and Gail Chester announce their joint-editorship of the forthcoming Women and the Book: Female Participation in Print Culture from the Sixteenth Century to Today, which promises to be a major contribution to the understanding of women's role in publishing history (4).

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conglomeration which British publishing experienced in the 1980s. John Feather's A History of British Publishing (1988) is representative of its type, in particular in its total omission of gender as a differential in the publishing equation across over 500 years of history. Despite its publication date of 1988, it reads like a text from the 1960s: no female publishing employee other than Geraldine Jewsbury, a house reader for Bentley's in the nineteenth century, warrants even passing mention; women appear either as monarchs, lending their names to convenient historical sub-divisions, or as faceless low-level publishing operatives in mid-twentieth-century houses run on the "& Sons" model of patrilineal descent.

The progenitor of Feather's gender-oblivious approach is the long-lived "classic" of British publishing history, Frank Mumby's Publishing and Bookselling. The fifth edition of the text, co-authored with Ian Norrie in 1974, magisterially pronounces upon the inferiority of female achievement with a certainty that belies its publication date:

At the start of our period women played little part in the book world, except as authors. In that role they excelled, especially as novelists and poets, and still do, although their achievements in music and the plastic arts have never equalled men's. Similarly, women have been amongst the most gifted of booksellers in the twentieth century but have seldom, as yet, been permitted the same opportunities to rise to the top on the other side of the trade, except as editors of children's books. (Mumby and Norrie, 1974: 241)

Up-dating Mumby's text and correcting previous editions' "many omissions" (9) in 1982, Ian Norrie somewhat belatedly noticed that "the feminist movement" was now "in full swing" (15), and added to the "Independents, Old and New" chapter a handful of sentences on Virago's Modern Classics reprint list, noting the "vivid mark" its director Carmen Callil had made upon contemporary publishing "by exploiting the woman's [sic] movement" (158). In the brevity of Norrie's remarks, in his conception of feminist publishing as essentially parasitic in its relationship to the political wing of the women's movement, and in his focus on a single press rather than on the industry force which

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women's publishing by 1982 had come to represent, Norrie inadvertently demonstrates the chronic limitations for feminism of the survey-overview genre of publishing history.⁶ A dynamic blend of feminist theory and publishing practicality, grounded upon varied and detailed case studies spanning a twentieth-century timeframe, is required to do justice to the complexities of the modern British feminist publishing experience. At its best, such an approach should aim not only to fill the gaps in traditional publishing and women's studies research, but – more profoundly – to prompt radical reconceptualisation of the nature and parameters of both disciplines.

That the history of the book is capable of such disciplinary reinvigoration under the influence of other schools of thought is demonstrated by recent trends in analogous areas. The self-avowedly apolitical historical-survey-style approaches which would seem to stymie efforts for a feminist re-appropriation of publishing history could be expected to be equally non-conducive to class-based approaches. Yet the hybrid of popular literature and publishing history has been an academic growth area over the past two decades, sponsoring studies such as John Sutherland's exploration of the role of economic determinants in the production of literary culture, Fiction and the Fiction Industry (1978), Joseph McAleer's use of publishing house case histories to reconstruct the mass public's reading experience in the earlier twentieth century in Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914-1950 (1992), Ken Worpole's study of mass-market publishing, Reading by Numbers: Contemporary Publishing & Popular Fiction (1984), and, most recently, Richard Todd's analysis of literary prizes' impact on the publishing industry and on bestseller lists, Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today (1996). The potential for reinvigoration and reconceptualisation of the field demonstrated by such titles is especially heartening given the near-adamantine

⁶ By 1982, the feminist presses Virago, Onlywomen, The Women's Press and Sheba Feminist Publishers were all in operation.

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resistance to feminist analyses demonstrated by other prominent genres of publishing history. The statistically-based modes of enumerative and analytical bibliography would seemingly be as well-suited to feminist-oriented enquiries as they are to traditional book history, yet the heavy reliance in British bibliography on the records of the Stationers' Company (a guild from which women were excluded) effectively militates against any such appropriation of the methodology for more politically-engaged ends (Eliot, 1994; Myers and Harris, 1985). Other species of publishing history proffer blank walls and uncongenial environs for the feminist book historian: the intrinsically self-congratulatory nature of the publishing house history does not lend itself to analysis of the veiled political rationale by which certain texts were rejected for publication. Similarly, technological and purely economic overviews of the printing and publishing trades appear to bear a residue of the ingrained hostility to female employment which characterised the printing unions from the nineteenth century until well into the 1970s: Marjorie Plant in her The English Book Trade: An Economic History of the Making and Sale of Books (third edition, 1974) decorously confines herself to exploring "the social and economic relationships which arose between masters and men" (7).

Faced with such colossal indifference to the history of women's interaction with the book trade, where is the feminist publishing historian to gain entry to this academic citadel, made all the more impenetrable by its constant self-description as tentative, permeable and open to innovation? The nucleus of studies around intellectual and cultural history is, I believe, the most profitable point of access for feminism into the history of the book. This belief is founded partly on the receptivity to theoretical self-analysis which characterises the field, and in part on its firm contextualisation of book history within the overlapping spheres of economics, politics, philosophy, sociology and history. Moreover, in an academic sphere regarded with some reason as dusty and fogyish, it is here that the most dynamic – not to mention readable – work is being

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produced. A field claiming to be besieged by a “multiplicity of approaches” and lacking in “binding theoretical coherence” can hardly complain that a further measure of interdisciplinarity threatens to wreak havoc (Jordan and Patten, 1995: 2; Sutherland, 1988: 576).

REWIRING DARNTON’S COMMUNICATIONS CIRCUIT

American historian Robert Darnton in his essay “What Is the History of Books?” (1990) provides a diagrammatic schema for conceptualising book history which has drawn significant attention in the field of publishing studies partly, one suspects, because the field is characterised by anxiety as to how its disparate elements might be made to coalesce into a semblance of disciplinary unity (Sutherland, 1988; Barker, 1990). Tracing the publication history of a book through a literary circuit, the stages of which include the author, publisher, printers, distributors, retailers and readers, Darnton situates the whole process within overarching economic, social, intellectual, political and legal landscapes (1990: 112; refer appendix of illustrations). It is Darnton’s contention that in the tension between these broad contexts and the smaller-scale activity of print circulation the history of the book can be seen in the making:

Book history concerns each phase of this process and the process as a whole, in all its variations over space and time and in all its relations with other systems, economic, social, political, and cultural, in the surrounding environment. (111)

Given that Darnton’s diagrammatic overview represents the closest thing to a disciplinary blueprint which book history has yet produced, the feminist publishing critic cannot but read the model looking as much for its absences as for that which it incorporates. Darnton’s book model is a mono-gendered construction, omitting entirely the involvement of women at any single point in the communication chain and, moreover, failing to discern that gender considerations play a determining role at *every* stage of his communications network, radically altering its nature for women. In

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encapsulating his goal as the quest to discover “how exposure to the printed word affects the way men think” (134), Darnton reveals not just an uncharacteristic (for a present-day American academic) rejection of gender-neutral language, but an unspoken basic premise of his publishing history model. Book history is, for Darnton, fundamentally masculine in gender.

The particular text which Darnton tracks around his communications circuit is Voltaire’s *Questions sur l’Encyclopédie* (1770), a significant fact, for the model proposed bears the imprint of the European eighteenth-century French language book trade. In order for it to comment meaningfully on the contemporary UK publishing scene it would have to be radically amended by taking into account the role of reviewers, literary agents, rights departments, literary prize panels and the plethora of other contemporary literary mediators. Hence, despite Darnton’s claims for the universality and trans-historical nature of his model – “with minor adjustments, it should apply to all periods in the history of the printed book” (111-13) – it is, crucially, a gender- and period-specific construction, imbued with the priorities of the twentieth-century academic historian as much as it is with the experiences of the eighteenth-century bookseller.

The history of the book is, however, not so littered with holistically-structured intellectual frameworks that historians of feminist publishing should be overly hasty in jettisoning Darnton’s model outright. While remaining fully cognisant of its glaring omissions and eighteenth-century timeframe limitations, feminists are wise to appropriate Darnton’s model and radically reconceptualise it for their own purposes. Once adopted and adapted there is much to recommend it. Firstly, the fundamental principle encoded in the model, that of the interdependence and dialectical tension between the book industry and larger societal contexts, is vital to any politically oriented critical approach

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such as feminism. Indeed, in order to take into account the central role played by encompassing social revolt and political ferment in the revival of modern feminist publishing in the 1970s, Darnton's model could be usefully restructured so that the communications circuit is depicted as operating *within* the intellectual, economic and political spheres. Such a readjustment is mooted also in Nicolas Barker's "Reflections on the History of the Book" (1990), though to support an historicist, not specifically feminist, position (22-23). Nevertheless, the proposed change would be beneficial in highlighting diagrammatically an oppositional press's position of unequal strength *vis-à-vis* the societal status quo. While it suggests the power discrepancy between independents and the mainstream (a fact invariably commented upon by feminist publishers in interview), such a modified communications circuit acknowledges also the potential for individual agency within a larger socio-economic system. It is this bifocal element which is one of the most valuable insights of Darnton's model: an individual bookseller may be motivated to stock Voltaire's *Encyclopédie* because of a fashion in pre-Revolutionary Europe for rationalist philosophy, yet his act may equally be prompted by the more immediate and personal spur of competition with a neighbouring bookseller (114-19). Such a receptivity to the importance of individual action, within the possibilities presented by a sometimes hostile social milieu, is the kind of dynamic analytical approach which any study of feminist publishing must strive to cultivate.

How else might Darnton's framework be appropriated for the cause of a feminist publishing history which he appears to overlook? I propose several alterations to sketch in the parameters of a feminist "communications circuit" (112) appropriate for charting women's control of the printing press across the twentieth century. Firstly, Darnton's model is posited upon the concept of *successful* communication; in his emphasis on how books move through the communications cycle he has little regard for what founders in the system, for what remains unwritten, for that which is rejected for publication, or for books

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refused retail space or denied distribution outlets. Hence, a feminist analysis of book industry operations would pay attention not only to Darnton's smoothly-oiled cogs, but also to the hiatuses, disruptions and silences in the process, examining not simply a system for the communication of ideas, but also the same system's reverse manifestation as an instrument for *non*-communication and for the frustration of radical policies. Locating the silences in a system in this manner generally involves evidentiary problems – how to locate those books which do not exist? – but the ghosts of these silences and hiatuses haunt feminist publishing endeavours, and are frequently discernible by paying attention to the remedial measures in which feminist presses have engaged. For example, the UK broadsheet newspapers' unwillingness to review reprint paperbacks initially threatened Virago's commercial extinction; hence their small print runs of review hardbacks and their recognisable standard Modern Classics cover design are doubly encoded with meaning – they amount to creative solutions to problems faced by industry outsiders.

Moreover, a recasting of Darnton's model for feminist usage would complicate its format and structure, rejecting Darnton's largely single-direction model for one better able to illustrate the subterfuge and tension characterising much feminist interaction with the publishing process. In particular, the unproblematic juxtaposition in Darnton's model of Author and Publisher belies the tensions inherent in the relationship, one strained especially amongst feminist presses by the risk of author poaching, and by the sometimes microcosmic community politics which lead to the situation whereby a manuscript is submitted by an author known to the publishing collective. Conversely, the model fails to accommodate individual feminist presses' efforts to reconceptualise positively the author/publisher relationship by infusing it with greater supportiveness, mutuality and consultation. The feminist publishing goal of reforming the conditions out of which literature arises cannot be done justice by Darnton's marginalising of the pre-publication phase, nor can the complexity of that relationship adequately be summarised by a deceptively simple

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diagrammatic arrow. The cumulative effect of these feminist restructurings of Darnton's model would be increased attention to hiatuses, communication impasses and feedback, to individual agency, alternative routes and circuitous channels: less quasi-scientific model than Snakes and Ladders board-game. For it is only through consulting the original documents, manifestos, articles and publications of the women's presses, enhanced by interviews with women centrally involved in the industry's development, that a critical medium can be struck between, on one hand, the trite, soap-opera-style representation of feminist publishing in Weldon's Big Women and, on the other, the somewhat bloodless geometry of Darnton's model.

SILENCES WITHIN SILENCES:

SEARCHING FOR PUBLISHING IN FEMINIST MEDIA STUDIES

If the communications circuits propounded within publishing studies can be adapted to feminist interests only by major rewiring, scholars with an interest in feminist publishing history could be forgiven for anticipating that women's studies – originally the academic limb of the 1970s women's movement – would offer the most congenial academic niche for their research. To an extent which is startling, this assumption readily proves to be false. Perhaps because the development of women's studies in the 1970s and 1980s was contemporaneous with and politically sympathetic to the burgeoning discipline of cultural studies, feminist research in the area of media has demonstrated a marked preference for popular genres such as film, television, magazines and periodicals, pornography, romance literature and music videos (Baehr, 1980; Jackson, 1993; Zoonen, 1994; Robinson and Richardson, 1997). In effect, this preference has rendered feminist publishing studies an academic no-man's land: too literary in its associations to be annexed to feminist cultural studies; and too tainted with commercialism to fall within the purview of literary criticism. The anomaly at the heart of this situation is that some

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of the foundation texts in feminist media studies were in fact published by the women's presses, thus these books in their very materiality and marketing bear witness to feminist intervention in media production (Betterton, 1987; Baehr and Dyer, 1987; Miller, Jane, 1990). Yet, perversely, in their content they frequently omit all mention of the topic. They are inherently paradoxical: indelibly marked with the stamp of the women's presses, but in their silence on the subject at the same time positively Trappist.

The fate of feminist publishing in falling between the two stools of literary criticism and cultural studies could, arguably, be attributed to shifts in the prevailing intellectual fashions of the past two decades. With a poor sense of academic timing, feminist publishing – according to such an interpretation – entered mainstream consciousness at precisely the point when critics were turning away from materialist analyses to pursue discourse-driven critical modes such as post-modernism, psychoanalysis and post-colonialism. Yet, such an explanation for the manifest absence of work on feminist publishing fails to convince on two grounds. Firstly, the boom in cultural studies during the 1980s and 1990s frequently retained a firmly economic substructure, demonstrable in analyses of favoured cultural studies media such as film (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1985; Dale, 1997), television (Ang, 1995; Gledhill, 1997; Geraghty and Lusted, 1998), and the pop music industry (Chapple and Garofalo, 1977; Negus, 1992). Moreover, the non-materialist discourses pervasive in 1980s academia need in no sense have precluded analyses of feminist publishing, as studies of post-colonial publishing industry politics in India and Africa amply testify (Altbach, 1975; Adaba, Ajia and Nwosu, 1988). Hence, with no inherent reason for cultural studies academia at large to have dismissed feminist publishing from critical regard, the troubling question becomes why – specifically – did the field of women's studies fail to notice such an omission and to act to rectify it?

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The implications of women's studies' dumb loquaciousness on the issue are twofold. Firstly, it represents an internal contradiction in the theoretical construction of feminist media studies. Initially, research in this field took as its focus representations of women in popular media, many of which were interpreted as intellectually patronising and ideologically coercive stereotypes. Moving on from this position by the late-1970s and early-1980s, feminist critics turned to more heartening evidence of women's proactive intervention in media production, and to analysing the ways in which women's representations of women differed from those produced by less politically self-conscious mainstream media institutions. Most recently, academic attention has focused on more specifically theoretical conjectures such as the nature and significance of media mediation and the manner in which individuals make sense of cultural products (Bonner et al., 1992; Robinson and Richardson, 1997). The field's marked failure to engage centrally with the legacy of the women's presses represents a glaring omission in what has been, up until this point, an academic arena nothing if not theoretically self-conscious. Compounding the intellectual inconsistency of the field at the theoretical level is a commensurate practical loss in terms of evidence: whether through lower start-up costs or through less rigorously exclusionary distribution systems, feminist presses achieved the most high-profile and long-lived success of any British feminist media enterprise. Within the UK, none of the feminist film-making collectives, film distribution organisations, feminist periodicals, academic women's studies journals, women's community newspapers, television production companies or independent radio programmes attained anything comparable to the financial success, public recognition and industry influence of the feminist publishing houses – Virago Press and The Women's Press in particular. To overlook this rich store of experience and flourishing of feminist cultural confidence because of a preference for formats more demonstrably 'popular' than the book is to sacrifice a wealth of potentially dynamic research on the

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basis of overly-pedantic disciplinary boundaries.

Negligence, rather than any wilful intent to curb research activities, probably accounts for this current situation within feminist media studies. Yet the contemporary status quo is foreshadowed in a text which served as a foundation for much of the materialist feminist criticism which subsequently emerged in the field: novelist and short story writer Tillie Olsen's influential critical work, Silences (1980). This volume, which concentrates critical attention on the circumstances – financial, domestic, cultural, familial and legislative – in which it is possible to produce literature, was timely for women's studies in linking women's publication history with the social and economic circumstances of their lives. The text's opening section, a 1962 essay entitled "Silences in Literature" (5-21), was, as its title suggests, the intellectual seedbed of the volume as a whole, and in it Olsen movingly extrapolates from her own late-flowering literary career a broadly socialist-feminist theory for women's relatively sparse literary production. Although Olsen adumbrates class, race and gender considerations which significantly constrain literary production, in addition to the further silencing tactics of self-censorship, artistic isolation and domestic and maternal burdens that prevent women from "com[ing] to writing" (39), her focus is predominantly on the pre-publication phases of writerly production. The process of publication is itself the unspoken silence at the heart of Silences. At only three points (9, 41, 143) in what is, as critics have often noted in exasperation, a scattered and somewhat repetitious text (Atwood, 1978: 27), does Olsen make even passing reference to "publishers' censorship" (9). Such criticisms are, moreover, usually centred upon publishers' genre preferences – " 'there is no market for stories' " (143) – which force writers into using certain, perhaps uncongenial, forms rather than on the publishing industry as an ideological filter with enormous commercial power to marginalise minority voices. Olsen's critique gives the impression that once a woman writer has leapt the hurdles represented by a lack of self-confidence, poverty,

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domestic responsibilities and an absence of writerly support, she has a clean, straight run until she must face the post-publication barriers of state censorship and the tricky water-jump of exclusion from academic syllabi. That access to publication, itself perhaps the most politically bemired and treacherous obstacle in this entire literary showjumping course, is glossed over with terse asides constitutes a fundamental misrepresentation of industry realities.

It is apparent that Olsen's underemphasis on the ideological force of access to publication has been uncritically reinforced by much work in feminist media studies since the original US publication of Silences (1978). This gives rise to a curious contradiction, as to handle a copy of the book itself is to perceive a triple irony. The text is, in spite of its content, indelibly soaked with the spirit of the feminist presses: not only was the largest single section of the book, a reflection on the life and work of nineteenth-century American author Rebecca Harding Davis, written as an afterword to the first title in the Feminist Press's women's reprint series (47), but Olsen by implication berates the mainstream publishing houses for allowing such a classic of American realist literature as Davis's Life in the Iron Mills (1861) to fall out of print and languish in obscurity. Furthermore, in Britain, Silences proved a solid commercial success for Virago Press from the appearance of their edition in 1980, raising questions about the inter-relationship not only of nineteenth-century and twentieth-century women's writing, but also of US and British feminist presses of recent decades. It is the book's failure to acknowledge its embedding in the sphere of feminist publishing from its very inception that makes reading Silences such a frustrating experience: constantly avowing a broad-based analysis of communications systems and raising hopes for an inclusivist approach, it yet fails to direct the full force of its critical beam on the circumstances which make it, as a published book, possible.

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TELLING IT SLANT ⁷:

READING WOMEN'S STUDIES FOR A THEORY OF FEMINIST PUBLISHING

Silences, omissions and glancing asides do not, however, constitute the chill entirety of women's studies' commentary upon the phenomenon of feminist publishing. Recent work in the field has come to echo a refrain of consternation and surprise at an omission both glaring and theoretically unjustifiable. Florence Howe, founder of the oldest of the contemporary women's presses, The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, bemoans the absence of a full account of the last 25 years of feminist publishing, declaring that "there has been no book on the subject" because "no one has tried to write [the history] down" (Howe, 1995: 137; 130). It is a sentiment echoed in Mary Eagleton's insightful discussion of "Women and Literary Production" in the second edition of Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader (1996a), in which Eagleton makes audible a critical silence by asserting that "the full story of the last twenty years of feminist publishing is still to be told" (71):

One hopes, though, that someone, somewhere *is* writing a thesis on this aspect of feminist literary production since much knowledge and experience will otherwise be lost. (71)⁸

Not to be outdone in terms of self-referentiality, Dale Spender and Cheris Kramarae in

⁷ Adapted from Emily Dickinson's poem (c1868):

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant –
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise

As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind –

(The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson. (1960) Ed. Thomas H. Johnson. Boston: Little, Brown. 506-507.)

⁸ In an article published in the same year, "Who's Who and Where's Where: Constructing Feminist Literary Studies" (1996b), Eagleton makes a similar point in arguing for greater academic attention to the economic, educational and institutional contexts within which feminist criticism is produced. She productively highlights the paucity of "analysis of the development of feminist publishing" (6).

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the introduction to their anthology of feminist analysis, The Knowledge Explosion (1992), delineate a necessary sphere of research even as they lament its absence from the pages of their own collection:

That this considerable publishing achievement [by women] so enmeshed with the knowledge explosion and so open to challenge has been the focus of so little attention within Women's Studies is one omission; that it has not been pursued in more detail in these pages is another. (19)

By a curious turn of academic events, feminist publishing begins to take on the trappings of a ghost discipline – commented upon as much for its absence as it is for its contributions.

I do not mean to suggest, by commenting upon feminist publishing's Scarlet Pimpernel-like status in academia – “they seek him here, they seek him there . . .” – that my research in this area takes place entirely within a vacuum. Although no book-length critical study giving an overview of British feminist publishing from the 1970s until the late-1990s has yet appeared, research in analogous areas does exist and, if read with an eye for the politics of contemporary publishing, provides rich insights. Hence my title for this section, “Telling it Slant”, borrows from Emily Dickinson's famous line to suggest the tactics of cross-reading, argument by analogy, refraction and qualified acceptance by which the picture of feminist publishing in Britain during the twentieth century might be constructed from close readings of the evidence women's studies has already compiled.

Providing valuable methodological models are a group of works which chart the interaction of women writers with cultures of print production, the majority of which were published in the late-1980s and early-1990s. Gaye Tuchman and Nina E. Fortin's Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers, and Social Change (1989) usefully demonstrates the gendered nature of the publishing sphere, in itself rebutting Robert

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Darnton's unspoken assumption in "What Is the History of Books?" that the realm of public print is a sphere unmarked by gender codings. Exploring a similarly engendered pattern in relation to the transatlantic nineteenth-century publishing world, Susan Coultrap-McQuin in Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century (1990) provides a more optimistic reading of women's conditional acceptance in the public world of letters. Coultrap-McQuin emphasises women's strategic sleight-of-hand in adopting personae which allowed them maximum flexibility to write the world as they perceived it, an approach also furthered by Catherine Gallagher in her analysis of the ambivalent authorial practices of women writers from the seventeenth through to the early-nineteenth centuries, Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820 (1994). Yet the theoretical sophistication and archival thoroughness evident in these works cannot compensate completely for the fact that their attention is necessarily drawn to the subject of women *and* publishing, rather than that of women *in* publishing – making them studies different in kind from that attempted here. Scattered work on the fascinating nineteenth-century house, the Victoria Press, an all-women printing and publishing operation of the 1860s and 1870s headed by pro-suffragist Emily Faithfull, manages to cover both of these academic bases by focusing on women as outsiders in the London print trade, as well as portraying their determined efforts to breach its exclusionary boundaries (Fredeman, 1974; De La Vars, 1991; Ratcliffe, 1993; Frawley, 1998). But the sea changes in publishing techniques and financing between the nineteenth century and the present mark out the Victoria Press as an interesting precursor to modern feminist publishing initiatives rather than as a direct progenitor.

Analyses focusing upon the twentieth century proffer greater insights into the contemporary status quo, although frequently periodical publishing, rather than fiction publishing, constitutes these studies' primary frame of reference. Hence Dale Spender's

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exploration of ideological “gatekeeping” by means of the far from objective refereeing policies of academic journals at once provides a key term for critiquing feminist publishing, while at the same time necessarily emphasising the distinctive character of academic journal publishing (1981). Similarly, Jayne E. Marek in her excellent Women Editing Modernism: “Little” Magazines and Literary History (1995) demonstrates with well-selected evidence the inherently political nature of editorial control in early-twentieth-century ‘little’ magazines, sponsoring a central tenet of this thesis’s theorising about the base-line power of wielding the editorial blue pencil. Yet periodical publishing, with its lower-scale investment, provision for advertising, and multiple authorship of a single edition, contrasts starkly with the financial realities of book-length fiction publishing, in which cash turn-around is invariably slower and for which the construction of a marketable house identity is a primary necessity. Consistently, the medium in which analyses specifically related to book publishing have appeared have been the feminist periodicals. Furthermore, the cogent articles which have appeared in the feminist press have frequently been penned by those with first-hand experience of feminist publishing practice. In this context, manifestos, commentaries, reports and position statements in women’s publications such as Spare Rib, Everywoman, Trouble & Strife, Quest, Sinister Wisdom, Women’s Review of Books and Feminist Review have provided the explicit theoretical orientation which pieces in mainstream newspapers such as the Guardian, the Observer, the Independent and the Times are inclined to suppress as overtly tendentious. It is precisely this falsely assumed mask of objectivity that the articles from feminist periodicals manage so compellingly to disrupt.

Finally, a bare handful of texts focusing in part upon feminist publishing’s politics and practice have appeared, constituting the nucleus around which further analyses of the area must hope to develop. Nicci Gerrard’s Into the Mainstream: How Feminism has Changed Women’s Writing (1989) employs the author’s experience as

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editor of Women's Review to survey changes in the field of women's writing throughout the 1970s and 1980s, benefiting from over 30 interviews with prominent writers in which they speak of their enhanced opportunities for publication in the wake of the feminist presses' success. Gerrard dedicates only one section of a chapter specifically to the topic of feminist publishing, however, the ambivalence recorded in her conclusions about the fate of the women's presses in the face of competition from vastly more powerful corporate multinationals has since proven unnervingly prescient. Individual chapters in other valuable texts provide instigatory analyses and important factual detail, but they read as somewhat superceded given industry developments since their various dates of publication: Rolling Our Own: Women as Printers, Publishers and Distributors (1981) by Eileen Cadman, Gail Chester and Agnes Pivot records the origins and intents of the women's presses with avowed authorial support; Lynne Spender's Intruders on the Rights of Men: Women's Unpublished Heritage (1983) is touched by the creeping economic rationalism of the early-1980s, casting a gaze of ominous foreboding in the direction of the corporate publishing sector; and, most recently, Patricia Duncker's inclusion in Sisters and Strangers: An Introduction to Contemporary Feminist Fiction (1992) of a chapter dedicated to discussing "the Politics of Publishing" underpins the readings advanced in her later chapters with a firmly materialist industry critique (39-54). Lastly, two guides to the women's press sector, Polly Joan and Andrea Chesman's Guide to Women's Publishing (1978) and Celeste West and Valerie Wheat's The Passionate Perils of Publishing (1978) convey the excitement of the early US women in print movement, but their tangential analyses of the British feminist press sector are at best rudimentary, and are in any case now greatly out of date.⁹

⁹ A more recent publication co-authored by two members of the Indian feminist press Kali for Women, Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon's Making a Difference: Feminist Publishing in the South (1995), is centrally concerned with women's presses in the developing world (the "South" of their somewhat confusingly worded subtitle) although the book also includes a (factually unreliable) five-page summary of "Feminist Publishers Across the Atlantic" (10).

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As contributions to an emergent debate around feminist publishing, these texts play a pivotal role, yet events since their various dates of composition – the 1991 resignations crisis at The Women’s Press, the collapse of Sheba Feminist Publishers in 1994, the sale of Virago to Time Warner subsidiary Little, Brown in November 1995 – bespeak an industry constantly in flux. It is this dynamic reality which gives the analysis which follows the status of a report from the field rather than that of a judgement professing magisterial finality. To declare the provisionality of one’s findings is to acknowledge – and to embrace – the dynamic reality of feminist publishing as an on-going commercial venture.

MIXED MEDIA:

EQUIVOCAL SUCCESSES AND SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES

Feminist publishing is beset by a dilemma which underpins the industry as a whole and each individual press at any given point: the irresolvable tension implicit in the phrase “political publishing”. How can a publishing house committed to securing cultural and political changes in favour of women hope to accommodate itself to a capitalist system that largely benefits from social stability and acquiescent female participation? Put another way, how can an oppositional politics hope to achieve commercial success within the ruthlessly competitive publishing marketplace? Compounding the problem of a press’s political identity are the risks attendant upon too great a commercial success: the decline of Virago’s Modern Classics list was ironically hastened by its manifest market popularity, a commercial strength which inspired mainstream competition and rivalry for the rights to out-of-print women’s titles. Feminist presses must walk an impossible tightrope between political authenticity and commercial viability; between financially risky first-book authors and low-risk, profit-generating “classics”; between

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ensuring sufficient turnover to remain solvent on the one hand, and, on the other, disguising any too flagrantly profitable operation for fear of imitation. Add to this already complex equation the uncongenial political and economic environment of the 1980s and early-1990s for left-identified operations, and its microcosmic reflection within the publishing industry in a wave of press mergers, takeovers and bankruptcies, and the precariousness of feminist publishing becomes apparent. That an industry which began with such insignificant capital investment and low public profile achieved marked success within three decades is remarkable; that it did so against a grim background of recession and political retreat is nothing short of extraordinary.

The title of this discussion, “Mixed Media”, captures something of this delicate balancing and profound ambivalence at the heart of feminist publishing. To propose any species of grand solution to the politics/profit conundrum would be hopelessly arrogant – involving, quite possibly, the total reconceptualisation of the current socio-economic system – and it would, in any case, be mistaken to reason away the very source of tension which provides the key to the feminist press industry. By concentrating on the variant strategies which British feminist fiction-publishing houses have evolved, I propose to grapple with the issue of political credibility versus company solvency from a variety of perspectives. Endorsement of any one approach is redundant in such a study, although, specifically in relation to radical collectivist feminist publishing, I do suggest that certain group policies aggravated rather than allayed circumstantial problems. More generally, my objective is to explore the variety of feminist print activity, and to demonstrate that, far from there existing an archetypal feminist press, the market in feminist books is now sufficiently large and diverse to support a multiplicity of approaches. The hostile rivalry between ‘independent’ presses and mainstream houses which dominated discussion of feminist publishing (such as it then was) in movement periodicals of the 1970s and 1980s

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misses the crucial point¹⁰: diversity and broad-based market penetration, rather than any abstract, unattainable notion of political ‘purity’, signal feminism’s best hopes for survival in the publishing sphere.

The timeframe adopted in this analysis is – as indicated in the title – the twentieth century. Given that feminist publishing activity is most frequently associated with the post-1970 period of Virago’s prominence and the establishment of its later competitors, this cross-century temporal frame may appear, at first glance, a curious choice. The importance of a cross-century perspective inheres in its disproof of the myth that 1970s feminist print activity sprang – virtually *ex nihilo* – from women’s liberation activism, an Athena-like creation myth that feminist publishers were, at times, not adverse to propounding themselves (see Arnold, 1976: 26; Tuttle, 1986: 263). While such a temporal cross-section allows the inclusion of the earlier Cuala Press and the pro-suffrage Woman’s Press – thus providing illuminating counterpoints to post-1970 undertakings – it nevertheless in turn raises the problematic issue of chronology. Adopting the linear chronology of standard historiography is especially unhelpful to a pan-twentieth-century study of this kind, in that it tends to bifurcate women’s publishing history into first- and second-waves, thus emphasising discontinuities and fracture over inherited practices and historical retrieval. Furthermore, a standard linear approach is insufficiently supple to grapple with the complex dynamic whereby knowledge of past feminist publishing practice appears to be dependent upon the vitality of women’s presses in the present day. History is, in this area at least, as much *made* through committed editors’ and writers’ conscious retrieval of women’s publishing history as it is passively inherited. Conversely, the demonstrable fact of a feminist publishing heritage should not necessarily be assumed as subjective knowledge on the part of feminist

¹⁰ See, for example, June Arnold’s “Feminist Presses & Feminist Politics” (1976), Harriet Desmoines and Catherine Nicholson’s “Dear Beth” (1976), cf. Elizabeth Linder’s “An Editor’s View” (1986).

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publishers of recent decades: while Lilian Mohin of Onlywomen Press recalls printing a poster of Elizabeth Corbet Yeats and Cuala Press employees at their handpresses (1998), their knowledge of Cuala's achievements was cursory¹¹, and cultural awareness amongst 1970s feminists of the suffrage press movement was almost entirely non-existent (see Arnold, 1976: 26). The body of knowledge around feminist publishing thus reveals itself to be not historically accumulative so much as historically specific.

In order to convey the complexity of historical nuance to a survey of feminist publishing, this analysis assumes the loose chronological scaffolding of the twentieth century but, against this standard backdrop, it imports a non-linear structure to present specific studies of individual imprints. The technique is one of crosscutting and juxtaposition – beginning with Virago Press (a house often assumed to be the archetypical feminist press) – and then moving across the twentieth century framework to capture reverberations and to replay specific issues initiated in the Virago survey. This approach has the twin benefits of highlighting recurrent debates across chronologically disparate periods, and of disrupting any latently Whiggish assumptions regarding later twentieth-century feminist publishing's 'improvements' upon the techniques of earlier houses. For, as I elaborate in the Chapter 4 discussion of the Edwardian suffrage imprint, the Woman's Press, earlier twentieth-century operations can be read as more politically efficacious and administratively efficient than the post-1970 houses that might be considered their descendants. Most significantly, the breaking of chronological order cannot but draw attention to the manner in which the history of feminist print activity is consciously constructed by the present age – and frequently to serve the ends of the contemporary period. This analysis cannot, of course, hope to exempt itself from what it reads as a universal process. But by entrenching a conviction of historical

¹¹ In interview, Ursula Owen, former publishing director of Virago, also recalls that Virago's founders had a rudimentary knowledge of Cuala, although they saw their own enterprise as quite distinct in its aims and methods (Owen, 1998).

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constructedness in the ordering of its chapters, the thesis aims to foreground the arbitrary and far from disinterested processes which drive presentations of publishing history.

The recurrent dilemma of how to impose a convenient academic unity on what is a manifestly diverse field has necessitated the employment of other analytical frameworks, although they have been invoked with a flexibility that leaves them this side of the outright arbitrary. The geographical frame in which I choose to study feminist presses is that of Britain, although, given the highly centralised nature of British cultural industries and of publishing in particular, London is more often than not the locale of the presses analysed. The notion of what exactly is encompassed by the term “Britain” is, especially in a twentieth-century context, immediately problematic; the term’s definitional boundaries have shifted and continue to shift according to constitutional changes, political preference and cultural flux. Ambiguous and problematic though the term is, I utilise the geographical frame of Britain to denominate those islands to the west of Continental Europe sharing certain cultural traditions and historical experiences – even if the nature or significance of those experiences has at no point remained uncontested. The terminological ambiguity inherent in the label “Britain” is, however, useful to a study that resists any watertight compartmentalisation of women’s cultural history according to political demarcations frequently not of their own making. The framework “Great Britain” in particular allows for the inclusion in this survey of the Dublin-based Cuala Press, important for its profound influence on early-twentieth-century Dublin and London literary milieux and a symbolic touchstone for later feminist presses on both sides of the Irish Sea. It would, furthermore, be churlish and overly pedantic to exclude any consideration of Cuala’s fate after the proclamation in 1921 of the Irish Free State merely because of a constitutional shift at that time in the nuances of the term “British”. Hence “Britain”, as opposed to the more legally accurate post-1921 “United Kingdom”, constitutes the geographical purview of this analysis. If there

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appears to be some irony in including a press famous for espousing the cause of Irish cultural uniqueness within such a definition, this thesis would urge examination of precisely this process whereby individual subjectivities and cultural trends elude containment by neat geopolitical boundaries.

Parallel developments in modern feminist publishing in the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the Republic of Ireland and Continental Europe are invoked as illuminating counterpoints to the British women's publishing experience. Writing concerning the politics and mechanics of feminist publishing is by no means so plentiful that the early-1970s manifestos of radical feminist US presses, for example, can justifiably be excluded from such a study solely on the grounds of impermeable geographical boundaries. References to Commonwealth countries seem especially germane given that Britain's two largest feminist imprints were started by Antipodeans (Virago having been co-founded by Australian Carmen Callil, and The Women's Press by New Zealander Stephanie Dowrick). In addition, another expatriate, South African Ros de Lanerolle, during her period at the helm of The Women's Press (1981-1991) presided over an important reorientation of the imprint's identity towards writing from the developing world. The internationalism of feminist publishing notwithstanding, this discussion remains attuned to cultural debates which occurred *within* Australia, New Zealand, Ireland and Canada contemporaneous with the rise of the feminist presses. These debates, especially where they reflect the vexing issue of post-colonial identities, place Commonwealth women writers and publishers at the intersection of nationalist *and* feminist agendas, and to omit consideration of either context would be to misunderstand the springs of their writerly and publishing activity. The same trend is perhaps less overt within feminist publishing in Britain, though in its discussion of Dublin's Cuala Press this analysis attempts faithfully to register the complex nuances of regional voices.

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The current paucity of book-length research on the subject of twentieth-century feminist publishing prompts this discussion to militate simultaneously in three directions. Bibliographically, it must locate sometimes obscure printed and archival material about feminist publishing and, where this material does not already exist, create the same through interviews with feminist publishers. Secondly, I propose a theoretical framework against which feminist publishing might be conceptualised, one coterminous both with publishing history and with women's studies though resisting the gravitational pull of either field by refusing containment solely within one or the other. Thirdly, I offer critical interpretations of how this primary (and occasional secondary) source material might be read against the proposed theoretical framework, allowing for a politically-engaged evaluation of feminist publishing's achievements and difficulties to date. Scrupulous academic objectivity in the classical sense is a principle which this work neither ascribes to nor attempts. Indeed, any such formulation would contradict at the outset the central perception with which feminist publishing originates: that production of the printed word and its interpretation constitute forms of *political* power. Hence, the result has been an attempt to replace the specious objectivity of pre-feminist criticism with a multi-faceted analytical approach which considers the construct 'feminist publishing' from a multiplicity of viewpoints – historically, politically, nationally, and commercially. The hallmark of academic writing which rises to the three-fold methodological challenge outlined here is a high degree of self-consciousness. Yet, given that in the pages which follow it is the lack of precisely this quality for which I take publishing history, women's studies and cultural studies to task, self-consciousness seems a necessary prerequisite of intellectual honesty.

‘BOOKS WITH BITE’: VIRAGO PRESS AND THE POLITICS OF FEMINIST CONVERSION

By no stretch of usage can *Virago* be made not to signify a shrew, a scold, an ill-tempered woman, unless we go back to the etymology – a man-like maiden (cognate with *virile*) – and the antique meaning – amazon, female warrior – that is close to it. It is an unlovely and aggressive name, even for a militant feminist organisation, and it presides awkwardly over the reissue of a great *roman fleuve* which is too important to be associated with chauvinist sows. (qtd in Scanlon and Swindells, 1994: 42)

– Anthony Burgess in a review of Dorothy Richardson’s
Pilgrimage, reissued by Virago in 1989

Twenty years since Marilyn French’s The Women’s Room, one of the most influential novels of that time, women’s lives have changed. There is a new spirit in women’s writing which Virago salutes with its new “V” imprint. The launch titles are as diverse as women themselves, but the young authors share a liberating sense of irreverence and risk-taking. The “V” aim is to avoid political correctness at all costs: these are books by women which speak to men as much as women. (3)

– “Wayward Girls & Wicked Women”, 1997 Virago relaunch
promotion

There is some considerable distance between being lambasted by a characteristically curmudgeonly Anthony Burgess for militant political chauvinism, and squeamish recoil from ideological commitment under the guise of rejecting “political correctness”. That both of these quotations refer to the public face of Britain’s Virago Press within the space of a decade highlights the extent to which the women’s publishing house has reinvented itself for a new generation of readers. Such a marked volte-face must derive either from a suspiciously 1990s-style obsession with self-reinvention and novelty for its own sake or, more fundamentally, from a crisis of house identity suffered by Virago and its directors. Such a seizure of self-doubt can be pinpointed with unusual

accuracy: the lynchpin between the two faces of Virago outlined above is the sale of the press in November 1995 to Little, Brown UK, a subsidiary of the US-based multinational Time Warner. The sale, and the flurry of negative publicity which surrounded it, represent a critical phase not only for Virago, but for feminist publishing as a whole, as falling profits and uninspiring frontlists forced a reconsideration of feminist publishing's agenda – a thorough-going industry soul-searching of the kind which Virago had not undertaken publicly in the course of its 23-year history. For this reason, the 1995 sale of Virago serves as a critical vantage point from which to survey the press's history and against which the company's post-1996 relaunch can be measured. Beneath the breathless rush of the new Virago's promotional copy, it is possible to discern a frantic search for the winning formula by which Virago formerly united its profits with its politics – and the belief that this elusive link is capable of being reconstituted in the consumer-dominated, politically skittish 1990s.

The sale of Virago Press to publisher Philippa Harrison's Little, Brown UK group for a rumoured £1.3 million on 2 November 1995 bears closer analysis because of the wider debates around feminist publishing which the incident sparked in the international media ("Little, Brown", 1995: 8). Essentially three strands are discernible in the journalistic coverage of the sale: the personality-dominated "feuding feminists" angle (Porter, 1995); the accusation of mismanagement and poor business practice (Pitman, 1995; Alberge, 1995); and – most common amongst left-identified newspapers – the lament for a passing golden age of feminist and publishing history represented by Virago (Dalley, 1995; Baxter, 1995). The first of these approaches, that focusing on the personal animosity between Virago's founder, Carmen Callil, the firm's original director and former chairman [sic], and Ursula Owen, initially Virago's editorial director and later its joint managing director, utilises the convenient journalistic formula of reducing complex issues to personal hostilities. Epitomising this hostile coverage is Henry

Porter's exposé of "feminist publishers – their angry struggle" (1) in his feature article for the Daily Telegraph, entitled "The Feminist Fallout that Split Virago" (1995). Strategically juxtaposing photographs of Callil and Owen, Porter paints a scenario of maenadic fury, the obvious subtext of which urges that sisterhood is at best merely spectral – suitable for a rallying cry but a risible failure when put to the test. In pursuing the feminist catfight line, the article ploughs an increasingly over-worked media furrow. The early-1990s war-by-fax waged between the tireless self-promoters Camille Paglia and Julie Burchill was belaboured in the mainstream press in precisely the same manner, as were the ideological differences between Australian author Helen Garner and younger feminists in the newspaper flurry over Garner's book about sexual harassment within universities, The First Stone (1995). According to this practice, the mergers and buy-outs of largely male-run multinational publishing companies are read as auguries of market trends; those of feminist publishing companies betoken nothing more significant than the hysteria of the wandering womb. As an unidentified "ex-Virago" confided to Jan Dalley in her Independent on Sunday article: "When men have boardroom battles, it's heroic and Titanic and serious. When women do the same, it's a catfight" (1995: 21).

Of the many articles published about Virago in late-1995, the ones which are of most significance for the purposes of this discussion are those that appeared in the UK's centre-left broadsheets – the Observer and the Independent on Sunday in particular – for they use the issue of Virago's loss of independence to survey the state of feminist publishing's health, and to reignite then latent debates about the political viability of such an enterprise. During the highpoint of Virago's commercial success in the late-1970s and early-1980s, the substantial backlist sales generated by its fiction reprint series, the Virago Modern Classics, and its daunting reader loyalty tended to obviate the need for any such debate. Virago was phenomenally successful, and commercial success was seen to constitute the litmus test of its publishing philosophy. The subsequent nadir of

the company's fortunes in late-1995 is attributable to a variety of causes: a profit of barely £100 000 on sales of over £3 000 000 (a margin of under 5%); the resignation of senior directors Carmen Callil, Harriet Spicer and Lennie Goodings within a period of eight months ("Virago loses" 1995: 6; Buckingham, 1995: 4); low staff morale; staleness induced by slow junior- and middle-level employee turnover; and ferocious competition from the feminist lists of mainstream houses for high-profile female authors and titles.

Yet, more pervasively, Virago's loss of direction is attributable to a crisis of confidence in the political and cultural role of a feminist publishing house, a deep-seated suspicion of its own irrelevance in an age which has broadly appropriated feminist positions as mainstream thinking, but which simultaneously eschews explicit gender politics as embarrassingly *passé*. Such defeat points, paradoxically, to the old-style Virago's victory: so successful was its publishing philosophy that its radical avant-gardism of the early-1970s now appears to the jaded late-1990s as banally self-evident. Hence Virago's 1995 directors might be forgiven for wondering whether they should preside over the company's demise or respond with a Mark Twain-like salvo to the effect that reports of its death had been greatly exaggerated.

Should Virago's sale to a multimedia giant such as Time Warner be taken as evidence that feminism's battle for representation from the margins of political and cultural power can be taken as won, and that its place in the cultural mainstream has been established? Alternatively, is the subsumption of Virago within the capacious corporate structure of Time Warner the final victory of market-forces and economic rationalism over political commitment – the selling out of a feminist dream? It is in keeping with the complex ambiguities of feminist publishing that the fact of Virago's sale should be susceptible to both readings, but both represent an over-simplification of the issue. For Virago's 1995 crisis is attributable chiefly to a loss of confidence in what had, until that

point, proved a delicate balancing act between the seemingly irreconcilable forces of politics and profit. By refusing to acknowledge that commercial success need necessarily vitiate political integrity, Virago attained a profile amongst the general reading public higher than that of any feminist press world-wide. The savvy and legerdemain by which such a delicate balance was achieved bears closer scrutiny, not only for the light which it casts on the fate of Virago Press in particular, but because it represents an optimal – though precarious – point on the continuum strung between feminist oppositionality and market centrality.

The characteristic which distinguishes Virago from many other feminist presses which sprang up under the invigorating influence of women's activism in the early-1970s is the duality of its self-conception: it perceived itself simultaneously both as a commercial publishing house *and* as an intrinsic part of the British women's liberation movement. With the mutation of international leftist politics towards the centre over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, it is difficult now to recapture the anomalousness of such a position in the socio-political climate of the early-1970s. With feminism regarding the left as its natural context, such a flagrant embrace of capitalist principles on the part of Virago engendered some suspicion, and attracted substantial criticism from the socialist wings of the women's movement (Owen, U., 1998). Yet, the insistence that politics and profitability be brought into a working relationship is, in retrospect, itself a radical proposition.¹ Virago's *raison d'être* was to publish books informed by the feminist

¹ The exact meaning of the term 'radical' within feminist political discourse is a troubled one, as the word has altered in meaning across the period covered by this thesis, and it has, in addition, frequently sustained multiple meanings simultaneously (see Chapter 5 for an extended discussion of this issue). In the twentieth century, the term has embodied three distinct meanings: firstly, it describes a non-conformist position to the left of progressive politics; secondly, it has been used to denominate the separatist wing of the women's liberation movement which prioritised gender over other social categories; thirdly, and simultaneous with these other meanings, the term has continued to be used to denominate the subversively non-conformist in a general sense (refer Williams, 1983: 251-52). Clearly, when using the term in relation to the capitalistic ethos of Virago Press, I intend this third sense of the term, as Virago was never an adherent of collectivist or avowedly separatist politics. In most cases, this terminological distinction will be apparent from the context in which I use the term. Though I acknowledge a slight potential for confusion, it

politics of the time and to make them profitable – in foundation member Harriet Spicer's terms "to make profitable what you wanted to do" (Spicer, 1996).

The attempted unification of capitalist and feminist agendas placed Virago in a borderland position, between the sisterhood (with its preference for experimental, collectively-run co-operatives such as the feminist periodical Spare Rib) and the traditional power centres of mainstream London publishing (which regarded politically-identified publishing – let alone *feminist* publishing – as a commercial non-starter and as a somewhat distasteful predilection). Nevertheless, it is this thesis's contention that Virago's protean house identity proved the key to its success. Because the press maintained a double outsider status in relation to both groups, it was able to weather the enormous changes in industry organisation and feminist thought which occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. Significantly, it was in the early-1990s – as feminism was beginning to embrace the cultural possibilities of ambivalence and irony – that Virago appeared to harden in its political stance and to suffer recurrent financial losses. In the apt colloquialism of former Virago employee Sarah Baxter, "Virago lost the plot" (1995: 9). The vagaries of fashion in feminist thought, not to mention the unpredictability of complex consumer economies, reward feminist presses which state their politics up front, but which are canny enough to factor in a buffer zone of ambivalence and allowances for revision. Provisional certainties, not lapidary pronouncements, are what the market rewards.

The borderlands between divergent political systems and ideologies can, however, prove dangerous and uncomfortable ground: original Virago member Ursula Owen speaks wryly of "get[ting] flak from the left and right, but I'm fairly resigned to

seems essential to destabilise the word's received meaning in terms of the standard tripartite classification of feminism into liberal, socialist/Marxist and radical wings. For radicalism in the general sense is by no means confined to self-proclaimedly 'radical' feminist enterprises.

that” (Macaskill, 1990: 434). Alexandra Pringle, who joined as Virago’s fourth member in 1978, casts the press’s dual outsider status in a more playful light: “Does it make you feel that you’re under siege? Well, yes. But it’s great fun, it makes you feel you’re up there on the barricades” (1996). This concept of strategic self-positioning in order to partake in both feminist activism and commercial publishing – but combined with a refusal to be defined or contained by either – is key to my analysis of Virago’s achievement and of its current remarketing. Within this general framework of Virago as a political and publishing fringe-dweller – though a powerful one by reason of its fringe-dwelling status – I present an analysis of the company from its origins in 1972, including its post-sale relaunch in mid-1996 and taking into account the contemporary season’s developments. The first section of the analysis is a general overview of the company’s history and its changing institutional niches, a rebuttal of the misconception present in much writing about Virago’s 1995 sale that Virago had, until that point, been a fully independent company (Henry, 1995; “Little, Brown”, 1995). Secondly, I explore the facet of Virago’s identity that is broadly feminist, focusing on Virago’s complex relationship with the women’s movement and with the academic wing of feminist politics – university-based women’s studies programmes. The discussion then proceeds to site Virago within the context of the publishing industry, focusing on three key issues: the significance of independence for feminist presses; Virago’s marketing of feminism for a mainstream readership; and Virago’s role in the creation and appropriation of a market for feminist books. In conclusion, Virago’s current state of play is analysed, as is its most recent attempt to remarket itself as a trade publisher with special appeal to a younger, more politically jaundiced, readership. My structure in this chapter, analysing Virago firstly against the background of feminist politics and, in the second instance, against publishing industry dynamics, is the result of convenience rather than of any absolute theoretical distinction between the two spheres. Publishing and politics are, in the case of Virago, indisputably interlinked; the disentangling of Virago’s relationship

with first one and then the other area serves merely as an analytical device to cast light on the unique position which Virago occupied at the cusp of the profit-driven publishing industry and the politically-driven women's movement.

A KITCHEN TABLE IN CHELSEA:

SELF-MYTHOLOGISATION AND THE ORIGINS OF VIRAGO

The origins and publishing history of Virago Press have been so often recapitulated in the firm's promotional material that the division between past and present has all but dissolved – history is recycled as publicity in a manner which occasionally owes more to directorial agendas than to historical veracity. The self-mythologising strain in Virago is comparable in publishing history only with Allen Lane's famous championing of the early Penguin paperbacks: because both ventures were innovatory for their time, the fact of their existence – aside from any individual title they produced – has become in itself a badge of their founders' achievement. The origins of Virago lie in the oft-repeated detail that the press began at founder Carmen Callil's kitchen table in her home in Chelsea, and that it was fuelled by red wine and late nights spent arguing over the politics of the emerging women's liberation movement, all undertaken against a backdrop of economic buoyancy and political possibility (Lowry, 1977: 9; Macaskill, 1990: 432). The company's initial self-description – “the first mass-market publishers for 52% of the population – women. An exciting new imprint for both sexes in a changing world” (“A Short”, 1996: 1) – encapsulates both the optimism and the determinedly non-sectarian vision of the press for which its founders strove. The house's success over the following two decades and its immense brand-name recognition fostered celebrations not so much of the firm's individual achievements, but of the press's very existence: in 1993 A Virago Keepsake to Celebrate Twenty Years of Publishing neatly conflated in its title the individual press with the concept of feminist publishing. The self-celebratory tone of the

book, distributed free to bookshops by Virago, earned the press censure from some sections of the women's movement who critiqued the discrepancy between Virago's profits in the 1980s and feminism's political retreat:

In the *Virago Keepsake* a further shift has taken place; a move from the individual author to the Virago author, a celebration not of the women's movement, or of women's writing, but the survival of the press itself – a recognition of what it stands for, not so much in terms of political achievement, but brand loyalty and quality writing. (Scanlon and Swindells, 1994: 42)

The choice of year in which to celebrate Virago's twentieth anniversary was itself contentious. The exact date of the press's foundation – either 1972, when Callil hatched the idea of the press, or 1973, when the company was registered and when Ursula Owen became involved – varies in Virago's publicity according to the political makeup of the board at the time of writing. For a publishing house which conceptualises its very emergence as a political achievement there is much feminist cachet to be had in presenting oneself as its sole founder.

The myth of Virago's genesis (an apt phrase, given the firm's wryly anti-Edenic bitten apple logo) often glosses over the exact financial conditions under which Virago's initial titles were produced. Between 1973 and 1976 Virago was an "independently owned editorial imprint" of Quartet Books, publishing titles under its own name but lacking complete editorial autonomy ("A Short", 1996: 1; Owen, U., 1998).

Unsurprisingly, given that this same corporate niche was later to prove so uncongenial to feminist publishers The Women's Press², Virago's former directors speak meaningfully of learning during those years about the importance of the power to publish. They evince a hard-won awareness that "any requirement to refer to others on editorial decisions,

² The conflict in 1991 between The Women's Press's managing director, Ros de Lanerolle, and the owner of Quartet Books, Naim Attallah, are explored in detail in Chapter 3. At the time of Virago's departure from the Quartet fold in 1976, however, John Booth and William Miller were in charge of the firm; Attallah did not become owner of Quartet until the following year. Yet speaking of Virago's time under Quartet's previous ownership, Ursula Owen recalls that "a year of that was enough and we realised we had to go off and do our own thing" (1998).

however benevolent those others might be, is a constraint" (Owen, U., 1988: 89). Budgeting and editorial conflicts with Quartet's board members led to a 1976 buyout, funded by a £35 000 bank loan and personal pledges of the directors. The period of independence which followed was one of steady expansion for the firm, with sales of the non-fiction Virago Reprint Library of early-twentieth-century socialist and Fabian books such as Margaret Llewelyn Davies' Life As We Have Known It (1977) and Maud Pember Reeves' Round About a Pound a Week (1979) being compounded by the marketing triumph of the Virago Modern Classics. This later series, a fiction reprint list of 'lost' women writers whose out-of-print works were purchased copyright free and attractively repackaged for a new generation of feminist readers, achieved such success that its titles came to define the public image of the firm. Coinciding profitably with the rise of women's writing courses in academia, which were in turn fired by landmark texts such as Elaine Showalter's A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing (1978), the Virago Modern Classics series blossomed, underpinning the firm's expansion into commissioned fiction from living writers. The flagship series incontestably achieved its original aim of showing "the imaginative range of women's writing and . . . celebrat[ing] the scale of female achievement in fiction" (Owen, U., 1988: 93). The removal of the pejorative sting from the phrase 'woman writer' has proven to be the series' most influential legacy. Nevertheless, as Virago Modern Classics editor Ruth Petrie observed in 1993, at the time of its launch in 1978 (with the republication of Antonia White's Frost in May [1933]) it was non-fiction rather than fiction which the women's movement felt harboured the greater revolutionary potential:

In those days [the mid-1970s] we all thought our politics were based in non-fiction writing, in issue-related titles. Fiction was what you gave yourself as a source of pleasure and distraction. It wasn't going to offer a commentary on life in quite the same way. (Norden, 1993: 15)

Virago experimented with a second period of corporate partnership with its sale in February 1982 to the Chatto, Bodley Head and Cape Group (CBC), which was to

provide Virago with the high-outlay distribution and production services it required, but which would guarantee the press's editorial autonomy, thus differentiating the carefully negotiated arrangement from the invasive paternalism of the earlier Quartet alliance.

Although Callil later justified the manoeuvre to a Women in Publishing forum as having "written into it safeguards orchestrated by ourselves" (Callil, 1986: 851), Virago in 1986 began to demur from an arrangement in which it was required to shoulder losses from other houses in the umbrella group, and under which they lacked access to "information about what bits of our business were generating profit"(Jones, 1992: 21-22). With the (then) US-owned giant Random House poised to take over the CVBC Group, Virago instigated a successful management buyout in November 1987, netting substantial profits for the firm's directors but necessitating the closure of the flagship Virago Bookshop in London's Covent Garden as a condition of their financiers' backing.³ Again, Virago's perceived prioritising of company profits over sisterly allegiance was criticised in the British feminist press, with Everywoman magazine tartly reporting that "staff made redundant at the bookshop" would, according to Virago, " 'unfortunately not' " be employed elsewhere in the company ("Upheavals", 1987: 11).

During the early- to mid-1990s the series of recessions within the publishing sector at large accentuated a loss of direction and quavering confidence within the firm. Repeatedly throughout the period Virago announced cutbacks in the frontlist, changes in editorial focus and retrenchment of staff – all undertaken without securing the desired result of long-term growth. Hence Virago's 20th birthday celebrations and managing director Harriet Spicer's 1993 international promotional tour carry beneath their ebullience overtones of discernible unease; the Keepsake's strident best wishes for "more than another twenty years of successful publishing" (viii) betrays the suspicion that,

³ In March 1998 Random House was itself bought by the German multimedia conglomerate Bertelsmann for an undisclosed sum. It has since been merged with Bantam Doubleday Dell (also a Bertelsmann subsidiary) and restructured as Random House Inc. (Traynor and Foden, 1998).

though ideal, this outcome was not necessarily probable. Virago was attempting, by invoking the magic of a brand name which had in the past proven so bankable an asset, to ensure future sales; a standard promotional tactic, it was nevertheless a vulnerable one for a firm entering its third decade.

The period from 1993 to the company's sale in late-1995 was dominated by boardroom disputes, further staff and list cutbacks, and directorial resignations: a briefly-returned Carmen Callil resigned as chairman in February 1995; managing director Harriet Spicer followed in July 1995; and publishing director Lennie Goodings compounded the trend by announcing her intention to quit in September 1995. This last departure was recorded in the Bookseller on 13 October, with a fellow Virago director attributing Goodings' departure to "editorial differences, including the decision to publish books written by men" ("Virago loses", 1995: 6). With the sale of the company imminent, Goodings' recorded preference for independence may also have prompted her resignation, for two years earlier she had remarked that "being independent has meant survival for us. We control our own costs and savings, we decide ourselves where we will compromise and where we won't. We choose the books we want to publish" (1993: 27). That new owner Philippa Harrison persuaded Goodings in November 1995 "to change her mind about leaving the company" and to take up the position of publisher for the now fully-owned Little, Brown subsidiary appears fundamentally to contradict Goodings's earlier avowals of press independence ("Little, Brown", 1995: 8). Moreover, the commitment to women-only publishing attributed to Goodings was contradicted by the first list she produced as publisher to the Virago imprint, containing as it did Sons and Mothers (1996), an anthology co-edited by Matthew and Victoria Glendinning. Viewed in one light, these changes reflect the dynamic, protean adaptability which has characterised Virago's history; viewed in another, they underline former director Alexandra Pringle's observation that "Virago as we have known it is now completely

over" (1996).

CONTINGENT SISTERHOOD:

VIRAGO AND THE POLITICS OF FEMINISM

An analysis of Virago's complex relationship with feminism in Britain results in a curious paradox: feminists tended to regard Virago as having more to do with publishing than with activist feminist politics while, simultaneously, publishers suspiciously regarded Virago as a feminist cabal, motivated first and foremost by political agenda. That Virago could be branded both a bourgeois press producing glossy, middle-brow fiction for the Hampstead and Islington middle-class left, and at the same time a house "run on communitarian lines" (Tindall, 1979: 144) by "militant feminist[s]" (Scanlon and Swindells, 1994: 42) hints at the complexity of left-wing and feminist politics in modern Britain. Yet it also indicates a complexity specific to Virago itself: a strategically protean identity which won the press attention and publicity for non-conformity in the journals of both the activist left and the right. Frequently it also earned Virago critical flak, from feminists no less than from conventional publishing circles, but this borderline position enabled Virago – metaphorically speaking – to snipe at both sides of the political battlefield, creating a controversial aura about itself which proved a publicity gift. I propose here to focus attention on Virago's fraught and often controversial relations with one facet of the political spectrum – women's movement politics – by analysing first its relations with the activist wing of the movement and, secondly, its interaction with academic feminism.

WOMEN'S BUSINESS: THE SELLING OF CAPITALIST FEMINISM

The tensions between political commitment and company profits which in late-1995 triggered Virago's sale were not, in the press's earliest years, perceived as

insurmountable. Ringing throughout the press's foundation publicity and early position statements is, by contrast, a boundless optimism that a company providing books for which it knew there existed an eager, previously unexploited market, could not *but* achieve commercial growth. The contemporary women's movement and Virago Press could, these press releases imply, sponsor ever-increasing mutual expansion – a relationship of seamless symbiosis ("Virago Press", 1977).

Accordingly, Virago was, from its inception, at pains to differentiate itself from the anti-capitalist underground publishing scene, Callil stating in a 1977 Guardian interview "I want to somehow get it across that we are not an alternative publisher and that quite ordinary women are feminists too" (Lowry, 1977: 9). The extent to which Virago's members harnessed the corporate principle of profit to the political agenda of feminism is clear in Callil's assertion of capitalist survival as in itself a political statement: Virago "must survive. It is our duty not to go bust" (Toynbee, 1981: 8). Implicit here is a rejection of the victim syndrome amongst politically committed arts organisations which US writer Robin Morgan has dubbed "the crown of feminist thorns": the belief that noble failure in the interests of an oppositional women's cause is ethically superior to survival and success (1977: 13). Virago, while voicing a political critique, was in fact organised hierarchically, and run on anomalously Thatcherite principles of long hours, low pay and heavy workloads. Long-time Virago employee and director Harriet Spicer diplomatically recalls that founder Callil's administrative style "is not to work at all collectively" (1996). Callil, in one of many "*l'état, c'est moi*"-style comments deployed in the media in a public relations onslaught spanning three decades, enthusiastically reinforces Spicer's assessment of a highly individual-orientated character: "Collective! . . . That was new to me, darling" (Porter, 1995: 25). Furthermore, Virago's corporate status dates from its inception, rather than being the formalisation of a previously unincorporated collective group. In 1972 Callil registered

two companies: Carmen Callil Ltd., a book publicity outfit, and Virago Press, the publishing company which was initially financed by the profits of the publicity operation. As has been noted, the individual nature of this act has, as Virago rose to public prominence, been repeatedly underlined by Callil, as though to construct from the miasma of 1970s collectivity and sisterhood a prime mover in the feminist publishing firmament.

The second manner in which Virago firmly demarcated itself from the newsletter-and-mimeograph segment of ephemeral women's movement publications was in its self-declared intention to appeal to a mainstream readership – one that included men as well as women:

The idea for a feminist house grew out of the feminist movement which was reborn in this country at the end of the '60s. Virago was set up to publish books which were part of that movement, but its marketing aim was quite specific: we wanted to reach a general audience of women and men who had not heard of, or who disliked, or even detested the idea of feminism. It was not enough for us to publish for ourselves. (Callil, 1986: 851)

This explicit appeal to a readership of males as well as females, one reiterated continually in Virago's early promotions material, encapsulates its desire to appeal across a spectrum that included both active feminists and those (currently) outside the movement. Its founders felt that the potential expansion of feminism as a mainstream social philosophy was needlessly inhibited by the coterie content and hostile tone of some separatist women's movement publications, in which a position of ideological purity was adjudged more important than public accessibility. Virago, by contrast, evinced an astute tactical and commercial sophistication, marketing to both the mainstream and the margins by hinting at its variance from both. Potential readers from either conventional or politicised feminist backgrounds are offered a mixture of something old and something new; the product is familiar enough to both groups that their expectations will not be completely confounded, but either its content (in the case

of non-feminists) or its format (in the case of self-identified feminists) should prove alluringly novel.

In order to appreciate the innovation of Virago's cross-spectrum marketing and its controversial dictum that it is "not enough for us to publish for ourselves", it is necessary to contextualise Virago within a women's movement with a (then) increasingly powerful separatist impulse. Second-wave feminists were acutely conscious of the fact that women's self-expression was highly constrained both in its formulation (by narrowly-defined patterns of femininity acquired through conventional socialisation) and in its expression (by means of the denigration of women's speech, by their virtual exclusion from academic curricula, and by the small number of women's texts published as literary fiction).⁴ Feminist interrogation of the silence surrounding women's experiences resulted in the prioritising of forums in which women could articulate their opinions unreservedly and without self-consciousness – an idea manifested in what became known as the consciousness-raising or 'rap' group.

In 1970s discussions of feminist publishing, the concept of the women-only forum is expanded into that of a "women's independent communications network" (Arnold, 1976: 26) in which all stages in the writing, publishing, distribution, reviewing and sales chain are controlled entirely by women. This separatist impulse was, as Michelene Wandor's interviews with prominent feminists in Once a Feminist: Stories of a Generation (1990) attest, widely prevalent within the British women's movement, but its most sustained articulation is contained in US manifestos on feminist publishing from the early- to mid-1970s. June Arnold, co-founder of the US imprint Daughters, Inc., in a classic article entitled "Feminist Presses & Feminist Politics" (1976), enumerates the

⁴ Refer Dale Spender, Man Made Language (1980) and The Writing or the Sex? Or why you don't have to read women's writing to know it's no good (1989).

principles which underpin the separatist feminist media analysis: the political necessity of women controlling all aspects of the publication process; the belief that the mainstream media wilfully misrepresent or, worse, deliberately ignore feminist issues, and that politically committed feminists must therefore shun its products; and the conviction that not only are feminist presses subverting mainstream publishing houses, but that they “are in fact the real presses, the press of the future” (20). Arnold alleges an absolute hostility on the part of mainstream Madison Avenue publishing to the feminist project, dubbing the conventional press “the finishing press because it is our movement they intend to finish” (19). The mainstream goal of annihilating feminist competition is, Arnold asserts, to be achieved through the combined tactics of publicly belittling feminist presses and selectively co-opting their market (19). While Arnold’s analytical terminology relies heavily on a Marxist perspective of a “revolutionary group . . . taking over a government” (18), a model of questionable relevance to feminist politics, her analysis of the “finishing press[’s]” appropriation of feminist books – “the least threatening, the most saleable, the most easily controlled or a few who cannot be ignored” (19) – is chillingly prescient. In the contemporary publishing sphere, high-profile third-wave feminists such as Naomi Wolf, Susan Faludi, Natasha Walter and Katie Roiphe are all published under the imprints of multinational conglomerates, an ambiguous development explored in detail in this thesis’s concluding discussion of the feminist bestseller.

Echoing the central tenets of Arnold’s essay are the notes for a talk prepared by US feminist media veteran Charlotte Bunch and published, in a concrete manifestation of her convictions, in the lesbian periodical Heresies (1977).⁵ In Bunch’s analysis, only

⁵ Charlotte Bunch was involved in the women’s liberation movement in Washington DC in the early-1970s, as well as being a member of the Furies editorial collective (1971-72) and co-editor of Quest: A Feminist Quarterly. She was, in addition, affiliated with the owners of Daughters, Inc., June Arnold and Parke Bowman (Bunch, 1977; Echols, 1989).

absolute control can guarantee editorial autonomy and political integrity in a hostile market of ideas:

“OUR PRIORITY must always be to keep our media alive, growing, and expanding: as a base of power made up of political and economic institutions of our own . . . [and] as a means of controlling our words and how they are disseminated, even when we aren't popular” (Bunch, 1977: 25).

For both Bunch and Arnold, feminist politics and corporate practice are antithetical ideological entities. The former must always be predicated upon breaking the cultural stranglehold of the latter.

In outlining the growth of separatist feminist media theory during the 1970s, and Virago's distance from many of its precepts, it is vital to take into account a distinctive third form of contemporary theorising: that emerging from women aligned with socialist-/Marxist-feminism. Unlike the liberal and radical wings of the women's movement, socialist-feminists in Britain did not establish their own publishing houses, instead they more commonly worked with men for existing left-identified imprints such as Lawrence & Wishart, Polity Press, Comedia and Minority Press Group. Nevertheless, socialist-feminists, especially those working around journals such as Feminist Review, articulated a firmly materialist critique which, in its insistence on the means by which literature is produced, disseminated and consumed, influenced the establishment of presses such as Virago in fundamental ways (Barrett, 1980 and 1988; Kaplan, 1986; Mulford, 1983). Socialist-feminist critics such as Michèle Barrett insisted that the standard New Critical practice of isolating a text from its circumstances of creation and publication could never adequately account for its nature, or even for the fact of its existence: “To restrict our analysis solely to the text itself is to turn the *object* of analysis into its own means of explanation; by definition this cannot provide an adequate account” (1980: 100). This extra-textual mandate for criticism problematised and politicised previously sacrosanct domains of the literary project, allowing a press such as Virago to validate its publishing

programme as an intervention into the spheres of book production, distribution and academic canon formation. Socialist-feminism's attention to those cultural industries responsible for producing the book contextualised Virago and made its project possible in ways which the company's founders have not always readily acknowledged: theoretically, it provided Virago with a political analysis and intellectual vocabulary to describe its project; while in practical terms it tied Virago into pre-existing networks of politicised women who supported the press's vision of gender-conscious publishing and lent their professional expertise to the fledgling enterprise.

The support of some socialist-influenced sections of the women's movement did not, however, provide the corporate-minded Virago with insulation from its feminist critics. With its determination to attract a high-street, crossover readership, the press predictably fell foul of some of the shifting tides of 1970s feminist affiliation, and was accused by separatist sections of the women's movement of collaboration with the mainstream. Alexandra Pringle recalls that the Spare Rib collective, a London-based group of 10-20 women producing the feminist periodical of the same name, "disapproved of us" (1996).⁶ Yet, in a manner highly characteristic of early-1970s feminist circles in London, there was considerable overlap between the groups: two Spare Rib members, Rosie Boycott and Marsha Rowe, had briefly been involved in the foundation of Virago before moving to full-time participation with Spare Rib; and a Virago advisory group of around 30 academics, journalists, writers and publishers contained several feminists who identified with the separatist and socialist causes. The mandate of the advisory group was to suggest to Virago new books or reprints for which there might be a market, and in some cases to write introductions to the volumes to increase their academic sales potential. The highly individualistic managerial style of Callil – "I was not collective-

⁶ Spare Rib magazine was founded in 1972 by Rosie Boycott and Marsha Rowe and operated as a collective until its demise in March 1993 (Toynbee, 1982; Fairweather, 1993).

mindful. I was a *leader*" – clashed directly with pressure for consensus decision-making from within the advisory group, resulting in a showdown which former Virago members recall as a clash of personalities as much as of politics (Porter, 1995: 25; Pringle, 1996; Owen, U., 1998). The event has a symbolic quality – highlighting Virago's compromised status from the point of view of influential strands of feminist thinking, yet also the firm's personal involvement with feminists sympathetic to such organisational politics. Ursula Owen, whose political experience and extensive involvement in feminist circles was crucial in developing Virago's list, remarks upon the "huge moral support" (1988: 90) provided by the network. Alexandra Pringle, by contrast, observes that "it in a sense became too intrusive . . . some people felt that they had a bigger role in it and of course once the company was up and running the people who were running it wanted to run it. So it had a limited life" (1996). The disbanding of the group in 1978 ended Virago's only loose organisational tie with the left of the feminist movement, the wing which was to be marginalised so decisively by the free market Conservative politics of the subsequent decade.

Given the market-driven, private sector politics of the Thatcher period, Virago's adherence to modes of corporate organisation and its recognition of the vital importance of profit-generation can be seen as prerequisites for its success and longevity. But accusations of Virago having sold out to the mainstream – of being a "bad apple" in the feminist barrel – are not uncommon in writing on the British feminist publishing scene from the 1980s and 1990s (Scanlon and Swindells, 1994: 41). Amanda Sebestyen, a former member of the Spare Rib collective, in 1990 remarked upon the de-radicalising of women's publishing with bitter-sweet acknowledgement of corporate feminism's dominance of women's politics (such as it was) during the 1980s:

Now there's been such a proliferation of cultural feminism, not in the sense that we used to mean it as separatism, but there's so much women's publishing. I sometimes get asked to write things for them.

We're a gang now, aren't we? You get asked, you're on people's visiting lists, it's nice they still remember you. This is all about the 1980s and about being on the make, which was very much despised and disliked by me and lots of my radical feminist mates, but people settle down. There's nothing wrong in wanting work that's interesting, or enough money, or a relationship: sometimes I do find it very twee, that's all. For one thing I think a lot of feminist writing has become dominated by the market. (Wandor, 1990: 143)

Virago's alliance of feminist politics and capitalist economics, encapsulated in Callil's vow that "it is our duty not to go bust", outlived the collectivist feminist presses, many of which (for example, Feminist Books, Black Woman Talk, and Sheba) had folded by the 1990s through chronic lack of funding. Perhaps the most telling comment on the state of play between collectivist and corporate feminist publishing by the early 1990s is also the most ironic: Sebestyen's critique of the "twee[ness]" of mainstream women's publishing is itself contained in Michelene Wandor's Once a Feminist – a Virago title.

A critique from the left of the women's movement which did, however, register with Virago's editorial board was the accusation that the Virago Modern Classics list disproportionately favoured white writers of past generations over living black authors. The allegation of a specific omission on the part of Virago is tied to contemporaneous debates within feminism as a whole over white feminists' tendency to homogenise the experience of all women to accord with their own. As African-American feminist and women's publishing practitioner Barbara Smith pithily surmises: "Feminism that is not about freeing all women, which means working-class women, women of color, physically challenged women, et cetera, is not feminism but merely female self-aggrandizement" (Smith, B., and Moraga, 1996: 26). Editorial director Ursula Owen, recasting the Virago house identity in line with the 1980s women's movement's changing priorities, acknowledges the silencing of which feminism – ostensibly a liberation movement – has itself been guilty:

In recent years we have published fiction by black British and American women, conscious of how, early on, we concentrated too

heavily on the experience of white women, how black women have felt excluded from the account, and conscious too of the difficulties for a largely white women's press in getting such publishing right. (1988: 94)

The debate around racism within feminism which rose to public notice during the 1980s operated in the publishing sphere in a still more complex manner: valid criticisms of Virago's tendency to cater for white, middle-class, heterosexual women also led directly to the Women's Press's contemporaneous "Live authors. Live issues" publicity campaign.⁷ An implicit criticism of Virago though it is, this differentiation of the Women's Press's target market from that of its rival in fact presupposes the continued existence of Virago as a point of reference – it implies that a gap is being filled, that a previously silenced voice is now being heard. This amounts, ironically, to a coded acknowledgement of Virago's achievement: subdivision of the feminist publishing market cannot but underline the success of the press which first established that market's existence.

"THE BIGGEST BATTLE STILL TO BE FOUGHT"⁸ :

VIRAGO, THE FEMINIST PRESS AND ACADEMIC WOMEN'S STUDIES

Despite controversy over the content of the fiction list, Alexandra Pringle is accurate in observing that "the Classics made Virago respectable", providing the reader association, distinctive packaging and literary kudos for which the press had been striving (1996). The republication of the first of the Virago Modern Classics in 1978 – the highly successful Frost in May – signals not only a move into fiction in addition to feminist social history, but also the first tangible sign of Virago's interaction with the movement in academia for rediscovering women's fiction (see appendix of illustrations). In a Times

⁷ The specific marketing strategy behind this slogan, the broader relationship between Virago and The Women's Press, and the complex issues surrounding race and feminist publishing are examined further in Chapter 3.

⁸ Extracted from a speech by Carmen Callil to Women in Publishing (1986): "The biggest battle still to be fought by all feminist publishers is, I believe, the battle for the school and university curricula". Bookseller 1 Mar.: 852.

Literary Supplement article about the Modern Classics, “Virago Reprints: Redressing the Balance” (1980), Callil outlines three key motivations behind the series: the first is a reaction against the conventional critical belittlement of fiction by women – “to reveal, and indeed celebrate, the range of female achievement in fiction, and to bury, if possible for ever, the notion that women novelists are confined to this ghetto of the imagination” (1001). Secondly, Callil promotes the concept of a female canon, with writers of different generations and centuries ‘writing back’ to the works of earlier women writers, conscious of their position within and contribution to a female literary tradition: “This is not to say that I do not see a female tradition in novel writing: I do – it is another aim of the Virago Modern Classics list to reveal this” (1001). Thirdly, Callil records the influence upon the firm’s editorial selection of one of the epochal texts of feminist literary criticism, Elaine Showalter’s A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing. Showalter’s text has itself since been critiqued, both for its recoil from explicitly theoretical critical approaches, and for its somewhat dogmatic classification of women’s writing into discrete ‘feminine’, ‘feminist’ and ‘female’ periods (Moi, 1985: 55-56, 75-80), yet its influence upon Virago in the late-1970s and 1980s is unquestionable: “her judgements led directly to the reprinting by us of May Sinclair, Sarah Grand and Dorothy Richardson” (Callil, 1980: 1001). Additional beneficiaries of Showalter’s research, via Virago reprints, were the literary reputations of Vera Brittain, Rebecca West, Katherine Mansfield, Winifred Holtby, Elizabeth Bowen, and Rosamond Lehmann. Marking a rare point of confluence between academic research and the direction of the British publishing industry, A Literature of Their Own was, as current Virago publisher Lennie Goodings notes, “the Bible of the now famous nineteenth and twentieth century [sic] fiction reprint series” (1993: 26).

Given the slightly earlier emergence of the women’s movement in the USA, it is unsurprising that US feminist presses, catering to the country’s vast tertiary education

market, also perceived the financial and cultural potential of re-issuing out-of-print women's fiction. The oldest and best-known of the US presses, The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, founded by academic and activist Florence Howe in 1970, was the first to identify and supply this market with its 1972 republication of Rebecca Harding Davis' Life in the Iron Mills [1861]. This text, published with a lengthy Afterword by socialist-feminist critic and author Tillie Olsen, comprised the first title in the Feminist Press Reprint Series, the name itself calling to mind for British readers the more immediately familiar Virago Reprint Library. The Feminist Press's reissue of this title coincides with the year of Virago's foundation, and certainly precedes the initiation of Virago's Modern Classics series in 1978, thus substantiating the warily pre-emptive assertion by Florence Howe that "we were the first to begin to reprint the lost literature by and about women" (Tally, 1987: 287). Questions of transatlantic publishing influence are frequently fraught with contradictory 'me first' claims and unsurprisingly, given the international nature of the women's movement, none of Virago's directors will explicitly acknowledge a direct US influence. Yet all the evidence indicates that Virago was certainly aware of the Feminist Press's prior reprint success: the initiation of the Feminist Press reprint series six years before the release of Virago's Frost in May; some cross-fertilisation between the lists of the two presses – particularly in relation to non-fiction and to Virago's subsequent republication of American writers Agnes Smedley, Zora Neale Hurston and Willa Cather – all Feminist Press Reprint authors; and, most conclusively, the meeting between Howe and Callil in the early-1970s which Howe recalls in a 1995 article, her tone being very much that of setting the historical record straight:

Virago's Carmen Callil, the British founder, visited The Feminist Press in the early 1970s. She was going to start a press that would restore British women writers. When asked how many books she planned to publish in the first year, she said, "Twenty-eight." When asked, "Which twenty-eight?" she replied, "The first twenty-eight I find." (133)

I cite this evidence not to belittle Virago's achievement in successfully marketing its reprint series, but because, in Virago's overwhelming public identification with women's reprint fiction and in the haze of self-mythologisation to which the firm is prone, the role of precursors and rivals has been obscured. It is an attempt to redress the publishing industry's tendency to celebrate not the originator of an idea, but its most prominent practitioner.

The factor which most clearly differentiates the Feminist Press from Virago – and which by extension distinguishes American feminist publishing in general from the London-based women's presses – is the extent of its interaction with the academic community. Feminist publishing faces an ideological and financial conundrum when contemplating entry into the academic publishing sphere: on the one hand, all feminist presses share an awareness of women's traditional exclusion from the privileged arena of high culture, and a concomitant awareness that in order to write women into the cultural memory, their achievements must be taught and discussed by the academy – the self-appointed arbiter of cultural value. On the other – financial – hand however, academic publishing is a discrete sector of the publishing industry, and the pre-established nature of its distribution channels and marketing practices presents a formidable barrier to new firms attempting to break into this lucrative market. Feminist presses remain burdened by an awareness that the tertiary sector is a market which, though ideologically essential, is commercially inaccessible.

Perceiving the politically ossifying effect of the traditional US publishing-academy relationship, the Feminist Press initiated various policies to break the vicious cycle whereby feminist knowledges were denied academic endorsement. In 1981 they commissioned a study of the most frequently set university American literature anthologies and, appalled at the continuing under-representation of all but a handful of

women writers, compiled a competing textbook, designed both to provide an alternative for staff already conscious of gender imbalance in existing texts and a corrective shock for those oblivious to the standard texts' shortcomings. In addition, The Feminist Press heavily marketed their American literature anthology by developing relationships with academic literary bodies and by embedding the press in the powerful US academic conference circuit (Lauter, 1984: 42). The fact that the press's director, Florence Howe, had in 1973 served as President of the powerful Modern Languages Association (MLA) gave the press an insider knowledge and academic embedding crucial to the success of such a risk-laden, high-outlay venture.

Virago, for its part, cannot be accused of failing to apprehend the importance of the academic market in the Commonwealth countries which constitute its primary market. In her speech to the 1985 Women in Publishing conference, Callil articulated the need for feminist presses to break into the academic market in terms reminiscent of the firm's founding political principles:

The biggest battle still to be fought by all feminist publishers is, I believe, the battle for the school and university curricula. . . . Until the body of women's writing is seen as central to the culture of our society, and therefore as something that must be taught in schools and universities, the work we do will continue to be an uphill struggle. (Callil, 1986: 852)

Several factors, some external to the company and others intrinsic to its decision-making processes, nevertheless vitiated such a desire to capitalise culturally and financially upon the academic market. Principally, academic women's studies in Britain is less influential, less institutionally secure and less endowed than its American counterpart, and thus it proves an uncongenial environment in which to launch a large-scale feminist marketing initiative. Britain lacked (and unquestionably still lacks) the powerful women's studies networks which provide a discernible market for feminist texts in the USA. Trev Broughton, analysing the British scene, sketches a community in which the

casual one-on-one academic relationships which characterised the first Women's Liberation Conference at Ruskin College, Oxford in 1970 still predominate: "university women's studies in Britain has been the result of a felicitous, but essentially sporadic and *ad hoc*, series of encounters between academic women from various disciplines and of various political outlooks" (1993: 73). It is a pattern mirrored in Virago's academic network, first with the loosely-defined advisory group, and later with the one-on-one editor-academic relationships which survived its dissolution. Harriet Spicer remarks that Virago "was not a religious attender of the academic conference circuit" (1996), and Alexandra Pringle recalls that direct promotion of the list to the academy was limited: "we would occasionally produce a leaflet but that was about as far as it went" (1996).

In addition, Virago was at a disadvantage in its attempts to woo the academic market in that it lacked an embedded editorial relationship with campuses and was unable to provide the kind of capital-intensive marketing programmes necessary for launching a new textbook. Intervention in the lucrative – though competitive – university text market would have demanded a financial commitment which Virago, even in its years of greatest profit-generation, was unable to provide. Yet unwillingness, as well as inability, was a crucial factor in Virago's underdevelopment of this potential market. In conversations about Virago, staff both past and present consistently give the impression of academic feminism as something *other* than Virago's sphere – a tangentially-related though clearly distinct phenomenon. The nature of Virago's interaction with British women's studies perhaps exemplifies many of the tensions implicit in forging a business from ideologically-informed publishing: while Virago's directors comprehended the cultural and political desirability of intervening in academic publishing, financial constraints and an institutionally insecure and amorphous market prevented real cross-genre expansion. From an academic feminist point of view this could be construed as a shortcoming on the part of the firm, as an opportunity for influence lost through

corporate lassitude. From a publisher's perspective, however, it represents good business practice: identify your core markets, cater to their interests, and do not risk over-expansion by forays into ill-defined new fields. Virago, usually adept at exploiting its borderline position between conventional publishing and feminist ideology, here felt the chill of its exposed position. While independence lends a publishing house an enviable degree of editorial autonomy, the financial limitations endemic to small companies can result in lost opportunities to proselytise to a broader social spectrum.

"IT DEFINITELY NEEDED BLOWING APART SOME WAY OR OTHER"⁹ :

VIRAGO AND BRITISH PUBLISHING CULTURE

Decisions over whether or not to target academic markets involve feminist publishing houses in questions of publishing priorities, public recognition and potential profits – all in themselves issues of substantial gravity. Yet it is the complex and multifaceted issue of press independence which strikes at the core of feminist press identity. From the re-emergence of feminist publishing in the early-1970s to the mainstream incorporation of feminist thought well underway by the late-1990s, it is the issue of independence which has dichotomised feminist presses, and which continues in its myriad mutations to dominate debate on the ideals and mechanics of women's political publishing. While the feminist publishing sector as a whole reflects the unstable dialectic of commercial investment and social politics, it is most often over the issue of press ownership that this latent tension becomes startlingly manifest. The reconciliation of oppositional politics and capitalist practice requires supreme political optimism combined with the jaundiced wariness of the market veteran.

⁹ Harriet Spicer's response when asked in interview about the 'boy's own' atmosphere of the British publishing industry in the early-1970s (Spicer, 1996).

Virago's in-and-out relationships with corporate empires make it a prime example of both the benefits and the detriments of corporate involvement for a feminist firm: chafing against the constricting paternalism of Quartet Books, Virago briefly sampled the commercial risks of independence, affiliated to the CBC Group, foresaw takeover of the group by Random House, re-established its independence while benefiting from a remaining 10% Random House stake, before finally selling to Little, Brown UK as a fully-owned imprint. The firm's on-going dilemma typifies the classic feminist publishing conundrum: fired by a political desire for editorial and financial autonomy, most presses are nevertheless tempted by the possibilities for increased marketing and production standards available by compromising this cherished independence. Yet this binary conceptualisation of the dilemma is not wholly accurate. Further complicating the debate is the idea of conglomerate membership as a means for furthering oppositional political ends, in that a house which markets to the high street through its conglomerate-controlled distributors may be more successful in proselytising a feminist political message to a wider audience. Virago, in its borderline position, is no stranger to these ideologically-pure-and-no-bank-balance or sell-your-soul-to-capitalism debates. Former joint-managing director Ursula Owen rejects such a diametric conceptualisation of the debate, in its place postulating a position in which subversion from within the system is not a left-wing taunt but a practical business possibility in a particular late-twentieth-century economic climate:

But since it is not possible to separate the economic and creative sides of a publishing house, no publishing house can be truly independent... We want to reach an even wider audience, which we are convinced is there. Yet we want to stay radical in the widest sense of the word. Our early decision to reach the high street audience and people who do not regard themselves as feminists meant that in a sense we became part of the Establishment, but not of it. (1988: 98)

Feminist presses must themselves locate a section of the continuum between an idealised independence, on one hand, and total integration into a conglomerate structure

on the other. In its attempts over a twenty-year period to reconcile the deeply-held feminist conviction that control over speech is a form of political control with a market-driven desire for expansion, Virago has moved across this continuum, negotiating distinct forms of cohabitation with each of its corporate partners. Its current position as a wholly-owned imprint of Little, Brown appears to violate its founders' earlier rhetoric about the necessity of financial and editorial autonomy – their avowals that the elusive 'power to publish' is the *sine qua non* of a feminist imprint. However, from the time of its inception Virago has equally insisted upon marketing for the mainstream, maintaining high production standards and adhering to professional business practice, all of which may be compromised by an insistence on full financial independence in the face of increasing competition. The various institutional arrangements which Virago has negotiated hence represent attempts to reconcile a feminist political agenda with a changing marketplace in which that political agenda does not enjoy majority support.

The question remains whether recent examples of renewed vitality within independent publishing make Virago's decision to sell a perspicacious reading of the business climate, or a miscalculation of the form of compromise which would best enable it to ride out current trends. The November 1995 sale in fact coincided with an increasing trend within publishing towards middle-sized, independent firms, the same market sector which was so decimated by the mid- to late-1980s impetus for conglomeration and takeovers. Publishing within a conglomerate structure has proven a less than ideal practice, with multinationals frustrated at the publishing sector's seeming inability to generate profit margins above 10%, and with authors affronted at being passed from editor to editor, without the opportunity to nurture a productive author-editor relationship. It is therefore ironic that, at the very point where literary energy within the London publishing scene is emanating from small- to medium-sized independents such as Bloomsbury, Harvill, Fourth Estate and Serpent's Tail, Virago's sale to the multinational

Time Warner was presented as a condition of its survival.

It is worth enquiring whether these signs of independent life on the fringes of conglomerate culture amount to a sea change within the industry's structure. The developing observations of Charlotte Bunch – an organiser of the instigatory 1976 US Women in Print Conference – are salutary in this regard. A prominent advocate of lesbian-feminist publishing in 1970s articles such as “Feminist Publishing: An Antiquated Form?” (1977), Bunch's political preference seems originally to have been for organisations run on collectivist and less populist lines than Virago, emphasising the “new ways of thinking and working” to which women-only media enterprises could give rise (25). Yet, by the early-1980s, her conclusions about the feasibility of collectivist feminist enterprises in a conservative age favour compromise in the interest of survival. In a 1980 interview published in Sinister Wisdom, the fervent oppositionality of her earlier article is tempered by a recognition of the economic and societal constraints which feminist publishing must incorporate into its analysis, or else wither as a result of its market naivety: “I think that what I'm hearing is not so much that the vision failed, but that the realities got it” (Doughty, 1980: 75). While endorsing the goal of independence for feminist enterprises, and the original “vision that we would be able to do it better if we controlled it ourselves” (75), she tempers this with the realisation that “the vision does become slightly different in the 80s, and it has to be more of the vision of what it means to survive with economic realities” (76). Interestingly, the three means which Bunch proposes for feminist imprints to maintain their independence in stringent economic circumstances directly contradict Virago's founding principles and certainly its current practice. She asserts first, specifically in relation to periodical publishing, the importance of perceiving a press as valuable even if it does not meet “the standards of the main culture's publishing world” (73) by bringing out its editions in accordance with yearly forecasts. Virago, by comparison, regarded the accuracy of its accounts and

publishing schedules – in short its business professionalism – as a point of company honour. Tactically speaking, this was a necessary image-building policy for Virago in an industry already suspicious of the press's professionalism on the grounds of its political agenda. Secondly, Bunch proposes a lowering of production standards in order to cut operating costs, opting for one- or no-colour covers and utilising poorer quality paperstock, even though this undercuts the goal “a lot of us had set out with: to create products that looked the way the society expected them to look” (74). Virago, with its conviction that feminist politics and B-format paperback aesthetics could be harmoniously reconciled, preferred to compromise on complete independence rather than to jeopardise its appeal to high-street booksellers or the loyalty of its established customers. Bunch's third suggestion proposes feminist subsidisation of women's presses in order to keep them financially viable (a highly contentious issue within the women's movement which is explored further in Chapter 5): “I think the real question that has never been answered is do feminists consider the existence of their own presses and publications important enough to subsidise them?” (74). Virago in its earlier days was in fact indirectly subsidised by Callil's self-named book publicity company, and thereafter received indirect subsidy via the free labour and expertise of numerous committed feminists within the industry and academia. Yet the concept of Virago as a self-supporting business was central to Callil's brand of feminism; just as she could enlist capitalism for feminist politics by declaring “it is our duty not to go bust”, all of her manifold print interviews and my own conversations with her support the view that for Callil the successful management of a business is in itself a feminist statement, and that appeals for subsidy indicate a degree of professional (and hence political) incompetence.

EVE'S BITE: MARKETING FEMINIST WRITING FOR A MASS AUDIENCE

Virago's belief in the mainstream appeal of eye-catching, well-designed titles is

intrinsically linked to its feminist beliefs: the potential for feminist ideas – well-packaged and well-marketed – to take root in mainstream society was the wellspring of Virago's birth. It is this fact which distinguishes Virago's embrace of marketing from the attitude towards this quintessentially capitalist industry prevalent amongst low-budget, collectivist imprints. For radical feminism, believing that its ideals and principles stand in essential opposition to society's current patriarchal and capitalist governing principles, tends to eschew the dilution of its political stance through collaboration with mainstream marketing – however lucrative the potential sales impact might prove for individual presses. Virago, by contrast, in a stance consistent with its more conventional hierarchical and corporate structure, evidences a more ambivalent view of the mainstream. The company's marketing strategies suggest that it perceives the mainstream as, in essence, philosophically-neutral ground; it acknowledges that feminist principles may not currently comprise the dominant paradigm, but it believes that the mainstream market is appropriable for a feminist agenda.

Within the context of 1990s feminism, typified as it is by a fascination with popular culture and an aversion to separatism (Wolf, 1993; Walter, 1998), Virago's expansionist conception of the mainstream market reads as unremarkable. But read against the context of 1970s women's liberation politics, pervasively informed by Marxist analyses of culture as complicit in producing economic inequality (Barrett, 1980: 97), it was a radical political tactic. Separatist lesbian feminism's allied suspicion of the marketable literary product as an envoy from "the finishing press's" evil empire underpins June Arnold's diatribe against publishers' "advertising and promotion methods [which] manipulate women into buying something they don't want or need" (1976: 24). Rather than attempting to bypass such complex and well-established sales channels entirely (as Arnold and, to a lesser extent, Bunch advocate in their 1970s celebrations of a women's independent communications network), Virago opted to exploit these pre-

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existing channels for feminist ends – packaging and distributing its titles along mainstream lines. Initially Virago's sales were centred upon the network of feminist bookshops within London such as SisterWrite in Upper Street, Islington and Silver Moon Bookshop in the West End's Charing Cross Road, but display in mainstream outlets was from the company's inception a priority, and one which received symbolic fulfilment when W. H. Smith, that notorious distributor of subversive, left-wing tracts, devoted windows to feminist books (including numerous Virago titles) at the time of the first International Feminist Book Fair in June 1984.

Ursula Owen confirms that cross-spectrum marketing was a central tenet of the firm's publishing policy from its inception: "we knew there was an audience which would love the books we loved, but we were determined to get into the high street as well as the radical bookshops" (1988: 89). More specifically, Virago sought mainstream status within the shop layout of high-street booksellers by arguing vehemently against the display of its titles in a ghettoised 'feminist books' section. Its staff lobbied exhaustively for space on the general fiction shelves so that "Virago books [would] be in every way integrated into people's lives and [would] reach the widest possible audience" (Pringle, 1996). Because Virago has consistently rejected diametrically-opposed conceptions of 'radical' and 'mainstream', the company was able to argue that such book placement tactics did not represent a capitulation to mainstream values, but a strategic means by which to subvert them. Politically, the policy gave the company considerable marketing flexibility, enabling it to present its wares as simultaneously alternative/specialist *and* mainstream, or as Harriet Spicer artfully encapsulates the manoeuvre: "to widen the definition of what is perceived to be mainstream" (Jones, 1992: 22).

Four elements underlie Virago's marketing success as one of English-language publishing's most highly-branded fiction imprints: its name; its distinctive uniform cover

design; use of the B-format trade paperback; and paperback original editions. The name 'Virago' was designed to be punchy, provocative and wryly self-ironic. It arose out of the atmosphere of the early-1970s women's movement, and was the name originally given to Spare Rib, until 'Spare Rib' was hit upon "so Virago was booted off to be the name of the publishing company", according to Rosie Boycott, co-founder of Spare Rib and one of the two women besides Callil involved briefly in Virago's formation (Bennett, C., 1993: 10). Tongue-in-cheek harridan associations were common amongst early women's movement publications – other titles include Shrew and Harpies Bizarre, and the later Trouble & Strife – with the political objective being to subvert mainstream stereotypes of feminists by so exactly adhering to them. This tactic of 'occupying' derogatory terms in order to defuse their negative connotations and infuse them with a new, positive zeal also informed Virago's choice of colophon: an apple with a bite taken out. Like its biblical counterpart 'Spare Rib', the image was designed jokily to counteract that most pervasive of patriarchal myths, the temptation of Eve. In marketing terms its power lay in its cheeky appearance on the spines of Virago titles, alluding temptingly to the dangerously subversive knowledge to be sampled within the glossy green covers. Coupled with the name 'Virago', the apple logo mounts a challenge to browsing book buyers – part tease, part dare – a combination made newly dangerous for the 1990s grunge generation by a recent Virago catalogue featuring a bitten apple tattoo ("Wayward", 1997: 3).

Yet if the imprint's name and logo were self-consciously feminist, its cover design was classically up-market mainstream. Standardised green covers were designed for maximum reader recognition, a deliberate borrowing from that other great post-war imprint branding – Allen Lane's colour-coded Penguin paperbacks: "it was a conscious decision to acknowledge what Penguin had done with their colours and that we would make a colour" (Spicer, 1996). Where Virago departed from Lane's principles was in its

pioneering use of the larger trade B-format paperback – now the staple of highbrow literary fiction imprints such as Picador and Vintage – and in its all-colour covers, frequently utilising works by nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century female artists. Alexandra Pringle, who took over the editorship of the Modern Classics after the departure of Callil to Chatto & Windus in 1982, recalls heated production debates over the feminist ethics of using a female nude painted by a male artist (1996). The traditional exclusion of female artists from the art history canon made the selection of their works not only a political, but also a marketing, bonus: Virago found that “second-rate painters made better covers than first-rate painters because the image was unknown and therefore you didn’t come to it with a preconception” (Pringle, 1996). Virago also capitalised on the burgeoning market for film tie-ins, using stills from gender-themed films such as Sally Potter’s *Orlando* (1993) and BBC Films’ *Enchanted April* (1986) on its covers, exploiting the recognition factor amongst film- and bookshop-going audiences. Underpinning each of these marketing and packaging decisions – imprint name, colophon, cover design and format – was a conscious decision to clothe generally oppositional texts in the guise of the mainstream, in order to reconceptualise and redefine the mainstream market. Virago, according to Alexandra Pringle, “was quite different from a lot of other small presses in that it always wanted to succeed, always wanted to sell books, always wanted the books to look attractive and be marketed well” (1996).

While alluring presentation and clever marketing propelled Virago towards its goal of selling feminist books to the mainstream, the ossified practices of British broadsheet reviewers threatened to jeopardise its newly-discovered mainstream market. British newspapers traditionally accord review space only to hardback originals, effectively triggering a publicity crisis by casting Virago’s list of paperback originals and reissues into media obscurity. Virago devised various tactics to circumvent this archaic reviewing policy (already by the 1970s out of step with publishers’ issuing practice and

consumer preference) including issuing a tiny hardback run of new titles specifically to cater for reviewers, and posting large, brightly-coloured slips around review copies stating “this has never been a hardback”. But, as Virago’s (then) publicity director Lennie Goodings admitted in 1990, “we’ve rarely made it” (Macaskill, 1990: 434). The trade/reviewer stand-off was complicated, in Virago’s case, by a political commitment to keep their books within the budgets of the largest possible range of women, a policy decision which necessitated the mass-market paperback format. But because of its countervailing commitment to high production and design standards, Virago waged a constant battle to reconcile its competing aims of market appeal, availability and company profit: “the books had to look good, they had to be as cheap as possible but we had to stay solvent” (Owen, 1988: 89). Virago’s house policy of politically-informed profit generation, and its resultant existence on the borderlands of both feminist politics and mainstream publishing, may have lent it agility in marketing terms, but it also created dilemmas of pricing and availability which would not have resulted in such rigorous political soul-searching in a more conventional publishing operation.

Virago’s expansion during the 1970s and 1980s testifies to the sales potential of oppositional texts if they are distinctively and attractively packaged. Other small-scale, politically-informed publishing imprints which sprang up in Virago’s wake were mindful of the selling-power of a distinctive cover design, imitating Virago’s immediately recognisable dark green spine with a black and white barbershop stripe (The Women’s Press) or a cutting-edge saw-tooth design (Serpent’s Tail). In another innovation which publishing rivals were quick to imitate, Virago revitalised the idea that an imprint with a pungent brand-name identity could still command reader loyalty, a phenomenon which was regarded as having waned since the dropping of Penguin’s uniform covers:

Still today, in an era of publishing despondency, booksellers swear that the green Virago spine and distinctive apple logo continue to inspire an almost miraculous loyalty – among men as well as women –

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and that customers still come in simply to ask for the latest Virago please. (Pitman, 1995: 28)

This unique house identity was beneficial also in attracting writers to the Virago fold. Because the titles reflected off one another, the critical and feminist kudos of the house's leading authors such as Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood generated an aura of highbrow, left-of-centre credibility of which other titles could partake. It was on the basis of this cross-spectrum market appeal that Virago secured women writers who may otherwise have had qualms about signing to a feminist press for fear of missing a wider readership. Publication with Virago provided a cocktail particularly attractive to right-on but critically ambitious female authors: the tang of oppositional credibility mixed with the reassuring knowledge that an attractive cover and elegant format ensured the work would still be stocked in the high street.

WAYWARD GIRLS & WICKED WOMEN:

THE RADICALISING OF THE LITERARY MAINSTREAM

Virago's sale in 1995 harboured a symbolic resonance for both feminism and publishing, prompting soul-searching on a paradoxical situation which had been brewing in the industry since the mid-1980s: why, when more feminist books than ever before are available on bookshop shelves, are the majority of feminist presses either defunct or mere imprints of multinationals? If, moreover, the political conservatism which characterised Britain in the 1980s initiated a retreat by the left to cultural rather than directly political spheres, why has that consolidation of cultural power not worked to invigorate the independent, oppositional publishing sector? A situation fraught with contradiction has now evolved whereby critiques of existing media power structures are published by corporations fundamentally implicated in those very structures. Either this situation marks the apogee of pluralistic tolerance on the part of capacious media empires or, according to a more circumspect Marcusean analysis, a cunning neutralisation of such critiques' political bite (Marcuse, 1986).

Since the mid-1980s, a conceptual gap has appeared between the assumption of early women's liberation feminism – that ownership of a communication medium is an essential prerequisite for controlling the message disseminated by that medium – and the status quo within the publishing world. Two examples serve to illustrate how the existence of a burgeoning market for feminist books and an increase in the number of titles catering to that market was speciously interpreted as evidence of the health of feminist publishing itself. Market growth was cited as a panacea for old-style feminists' unease at the poaching of the feminist market from feminist presses. Women in Publishing specifically asked Callil to address this on-going threat in an address to its Autumn 1985 seminar, suggesting a discussion about “the future of feminist publishing houses attached to general houses: would their parent companies close them down if the market dropped away?” (Callil, 1986: 850). Surveying the history of Virago, its influence on the lists of mainstream houses and its prominence on the high street, Callil diagnoses that “the outlook for women's publishing has never been brighter” (850), adroitly side-stepping Women in Publishing's implied point that a vibrant market for feminist books in no way presupposes the existence of independent feminist presses to supply that market. In a further example of the 1980s preoccupation with markets eclipsing 1970s-style ideological debate over press ownership, Lennie Goodings's 1993 interview with the Bookseller celebrates a proliferation of new feminist publications, relegating to brackets (significantly) the names of the imprints under which they appeared:

Feminism was shifting and finding new ground, and so was political publishing. It was with great delight that in the 1990s we witnessed the withering of post-feminism under the remarkably fine scrutiny of Susan Faludi's Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women (Chatto & Windus). . . . At the same time as the pundits cried “Feminism is dead”, the bestseller lists answered “Long live feminism!”. There, in 1992, alongside Peter Mayle and Michael Palin, were Germaine Greer's The Change and Marilyn French's War Against Women (both Hamish Hamilton), and new works by some of

the grandes dames of feminism, Gloria Steinem (Bloomsbury) and Nancy Friday (Hutchinson) – preceded the year before by Naomi Wolf's The Beauty Myth (Chatto & Windus). (27)

Surface-level triumphalism on the part of feminism is here destabilised by commercial reality, uncomfortably suggesting a wholesale appropriation of feminist markets from under the blithely self-congratulatory gaze of the women's presses.

This negative reading is, however, itself contentious; debate over the shift towards mainstream publication of feminist works has generated three differing analyses of the status quo. The first of these interpretations, which might be labelled the "feminism triumphant" reading, argues that the appearance of a mainstream colophon on the spine of a feminist text provides irrefutable evidence of feminism's successful self-establishment at the heart of contemporary culture. A second, more sceptical, view reads in the rush of publishers for feminist titles a cynical commercial exploitation of currently fashionable subjects. Feminist communications theorists such as Dale Spender echo concerns of earlier decades in their awareness that, because mainstream houses have no ideological commitment to feminist politics, these "women's studies" lists could be dropped as soon as the " 'fashion' has finished, the market has been saturated" (1981: 198). Industry evidence abounds to support this more cautious view: Naim Attallah's purging of 'unprofitable' third-world titles from The Women's Press list in March 1991; and Penguin editor Margaret Blumen's flat statement of publishing *Realpolitik* in her assertion that "publishing is not a charitable organisation. There's money to be made in feminist publishing" (Briscoe, 1992: 17). The third, ambivalent, reading of the situation rejects both uncritical enthusiasm and knee-jerk suspicion in its view of the market, arguing instead for the position of cultural tactician. For in an age dominated by marketing principles, the injection of radicalism under a mainstream imprint may constitute the most effective means of subversion – one consistent with the oppositional politics of 1970s feminism, but enacted in a characteristically media-savvy 1990s

manner.

BITING BACK: VIRAGO'S 1996 RELAUNCH AND BEYOND

The media relaunch of the new Virago Press in July 1996 was, like many so-called novelties, in actual fact an artfully repackaged version of a much older idea: that of selling women's fiction between glossy covers and with a hint of bad-girl allure. As might have been suspected from the copious use of the Virago apple icon and the prominent placing of the press's name in relaunch publicity, the old was being remarketed as new – a further twist of corporate self-mythologising. Timely innovation is, however, discernible in the new range of first-time-author titles labelled as the “Virago Vs”, a list designed to capture a 20- to 30-something demographic which had grown disaffected with the standardised design and more explicitly political agenda of the old Virago list. Texts about the women's peace movement and gardening, which had come to feature in Virago's list by the mid-1990s, are here replaced by a sharper, bawdier, highly self-confident tone, with titles such as Jennifer Belle's Going Down (1997) and Lydia Millet's American pop-culture satire, Omnivores (1997). The arch irreverence of Helen Eisenbach's V title, Lesbianism Made Easy (1997), a spoof self-help book on sapphic chic, targets an audience which demands its lifestyle politics light and untrammelled by undue theorising or requirements of activism. Sally Abbey, the current senior editor for Virago within the Little, Brown group, encapsulates the dilemma of marketing to a generation which demands the personal freedoms won through feminist activism, but which shies at explicit political identification:

We're aiming the Vs at that broader spectrum of women who were independent, politicised, who by all definitions would have been called feminist, and a lot who are feminists, who were put off by an old-fashioned look. (1998)

Virago's house policy is that its relaunch represents not a new development (although, as the V list indicates, there clearly *is* an attempt to attract new audiences) but a continuation of the old – “as far as we're concerned we'd never been away” (Abbey, 1998). Hence, in the press's relaunch material it is the insignia of the old Virago which predominate – “the word is VIRAGO”(“The Word”, 1996: 1); a seductively naked woman proffering an apple (“Wayward”, 1997: 1). In particular, house author Angela Carter is highlighted, with the intention that Carter's critically acclaimed novels of fantastic, sexually-charged surrealism should speak for the relaunched press as a whole. The identification of Carter with the firm extends to the borrowing of one of the late author's titles – Wayward Girls & Wicked Women (1986) – for Virago's 16-page advertising insert in the Guardian of 7 June 1997: “if any single author could be said to embody the spirit of Virago it would be the late Angela Carter, whose darkly humorous novels are filled with women and girls both wayward and wicked” (3). That this conscious representation of the house's identity has proven lucrative is testified to by Abbey's statement that 1997 marked the highest annual turnover in the company's history (1998).

Virago's traditional genius for packaging oppositional texts so as to attract not only a highly-politicised feminist audience but, in addition, a mainstream audience of casual bookshop browsers, remains pertinent. The 1997 publication of former Women's Press author Andrea Dworkin's collected essays, Life and Death, offsets Dworkin's public identification with strongly 1970s-derived separatist politics with a covershot of artwork by contemporary cult artist Sarah Lucas. By scrupulously avoiding a cover graphic which might reinforce reader perceptions of the author as an anti-pornography campaigner with a readiness to indict men as the problem, Virago engineers a strategic introduction of radical feminist ideas into a demographic of readers seeking recreation, rather than political edification, from its reading. Moreover, the design decision is financially astute: doubling the potential audience for the book not only secures

Dworkin's loyalty and theoretical kudos for the house, it moreover healthily inflates sales. It is a harmonisation of political credibility and commercial marketability as intrinsic to Virago as it is anathema to the public persona of Dworkin herself.

Integration into the Little, Brown publishing conglomerate has gained Virago access to titles published under other imprints controlled by its parent company, allowing for a title more strongly identifiable with a Virago readership to be fed into the imprint's list. Marilyn French's seismic 1970s novel about one woman's coming to consciousness, The Women's Room (1977), was transferred from the Abacus imprint and, endowed with the literary-critical imprimatur of a Virago Modern Classic, vastly increased its sales, making the book a primary success for the relaunched imprint. Yet, this list-feeding fluidity could, if reversed, potentially dilute the integrity of the Virago house identity, allowing for Virago luminaries such as Margaret Atwood and Angela Carter to be stripped off the Virago list and marketed under the Orbit, Abacus or Little, Brown colophons – should “anyone from the agent, the author, or the in-house editor think[] it would be better paperbacked or hardbacked on a different list” (Abbey, 1998). Moreover, Virago's editorial autonomy is widely asserted but, in the event, unenforceable. Philippa Harrison, the managing director of Little, Brown UK, is highly regarded within feminist publishing circles and, according to Abbey, “very pro-Virago” (1998), yet the hypothetical possibility remains that a title endorsed by the four-strong Virago editorial team could be vetoed at company board level. The 1998 crisis at HarperCollins over former Hong Kong Governor Chris Patten's book, East and West (eventually published by Macmillan in 1998), highlights the reality that multinational corporations will not shy from utilising their economic dominance to silence uncongenial political opinion.

To peruse Virago's current catalogues is to marvel at the cultural centrality and market prominence of women's writing, and also to endorse the company's perception that the visual and tactile allure of a well-designed, spot-laminated cover can facilitate the purchase of radically oppositional feminist writing (Virago Spring/Summer, 1998; Virago July-December, 1998). Unlike numerous other 1970s feminist presses, Virago discerned that inferior production standards and utilitarian packaging actually militated against the proselytising of feminist ideas. That commerce and feminism are capable of being mutually enhancing, rather than mutually exclusive, is a belief which underlies the history of Virago, and which casts the longevity of the firm, despite industry convulsions, as in itself a political achievement. Callil's vow that Virago was ideologically obliged "not to go bust" has – perhaps especially in its latest incarnation – been stunningly upheld.

Yet the commercial necessity of minimising a book's political content in its cover design so as to avoid unduly alienating a skittish 1990s readership gives a feminist critic of the publishing industry reason for pause. A readership which demands feminist-informed ideas, but only under the metaphorical brown paper wrapping of mainstream consumer culture, not only disassociates itself from its political history, but falls victim to the crass stereotypes of the women's movement propounded in the mainstream media. Catering for this contemporary *Zeitgeist*, Virago promotes lifestyle politics without requiring political gestures beyond the act of consumption itself: "By and large, I think people just respond to a cover, an idea . . . what they want is to be sold an idea – they're not buying into a club in the same way they probably once were" (Abbey, 1998). Viewed superficially, the depoliticisation implicit in this process appears unnervingly regressive. Yet, as Western political processes increasingly appropriate the techniques of consumer marketing, Virago Press may discover that the tense dialectic of politics and profit on which it has always based its publishing practice has become curiously

redundant. For, in an age in which politics and marketing have become effectively indistinguishable, the embrace of consumerism in the name of the feminist cause may constitute a supremely expedient political tactic.

**'WORK FOR IRISH HANDS IN THE
MAKING OF BEAUTIFUL THINGS':
THE CUALA PRESS AND CONFLICTS
OF CULTURAL NATIONALISM**

Five lines of text and ten pages of notes about the folk and the fishgods of Dundrum. Printed by the weird sisters in the year of the big wind.

To be printed and bound at the Druiddrum press by two designing females. Calf covers of pissedon green. Last word in art shades. Most beautiful book come out of Ireland my time.

– James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1993: 13, 403)

For Elizabeth Corbet Yeats's Cuala Press, a private printing operation active around Dublin in the first half of the twentieth century, to be satirised for its esoteric colophon notes and Arts-and-Crafts-influenced sales speak may be considered a misfortune. For such criticism to occur in perhaps the twentieth century's most influential novel, James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), is doubly so. The inexhaustible thoroughness with which literary academics have scrutinised Joyce's text for allusions to early-twentieth-century Irish political and cultural life has tended to reinforce Joyce's hostile perception of Elizabeth and Susan Yeats's Cuala Industries as the hobby of two middle-aged Irish spinsters intent upon deriving some vicarious glory from the literary success of their elder brother, William Butler Yeats. The ingrained sexual stereotyping involved in such a presentation is, in the case of the Cuala Press, particularly misleading, for Elizabeth Yeats's press was a crucial agent in sponsoring the flourishing of cultural self-confidence and artistic innovation loosely termed the Irish Renaissance. Cuala not only revived the techniques of fine hand-printing in Ireland, but also published key books by literary innovators such as John Millington Synge, Lady Augusta Gregory, Ezra

'WORK FOR IRISH HANDS'

Pound, Oliver St. John Gogarty, Louis MacNeice, Patrick Kavanagh and Elizabeth Bowen – all in addition to creating audiences for the poetry of W.B. Yeats, and for the artwork of the sisters' younger brother, Jack Yeats. Declining to republish established classics in lavishly illustrated editions – the policy which characterised much private press publishing from William Morris's Kelmscott Press to the industry's highpoint in the 1930s with the Cresset Press and the Golden Cockerel Press – Cuala aimed at both typographical elegance *and* literary novelty. The consistently high prices which Cuala's limited editions continue to command at contemporary rare book auctions testify to the Press's success on both these counts.¹

While Joyce's sly squibs at Cuala's tendency towards over-annotation and "art shade[]" covers no longer receive uncritical endorsement, his characterisation of the Yeats sisters as the Macbeth witches of south Dublin and as "designing females" has, until recently, been continuously reinforced by critical works about the Yeats family. Especially in the case of the Cuala Press's director, Elizabeth Corbet Yeats (known within the family as 'Lolly' or 'Lollie'²), critical belittlement of her skills and personality has been so relentless as to effect by historiographical sleight-of-hand the fiction that the Cuala press was not, in fact, her own creation, but was in actuality a project under W.B. Yeats's command. The influence of Irish publisher and publishing historian Liam Miller has been significant in this regard for, as the reviver of the Cuala Press in 1969, he was well-placed to further the historical misconception that the key influence on Cuala was that of its literary editor, and not that of its director. In an early piece on Cuala by Miller, Elizabeth Yeats is pushed so far to the periphery of consideration as to become invisible:

The real mark which the Dun Emer Press [the name under which Cuala operated from 1902 until July 1908] made on its time developed

¹ A search of rare book catalogues on the World Wide Web indicates that Cuala Press first editions, especially of works by W.B. Yeats, regularly sell for between £200 and £300.

² The elder of the Yeats sisters, Susan Mary Yeats, was known within the family as 'Lily', to distinguish her from her mother, Susan Pollexfen Yeats.

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from the fact that this was primarily a writer's press, guided editorially by William Butler Yeats who, in a period in which there was a dearth of Irish publishing, developed a list dedicated to the publication of new Irish writing and commenced a movement which led to the re-establishment of Dublin as a noteworthy centre of publishing. (1965: 141)

Critics swayed by the gravitational pull of W.B. Yeats's literary reputation, and the privileged preservation and reiteration of his views on Cuala, frequently adopt the related tactic of presenting Cuala as the Yeats clan's private business, one which Elizabeth Yeats understood as her "chief family responsibility" (Badaracco, 1989: 525). Though three generations of the Yeats-Pollexfen family were indeed involved in some aspect of Cuala's operations during Elizabeth Yeats's lifetime, to ignore the nature of the press as an individual woman's business is to confine women's autonomous endeavours within the traditional female realm of the domestic.

A third governing context within which the Cuala Press is frequently analysed is that of the Irish Renaissance itself, with critics extrapolating from the impressive list of writers published by the press the idea that the general cultural and political milieu – rather than any specific individual – was responsible for the press's appearance. Robin Skelton, in an article entitled "Twentieth-Century Irish Literature and the Private Press Tradition" (1964), effects such an eclipse of individual women's efforts by nationalist preoccupations in stating that "the Cuala Press . . . tried at all points to become an expression of national pride and a vehicle for traditional thought and art" (371). Such critical tactics create the bizarre impression of a press which seemingly ran itself, fired only by contemporary cultural politics and the reflected glory of Ireland's often otherwise engaged national bard.

This jostling over the relative status of women's endeavours *vis-à-vis* nationalist (masculine) trends dominated early-twentieth-century Irish political debates during the

period in which the original Cuala was active, and it has since re-emerged as the key debate in modern Irish feminist historiography (Ward, 1983; Owens, 1984; Luddy and Murphy, 1989). The selection of this debate as an intellectual starting point for a feminist investigation of Cuala focuses attention on the ways in which discourses of Irish nationalism and gender identity have come to coalesce in writing about Cuala, specifically in relation to its founder, Elizabeth Yeats. The genesis of this presentation lies in the writings of her elder brother, W. B. Yeats. Despite the fact that for 37 years Elizabeth Yeats and her brother were corresponding almost weekly on the management of Cuala, W.B. Yeats in his Autobiographies (1955) mentions his younger sister only three times, and all in relation to what he regarded as her psychic ability to predict the future through dreams (492; 508; 513). It was, perhaps, all he could trust himself to reveal publicly about this sibling with whom he experienced constant tension, most often on account of their equally outspoken and strong-willed personalities. By internalising W.B. Yeats's prejudices, subsequent writers about Cuala including Yeats's son Michael B. Yeats and Liam Miller have perpetuated a view of Elizabeth Yeats as erratic, emotionally unstable, socially embarrassing and professionally inept, a distorted stereotype which reaches its apotheosis in William M. Murphy's influential recent group portrait, Family Secrets: William Butler Yeats and His Relatives (1995). Elizabeth is there characterised as suffering from "a severe personality disorder, an extreme neurosis" (176) bordering on "psychopathy" (364), to substantiate which assertion Murphy presses into service the far from impartial comments of the one significant early-twentieth-century writer the press did not publish, James Joyce: "there was only one designing woman, not two, not two weird sisters, but one" (177). Reflecting on the duties of the biographer, Murphy claims to be pursuing absolute objectivity in his portraits – to be "grappled to his evidence by hoops of steel" (177) – though his prose in fact re-enacts the traditional dismissal of feminist methodologies as tools for examining Cuala. In a stunningly backhanded compliment, Murphy praises Cuala's Irishness at the

very moment he regrets that it sprang from the work of two frustrated, unmarried women:

The Industries managed by Lily and Lollie during the glorious days of the Irish Renaissance constitute a distinctive part of the artistic life of the Dublin world during the most exciting period of Ireland's modern history. That such an achievement should have come from two troubled spinster sisters – one trapped in a life she hated, the other trapped in the life of the first – is not the least of its glories. (263)

Curiously, given feminist theory's rise in the academic firmament over the last 30 years, it is only in the 1990s that a feminist-informed critique of the Yeats sisters has emerged to contest the misogynistic assumptions which thread Murphy's prose. This counter-trend was first signalled in Richard Kuhta's 1993 article entitled "On the Breadth of a Half Penny: The Contribution of the Cuala Press to the Irish Literary Renaissance", in which he suggests that one of the interpretative "lenses" through which Cuala might profitably be viewed is that of "feminist studies", as the press, "run totally by women for four decades", constituted a "bold experiment" (13). The appearance of Gifford Lewis's sympathetic and historically informed The Yeats Sisters and the Cuala (1994) endorsed Kuhta's critical hunch that the gender politics of Cuala would reward sustained investigation, and the body of writing in this area was further enhanced two years later by Joan Hardwick's appreciative reappraisal of Elizabeth Yeats in her joint biography, The Yeats Sisters (1996). There is evidence that the publication of both books was spurred by the influence of the post-1970s women's publishing movement, in which contemporary feminist publishers eagerly scanned the historical record for signs of their precursors – an exact echo of the way in which early-1970s feminist critics had sought their literary foremothers by examining out-of-print women's writing. In the Preface to Gifford Lewis's text, the author records the catalysing influence of a 1988 conversation with Philippa Brewster of Britain's first feminist non-fiction imprint, Pandora Press, who was eager to commission a book which would demonstrate "the unique significance of the Cuala Press in the history of working women" (ix). While

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Lewis's book later appeared under the colophon of the Irish Academic Press, Brewster indirectly achieved her goal with the 1996 Pandora Press publication of Hardwick's biography.³ My own research indicates that interest in Cuala as a foreshadowing of the later twentieth century's avowedly feminist publishing operations predates Pandora's foundation in 1983; Lilian Mohin of Onlywomen Press recalls printing an early poster featuring the Irish women operating their hand-press (1998; see appendix of illustrations), and Carmen Callil recalls that Virago was aware in an general way of turn-of-the-century women's imprints including Cuala (1996).

"WILLY DID ALL THAT":

IS A WOMEN'S PRESS NECESSARILY A FEMINIST PRESS?

To approach Elizabeth Yeats's Cuala Press from the perspective of late-twentieth-century feminist publishing is to experience a curious analytical vertigo. On one hand, the Cuala Press appears to attract feminist analysis with its all-female workforce, its training of women in the technical arts of composition, typography and pressmanship, and through its insistence on economic autonomy as the key to providing rural Irish girls with opportunities for self-development. On the other hand, however, any researcher approaching Cuala with a reductive identikit of what constitutes a validly feminist endeavour faces immediate – and disconcerting – rebuffs. For neither Lily nor Elizabeth Yeats was in any direct way involved in contemporary Irish women's activism to gain either the vote or national independence, and they were, moreover, specifically

³ The history of Pandora Press is complex and involved: founded under the auspices of academic publisher Routledge and Kegan Paul in 1983 to fill a perceived gap in the market for feminist non-fiction, it was sold in 1990 to Rupert Murdoch's HarperCollins group and in January 1998 was sold on to the small North London-based publishing house, Rivers Oram Press, within which it maintains its status as a separate list. Rivers Oram Press's 1998-99 catalogue states that "[Pandora's] identity will be maintained by Rivers Oram, which plans to build on Pandora's rich backlist and excellent feminist reputation" by continuing to publish "vibrant, feisty books for women" (i).

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disparaging of their more highly-politicised female contemporaries such as Maud Gonne, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Constance Markievicz. Nor does the Cuala list privilege female writers, for only four (Lady Augusta Gregory, Katharine Tynan, Elizabeth Bowen and Elizabeth Rivers) appeared over the course of its 44-year history as an imprint promoting new writing, a group vastly outnumbered by the press's male authors. Furthermore, the fact of these four women authors' publication is qualified by the fact that Gregory and Tynan were approached in part because they were friends of the Yeats family and not solely on account of their political or artistic views.

A further consideration which any feminist critique of Cuala must take into account is the legacy of Lily Yeats, who outlived her sister by nine years and who edited the family history in accordance with her own socially conservative views. Lily's *in memoriam* pamphlet printed upon Elizabeth Yeats's death in 1940, contains the kernel of many subsequent critical interpretations belittling Elizabeth's technical printing knowledge, stating offhandedly that she had at first "no knowledge [of printing] at all beyond what she learned of the setting up of types in a few lessons at some womans' printing works in London [sic]", and that she "disliked machinery and said she was afraid even of a sewing machine" (3). As though to quash altogether the possibility of Cuala being viewed as the product of a woman's individual skill and professionalism, Lily elsewhere pre-empts the argument with a flat denial of her younger sister's literary-critical acumen: "Lolly could not have run the Press alone. She had no judgement in the choice of books. Willy did all that" (qtd in Murphy, 1995: 261).

The inclusion of the Cuala Press in this survey of twentieth-century women's publishing is motivated by the same interest which 1970s feminist publishers showed in the press. It derives from the image of three women, their constricting Edwardian fashions covered in long protective smocks, absorbed in the actual mechanics of print

communication – of setting types, rolling inks and operating the heavy Albion hand-press. In the sense that publishing involves actively committing words to paper, the Cuala Press was more intrinsically a publisher than any of the other twentieth-century imprints discussed here (including its sometime London contemporary, the WSPU-backed The Woman's Press). For none of these other houses diversified into the *printing* of books, all confining themselves to the risk capital management, editorial selection and publicity operations which characterise the modern publishing house. In choosing to analyse Cuala through the lens of contemporary academic feminism, I am cognisant of the pitfalls of reading an historical operation so as to accord with vastly different modern critical and political preferences; of indulging what novelist Julian Barnes colloquially terms the “curious vanity” of the present in expecting “the past to suck up to it” (1984: 130). Two open questions thus underpin and inform this analysis of the Cuala Press within the context of modern feminist publishing. Firstly, can a women's press be regarded as feminist even if it was not avowedly so in its own time, but if it can in retrospect be seen to constitute a vital link in a broader historical pattern of feminist print endeavour? Or, to phrase the question in a more catchily Barnesian manner, does a press's feminism reside in its means or in its ends? Secondly, does Irish nationalism constitute the sole framework for understanding women's participation in the Irish Arts and Crafts movement, or is self-described nationalist activity by women capable of being simultaneously interrogated for what it reveals about contemporary gender identities? In answering both questions in the affirmative I aim critically to reappraise the ways in which the Cuala Press has traditionally been viewed, giving due weight to Elizabeth Yeats's achievement as the first woman in Britain to run a private art press, and grounding the post-1970s feminist publishing boom within an historical framework.

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"WORK FOR IRISH HANDS IN THE MAKING OF BEAUTIFUL THINGS":

THE ORIGINS AND PURPOSE OF DUN EMER

All feminist presses bear the imprint of their encompassing politico-cultural milieu, but with the Cuala Press the ties to a broader political movement are particularly strong and pervade the early publications and prospectuses of the press. The Dun Emer Industries arose out of its founder Evelyn Gleeson's interest in the cluster of Irish cultural organisations which sprang into being in Dublin and amongst Irish expatriates in London during the 1890s. Sensing that the cause of Irish cultural revival would harmonise well with the need for work creation schemes in Ireland's depressed rural economy, Gleeson planned the creation of a craft guild which would employ Irish girls in the making of crafts acceptable to the sympathetic members of the nationalist Catholic and Protestant middle and upper classes. Calling upon the Bedford Park set of genteel bohemians which included the Yeats family, Gleeson recruited both Lily and Elizabeth Yeats to the Industries, with the decision that the firm would specialise in carpet and tapestry weaving, fine embroidery, and hand-printed books – these three departments to be headed by Gleeson, Lily and Elizabeth respectively. Gleeson's house 'Runnymede' in Dundrum, then a village south of Dublin, was rechristened 'Dun Emer' in an attempt to dispel the ineradicably English associations of the original name and to evoke instead the legend of Lady Emer, wife of the mythical Irish hero Cuchulainn, and a woman famed for her skill in embroidery. The name 'Dun Emer' furthermore suggested a fortress of female industry (Hardwick, 1996: 119), a stronghold of Irish creativity intent upon revivifying a colonised and dispirited indigenous cultural tradition.

The artful blending of William Morris-inspired Arts and Crafts rhetoric with the language of a diffuse cultural (though not necessarily political) nationalism is apparent in the 1903 prospectus printed at the Industries, one year after the foundation of Dun Emer

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in Autumn 1902. The commitment to exclusive use of Irish products was dictated as much by the need for local economic revival as it was by the wish for authenticity: “Everything as far as possible, is Irish: the paper of the books, the linen of the embroidery and the wool of the tapestry and carpets. The designs are also of the spirit and tradition of the country” (*The Dun Emer Industries*, 1903: 1). The prospectus states hopefully that bookbinding will soon be added to the guild’s specialities (1) – an unusual course in the history of women’s publishing endeavours and one which was not, in the end, to materialise – although all Dun Emer and Cuala bindings were subcontracted to Dublin firms, and all featured spines of pure Irish linen. The chief logistical problem which dogged Dun Emer/Cuala was the economic exigency of marketing highly labour-intensive luxury goods in a country of widespread poverty and subsistence living. William Morris had previously tussled with this economic conundrum, and his example was particularly influential for the Yeats family as they were personally acquainted with the Morrises in London, and Lily had worked for six years as an embroiderer at Kelmescott Manor under May Morris. Cuala advertising hence followed Morris’s example in justifying the higher prices of the goods by asserting their ethical superiority to machine-manufactured equivalents, and by appealing to the political conscience of the purchaser in a manner strikingly similar to 1990s ‘ethical consumerism’ advertising tactics:

Things made of pure materials, worked by these Irish girls must be more lasting and more valuable than machine-made goods which only serve a temporary purpose. All the things made at Dun Emer are beautiful in the sense that they are instinct with individual feeling & have cost thought and care. (1-2)

On a day-to-day basis the Dun Emer Industries was an entirely female workplace, with teenage girls from the village of Dundrum taken on to work full-time in one of the three departments, and with only two trained at any one time in the detailed requirements of Elizabeth Yeats’s printing department. With the expansion of the business, more

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workers were required – in 1902 there were 13 girls employed, and by 1905 there were 30 (*Leabhar Dun Eimire*, 1903-05). Although the scarcity of alternative employment opportunities amongst working-class girls in the region meant that Dun Emer was supplied with a steady flow of prospective workers, these workers' near total absence of pre-existing skills caused Elizabeth Yeats to complain that “all our work is done by girls & they had to *learn from me* – they came to me as they left the village school (at 15)” (Miller, 1973: 82). It is in Dun Emer's approach to the training of these girls that its policies intersect most directly with the ideas of Edwardian feminists, for “the education of the work-girls” was, from the Industries's inception, always considered to be “part of the idea”: “they are taught to paint & their brains and fingers are made more active and understanding; Some of them, we hope, will become teachers to others, so that similar industries may spread through the land” (*The Dun Emer Industries*, 1903: 1).

This desire to advance Irish women's economic autonomy through the teaching of traditionally female domestic crafts is typical of the seemingly self-contradictory intermeshing of loosely feminist ideals and conservative constructions of femininity which recurs throughout the writings of the sisters. While the emphasis on skills enhancement, education, and the benefits of long-term employment with the firm are firmly adumbrated, there is no mention of imparting the techniques of accounting or production costing – advanced business principles which would have proven essential to the foundation of further women-run enterprises like those envisioned by the 1903 prospectus. Moreover, it is unlikely that Arts and Crafts produce can ever generate sufficiently large profit margins to ensure commercial stability, let alone expansion. In this sense Elizabeth Yeats's desire that Cuala books should attain public prominence and should proselytise for the Irish cultural cause by being “scattered over the world” to give “pleasure to our country people in America and at home” was fundamentally at odds with the mechanics and scale of Cuala publications (*The Dun Emer Industries*, 1903: 3). Print

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runs for Cuala books were rarely over 300, and all of Cuala's publications of W.B. Yeats's works served as hand-printed precursors to the mass editions produced by commercial firms. By printing limited editions on a hand-press, Elizabeth Yeats was in effect consigning Cuala to exactly that realm of non-commercial gentility from which her educational rhetoric and personal experience indicated that women needed to escape. This problematic duality not only constricted Cuala's financial situation throughout its lifetime, but it must also give pause to any over-easy present-day categorisation of Cuala as a feminist endeavour. Late in her life Elizabeth Yeats appears to have grasped the imperative of commercial expansion in an increasingly competitive publishing industry, though – as ever – chronic undercapitalisation made any such expansion cost-prohibitive, and thus threatened the very continuance of the press:

I still feel that the only hope for Cuala is to get money into it and then start publishing in a bigger way – I know this could not be done with only a Hand Press, but the Press and . . . the Publishing House might occupy the same premises. The Prints, Cards and some limited editions could be done on this Press. (1938; Cuala Press Archive: Box 8.1)

Sheila Shulman, a member of the more recent Onlywomen Press collective, believes in retrospect that learning to hand-print in the early-1970s “was a slightly naïve decision because technology was already outstripping us” (Jackson, 1993: 47). Elizabeth Yeats appears eventually to have arrived at a conclusion similar to that of Shulman, realising that the obsolete technology of the hand-press confers artistic prestige precisely because it leads, ultimately, to commercial extinction.

“YOUR HANDS WILL ALWAYS BE COVERED WITH INK”⁴:

WOMEN AND THE PRINTING TRADES

By taking up hand-printing in 1902, Elizabeth Yeats anticipated by some 15 years the proliferation of hand-presses amongst modernist literary women in the years after the

⁴ Virginia and Leonard Woolf's remark to Nancy Cunard on learning that Cunard planned to launch the Hours Press and to learn to print on a hand-press (Chisholm, 1979: 138).

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outbreak of the First World War. Yet Lily Yeats's brisk statement in her *in memoriam* pamphlet that Elizabeth undertook "a few lessons at some womans' printing works in London" misrepresents the then-established tradition of women moving into the printing industries, and the vigorous trade union opposition which was its ever-present corollary. The Women's Printing Society in Westminster, at which Elizabeth Yeats mastered the rudiments of composition, design and press mechanics, had been jointly established in 1876 by Emma Anne Paterson and Emily Faithfull, both of whom were involved in Britain's first all-female printing press, the Victoria Press. Aside from producing the pro-suffrage monthly the Women's Union Journal, the Victoria Press throughout the 1860s specialised in the printing of soft-cover pamphlets and occasional bound full-length volumes – texts arguably more ambitious in their length and typography than those undertaken by Cuala some 40 years later. By training women to compete in what had until that time been virtually an all-male industry, the Victoria Press earned the implacable opposition of the London Society of Compositors, which blacklisted all workplaces employing female typesetters and asserted that women's lower wages threatened to undercut hard-won male pay-scales.

This legacy of trade union misogyny was made readily manifest during the years of the Yeats family's residence in Bedford Park, when William Morris's Kelmscott Press initiated court action to achieve trade union recognition of the Press's first female compositor, Mrs Pine. Given that Emery Walker, a consultant to Morris on his lavishly-illustrated Kelmscott editions, was Elizabeth's trusted adviser on all matters typographical from the turn of the century onwards, it is reasonable to assume that Elizabeth was aware from the outset of the Dun Emer/Cuala Press that she risked trade union ire by teaching the techniques of printing to young girls. The printing unions in Ireland (under the policy-making control of their London counterparts in Cuala's first two decades) did in fact ban union members from the Yeats sisters' site, but they appear to have ignored the

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employment of Cuala's teenage girls because of the rural obscurity of the press. Moreover, the obsolescence of Cuala's equipment – a mid-nineteenth-century Albion hand-press and several founts of 14 point Caslon old-style moveable type – probably appeared so wilfully archaic as not seriously to threaten union monopolies on more sophisticated typesetting and printing technologies.

The two hand-presses used by Cuala (since 1986 owned and stored on campus by Trinity College Dublin) are awkward and laborious to operate, but they are nevertheless undoubtedly operable by a woman.⁵ This fact, one which was presumably self-evident given Elizabeth Yeats's regular production of publications, was nevertheless a bone of some contention between Cuala's director and W.B. Yeats, the Press's literary adviser. Betraying both W.B. Yeats's tendency towards domineering family behaviour and his antique conception of women's practical capabilities, Yeats bombastically demanded that Elizabeth “ ‘Do this, you must do that,’ etc., a press man is absolutely necessary,’ and so on” (qtd in Murphy, 1995: 103). In so doing, Yeats not only cast aspersions on his sister's more than capable pressmanship, but also revealed his ignorance of the industrial relations climate in which Cuala was forced to operate. In 1923, with the civil war at its anarchic height and with two of Cuala's regular printers under arrest for alleged republican sympathies, Elizabeth Yeats wrote to the family friend and sometime US distributor for the press, John Quinn, of her need to retrain from within the Industries rather than seek outside help. The memoirs of their father, John Butler Yeats, had already been typeset, and Cuala thus risked critical cashflow problems if the printing of Early Memories (1923) was further delayed. Already battling against falling sales, occasional military raids and severe staff shortages, the male industrial organisations represented for

⁵ I am grateful to Charles Benson, Keeper of Early Printed Books and Special Collections at Trinity College Library, Dublin, for allowing me access to the Cuala hand-presses and for explaining their workings. Since 1986 they have constituted part of the working equipment of the College's Trinity Closet Press.

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Cuala yet another constriction on its daily operations: “They [the new print girls] were sure they could never do it, but I convinced them they could. It was the only thing to do, as we could not get a man printer because of the Trades Union” (qtd in Murphy, 1995: 219). Although in this instance union wrath was abated through the employment of other in-house female staff, the trade unions’ tactic of benign disregard so long as Cuala paid its press workers well below male wages – thus ensuring no direct competition with its members – contains a sinister aspect. Not only does such a two-tiered system leave male monopolies on industrial technology virtually intact, it also suggests the ghettoisation of female talent within technologically superseded industries. In this respect, Cuala’s experience might be read as an ominous foreshadowing of late-twentieth-century developments, in which women’s increasing managerial profile within the publishing industry parallels that industry’s loss of prestige in the face of competition from privileged electronic media.⁶ Arguably, as capital begins to move out of an industry, women move in – an indirect power ratio which would recast the recent feminist publishing boom not as a triumph but as a painfully hollow victory.

THE POWER TO PUBLISH: EDITORIAL POLICY AND FAMILIAL CONFLICT

For feminist publishing houses founded in the early-1970s and since, the guarantee of the power to publish is the lynchpin of house identity. The right to grant editorial imprimatur or to pass veto on publication of a specific text is insisted upon by feminist houses with such rigour because they recognise that it represents a specifically *political* form of power – the right to allow a text entry into the public domain or to withhold it from the general currency of ideas. For self-declared feminist houses, the power to publish is often written into the company’s articles of association, or otherwise constitutes the group’s unwritten,

⁶ Refer to the Afterword of this work for further discussion of the issues surrounding women and communications technology.

but universally understood, *raison d'être*. Neither guarantee is completely watertight (as The Women's Press's differences with its corporate owner in 1991 testify, or as editorial disputes amongst radical publishing collectives continue to demonstrate), but the formal expression of where editorial authority resides functions to reduce the number of potential conflicts. In the case of the Cuala Press, editorial authority was ostensibly held by W.B. Yeats, who was authorised to act as the press's adviser on commissions and unsolicited submissions. Elizabeth Yeats, as the press's director, was to manage its financial affairs and to oversee production, but not to take it upon herself to accept or reject manuscripts for publication. This speciously neat division of responsibilities was, however, fraught with potential for conflict on two accounts. Firstly, until late-1906 the agreement was merely verbal, and represented more of an informal family understanding than a legal contract. Secondly, the division of responsibilities worked to exacerbate the tension that underlies all publishing endeavours: that between literary excellence, on one hand, and financial survival, on the other. By investing W. B. Yeats with literary authority over the press's direction, but not requiring him to take responsibility for financial issues, the Cuala agreement tended to emphasise Yeats's conception of the press as an offshoot of his own literary career and as a high-minded – but not necessarily profit-making – cultural enterprise.

Elizabeth Yeats, on the other hand, had supported the poet financially throughout the 1880s, and was moreover using the profits of the Cuala Industries to support herself, Lily, a young family ward and their chronically impecunious artist father. As the family's sole means of support, the Cuala Press represented to Elizabeth Yeats an essential financial resource, and she was therefore prepared to suspend, if necessary, Parnassian idealism in order to keep it running. Further exacerbating this incendiary situation was the press's contextualisation within the volatile and somewhat over-involved Yeats clan, whose nominal head, John Butler Yeats, could at best sponsor only half-hearted peace-

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keeping operations. Small wonder that Michael B. Yeats, the son of W. B. Yeats and his wife George, recalls an aura of imminent disaster and acrimony always surrounding decision-making at the press: “affairs never really ran smoothly, and from my own very early years I can remember the constant atmosphere of tension that surrounded everything connected with Cuala and its affairs” (Michael B. Yeats in Preface to Miller, 1973: 7).

Two specific flashpoints at Cuala – one in 1906 and one in 1913 – serve as clues to underlying tensions at the press. As such they reveal that although Elizabeth Yeats never conceived of Cuala as a feminist press, she was aware of the necessity for her as a woman to defend her judgements against the often overbearing and dictatorial pronouncements of her elder brother – a man quick to deride her skills and highly derogatory in his opinion of her critical acumen. The first of these two conflicts arose over the submission to Elizabeth of a selection of poems by George Russell (writing under the pseudonym ‘Æ’) to be entitled By Still Waters. Relying, presumably, on the fact that Russell was already a Cuala author because W.B. Yeats had accepted his The Nuts of Knowledge as the press’s second publication in 1903, Elizabeth decided to gratify a family friend and to accept the new anthology for publication in 1906. Unbeknown to Elizabeth, her elder brother was still smarting over differences between himself and Russell over Yeats’s allegedly dictatorial management of the Abbey Theatre, a conflict which, running over into the new year, led Yeats in January 1906 to fire a priggish and self-righteous rejoinder to Russell, querying his judgement:

The antagonism, which is sometimes between you and me, comes from the fact that though you are strong and capable yourself you gather the weak and not very capable about you, and that I feel they are a danger to all good work. (Wade, 1954: 466)

The virulent letter which W.B. Yeats penned to Elizabeth upon discovering that Russell’s book had, without his approval as literary advisor, already been accepted by Cuala was sufficiently hostile to call in the pacifying services of their father. Attempting

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to broker “peace . . . between you and Lolly”, John Butler Yeats reproached his son for his arrogant and bombastic behaviour towards Elizabeth, praised her courage, and suggested W.B. Yeats resign if he could not work harmoniously within a prearranged (if only loosely so) agreement:

I think also you should treat Russell [Æ] . . . with great respect – after all a writer knows his own work, and he should be anxiously consulted, besides there is her [Lolly’s] amour propre which should count for *something* in all business. You must keep strictly to advising, otherwise you wreck everything. (Hone, 1983: 98)

Retaliating in kind, W.B. Yeats took his father at his word and risked a display of petulance by proffering his resignation. Elizabeth, by this time in New York on a visit to John Quinn, resolved matters by agreeing terms with W. B. Yeats for his return to Cuala. These were formally to set out his autonomy and right to be consulted first on all editorial issues, and her control over production management and internal press administration. Although the conflict had been amicably resolved, it raised issues of task demarcation and individual authority which were to resurface in constant displays of friction throughout the press’s working history. Sensing that familial prejudices, social thinking and economic influence were all stacked against her, Elizabeth Yeats, in a letter appealing to John Quinn, stated “I want to keep some control in my own Press”– a plaintive protest against incursion upon what she understood as her territorial rights (Hardwick, 1996: 144).

Although the 1906 contract between Elizabeth and W.B. Yeats attempted to place their informal understanding upon a more legally certain basis, within seven years of the agreement editorial authority was once again a fraught issue within Cuala. Edward Dowden, a friend of John Butler Yeats and formerly the Professor of English Studies at Trinity College Dublin had died in 1913, and his widow offered Cuala a selection of his poetry to be published anonymously under the title A Woman’s Reliquary. In part because he considered Dowden’s verse in this instance to fall below the high literary

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standards required of Cuala publications, and possibly in part because Yeats was at this time gathering backers for his appointment to Dowden's now-vacant chair, Yeats was furious when he discovered that Elizabeth had already accepted the anthology and had typeset the text. As press director, Elizabeth Yeats's instinct was to regard an idle press as a financial opportunity lost, and Cuala was at this point – as ever in its history – several hundred pounds in debt and without immediate prospects for repaying the sum. John Butler Yeats, sitting as family arbitrator, did not, however, regard financial need as sufficient defence against what amounted to a flagrant breach of the 1906 agreement, and he delivered to Elizabeth a swift reminder of whence Cuala's prestige derived: "were he [W.B. Yeats] not the Editor your press would fail. And as Editor his authority ought to be respected" (Hardwick, 1996: 181).

The price of W.B. Yeats's continued patronage of Cuala was the insertion of a note into each prospectus advertising A Woman's Reliquary disassociating Yeats from its production and stating that "This book is not a part of the Cuala series arranged by Mr W.B. Yeats" (Lewis, G., 1994: 111). That publication of the book occurred in 1913, but this note did not appear until Cuala's 1914 prospectus, could be read as an indication of Elizabeth's reluctance to comply with her brother's demand. In early December 1913, only weeks after the book's appearance, John Butler Yeats still considered it necessary to pour oil on the troubled waters of Cuala's sibling rivalry by insisting upon the merit of the collection in a letter to his eldest son:

I have looked through Dowden's book of poems and like them very much indeed and am grateful for them – for this history of his friendship with the present wife. And from a propagandist point of view I would say that they will do good to husbands and wives, who because of Dowden will read them and love each other more happily. (Hone, 1983: 169)

No manifest success at his own marriage despite an abundance of literary models, John Butler Yeats's special pleading on the book's behalf rings slightly hollow, as though

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feigned appreciation of the title were the necessary price of ensuring William's continued involvement in the family's chief money-making operation. Privately he confided to his eldest son that "possibly or probably after all [Cuala] may end in ghastly failure", but that dire prognosis was kept from his two daughters who were not, he assured W.B. Yeats, "show[n] your letters" (Hone, 1983: 97).

This atmosphere of family secrecy, of a father and son in league against the women who made demands upon them, perhaps accounts for the rather petulant, defensive tone which permeates Elizabeth Yeats's letters to W.B. Yeats and his wife George (who had also become drawn into Cuala's affairs) by the late-1930s. Post-independence Ireland and its relative political stability had not ensured a significantly more prosperous environment for Cuala publications. As a result, Cuala's operating deficits never ceased to loom large in the minds of the Yeats family. Nor, it transpired, had Elizabeth and W. B. Yeats's individual fields of responsibility even now been satisfactorily determined:

May I see the letter the Bank sent W.B? If I don't know what the Bank says to him and he to the Bank I am all at sea – and I am not a child after all – I am always quite straight forward with Willie naturally – it is my nature and it is certainly due to him. (1937; Cuala Press Archive: Box 8.1)

The emphatic assertions and querulous tone of these "weekly reports" (CPA: 8.1) from Elizabeth to George Yeats have arguably done much to perpetuate the image of Elizabeth as demanding, frustrating and erratic – the image which emerges with particular virulence in Murphy's Family Secrets. Yet, if read against the background of mounting debts, professional isolation and uncertainty as to her role, these letters reveal the myriad insecurities into which Elizabeth Yeats was cast by the refusal to permit her editorial autonomy. Working relationships at Cuala were placed under intolerable strain by the fact that Elizabeth Yeats controlled all the activities of the press, except the crucial activity of editorial selection. This situation thereby ensured that while the administrative

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demands of the business were her constant responsibility, she could nonetheless never take personal credit for its successes. Yeats herself never viewed this untenably contradictory situation in the light of feminist analysis. Yet, as conflicts over the power to publish recur as the *leitmotif* of contemporary women's publishing, Yeats's situation responds intriguingly to the very gender-based analyses she denied.

"AUGHT WOMEN MAY DO": CULTURE, POLITICS AND IRISH FEMINISM

The blurred identity and contradictory self-conception which Elizabeth Yeats experienced within Cuala is reflected on a wider scale in women's involvement in the Irish Renaissance and in the explicitly political wings of the burgeoning nationalist movement. As the fervent Irish nationalist Maud Gonne found in the closing years of the nineteenth century, the cultural nationalist movement in Dublin sought to perpetuate a classically Victorian dichotomised view of womanhood. Woman was at once the personification of Ireland and her mythical past – she was Eire, Kathleen ni Houlihan, Queen Maeve – and hence featured as a recurrent motif in nationalist iconography, but women as active *political* beings were severely discouraged by a conservative paradigm of what constituted appropriate female behaviour. According to this view, a woman's decorous study of the Irish language and folk-dancing were deemed seemly displays of cultural sympathy, but her more activist potential as an opposer of tenant evictions, as a public speaker or street activist were castigated as 'pollution' of a presumed innate female apoliticality. In perpetuating this constricting view of Irish womanhood, the nationalist movement actively obscured knowledge of earlier women-led political groups, such as Anna Parnell's (sister of Charles Stewart Parnell) foundation of the Ladies' Land League in 1880-81 (Ward, 1983: 4-39; Innes, 1993: 111-18). Male nationalists, by prohibiting female membership of political and intellectual societies of the 1890s such as the Celtic Literary Society and the Gaelic League, tended to belittle the legacy of the Ladies' Land

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League, presenting it as a coven of politicised viragos threatening to bring the respectability of the republican movement into disrepute. When Maud Gonne attempted to involve herself in activist Irish politics in 1899, she discovered that she was barred from membership of all the influential nationalist organisations, or was at best tolerated as an occasional (and silent) lady visitor.

The political and legal subordination of women in Ireland in the 1890s was, as elsewhere in Great Britain in the nineteenth century, obscured by a compensatory cult of womanhood, according to which the supposed moral and spiritual power of woman was exulted exactly as her concrete political rights were eroded or denied outright. W.B. Yeats, for all his involvement in artistically and politically progressive circles, was himself suffused in the mythology of the sexual double standard. Indeed, in his exultation of female intuition and spiritual superiority, he endorsed the ideology of separate spheres with all the idealistic vigour of Coventry Patmore's The Angel in the House (1854-62) but clothed in the botanical imagery of Ruskin's "Of Queens' Gardens" (1865):

What poor delusiveness is all this "higher education of women". Men have set up a great mill, called examinations, to destroy the imagination. Why should women go through it, circumstance does not drive *them*. They come out with no repose[,] no peacefulness – and their minds no longer quiet gardens full of secluded paths and umbrage circled nooks, but loud as chattering market places. (Kelly, 1986: 161)

Intriguingly, W.B. Yeats's cry of despair at the emergence of the university-educated New Woman directly contradicts the realities of his financial existence. For during the Yeats family's years in Bedford Park during the 1880s, it was Elizabeth Yeats, by means of her training as a Froebel kindergarten teacher and painting instructor, who sustained the family finances – ironically underwriting the impecunious W.B. Yeats's freedom to pen idealisations of ethereal, Celtic twilight beauties. That W.B. Yeats's antique conception of gender relations clashed so radically with the realities of Elizabeth Yeats's work at Cuala leads only to surprise that their conflicts over editorial direction were not more

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frequent. W.B. Yeats was, in the final analysis, making public his conventional views on femininity through paragraphs typeset, inked, printed and distributed by women working full-time in a demanding and laborious manual trade. In light of this underlying material reality, Yeats's conservative remarks take on new shades of irony, their intended message undercut by the very processes required for their dissemination: "a woman gets her thoughts through the influence of a man. A man is to her what work is to a man" (1955: 353).

The cult of Irish womanhood so prevalent in the 1890s Dublin set in which Elizabeth Yeats circulated was, however, counterpointed by the development of an Irish women's movement which negotiated the turbulent crosscurrents of nationalist and feminist politics. The movement produced a cluster of women's groups which reflect various reconciliations of women's rights with the Home Rule agenda. In response to her experience of emphatic marginalisation within the nationalist cultural and political milieu, Maud Gonne in 1900 established the women-only *Inghinidhe na h'Eireann* (Daughters of Ireland), a political lobby group which focused existing strains of women's support for home industries with a more activist nationalist agenda. Though it flourished in the first decade of the twentieth century, organising a triumphant Patriotic Children's Treat in 1900 to draw attention to the imperialist subtext of Queen Victoria's visit to Ireland, its gradual fracturing and decline hastened its subsumption within the more conventionally feminine *Cumann na mBan* (Council of Women) after April 1914. It was left to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington's suffrage lobby group, the Irish Women's Franchise League (established in 1908) to protest male nationalists' prioritisation of Home Rule over the granting of the vote to women by the Westminster parliament. The vibrant diversity of women's political involvement in early-twentieth-century Ireland contextualises Cuala's practice in a way usually overlooked by commentators focusing solely on the press's role as a literary and publishing phenomenon. Though Elizabeth and Lily Yeats personally

recoiled from the public profile of radical women such as Gonne, Sheehy Skeffington and Sinn Fein Council member Constance Markievicz, a more detailed examination of the period reveals that Cuala *was* prepared to exploit contemporary women's political networks, though only with profound ambivalence.

CONTINGENT SYMPATHY: CUALA AND THE BATTLE FOR IRISH WOMANHOOD

There can be no question that the Yeats sisters were aware of contemporary Irish women's activism in the early decades of the twentieth century, for their family's long association with intellectual discussion groups and the movement for Irish artistic revival put them in social contact with many of the era's key progressive figures. Moreover, in publishing work by contemporary thinkers, Elizabeth Yeats was constantly exposed to the shifting political tides of the Irish avant-garde. It appears incongruous, therefore, that in spite of her successful training as a teacher and her status as a self-employed woman, she nevertheless adhered to so conventional a view of women's capabilities. Yet, in this instance it is especially important to avoid the patronising retrospective judgements of posterity. That exposure to cultural liberalism did not prompt a similar liberalisation of Elizabeth Yeats's views on gender politics may be attributable to her highly insecure position within Dublin society as an Anglo-Irish Protestant championing Irish culture, and one attempting moreover to keep up middle-class appearances on an income inadequate to the task. Both Yeats sisters were sufficiently financially realistic to recognise that the newspapers and networks of radical women's political societies represented potential sales channels for Cuala goods, even if Cuala's directors privately abhorred the groups' leaders and recoiled from the public assertiveness of their political tactics.

In the early years of Cuala's foundation, its self-conception as a women's craft community was perhaps strongest, as the Industries' yearly scrapbooks, the *Leabhar Dun Eimire* (the Book of Dun Emer, 1903-05), reveal in their collections of photographs,

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creative writing pieces from the teenage work-girls, and lavishly illustrated drawings of traditional Irish motifs. It has the distinct air of a girls' school magazine, with Elizabeth and Lily presiding as favourite teachers, and Evelyn Gleeson as the older and more austere headmistress. Gleeson's earlier membership of the women's suffrage society, the Pioneers Club, suggests the possibility that this all-female community might in time have come to conceive of itself along more political lines, but the disentanglement of the Yeats sisters' printing and embroidery departments from Gleeson's craftworks in 1908, resulting in the legal separation of the Dun Emer Guild (which remained with Gleeson) from the Cuala Industries (run by the sisters), made any such political identification highly unlikely. Aside from Elizabeth and Lily's deep-seated social conservatism, their personal dislike of the nationalist heroine Maud Gonne drove them still further from potential recruitment into the ranks of the *Inghinidhe na h'Eireann*. The statuesque beauty who so captivated their elder brother was described as early as 1889 in a diary entry by Elizabeth as a self-regarding society belle, exploiting her wealth and looks to grandstand on the political stage:

Miss Gonne, the Dublin beauty (who is marching on to glory over the hearts of the Dublin youths), called today on Willie, of course, but also apparently on Papa. She is immensely tall and very stylish and well dressed in a careless way. She came in a hansom all the way from Belgravia and kept the hansom waiting while she was here. (Hardwick, 1996: 58-59)

In the always financially precarious Yeats household the sisters spared little sympathy for a wealthy English-born woman whose passionate interest in things Irish they disparagingly interpreted as a rich woman's hobby, whereas for them it represented a life-long cause and – in more prosaic terms – a business proposition.

It is in Dun Emer and Cuala's advertising material that the Industries' uneasy position at the confluence of Arts and Crafts revivalism, political nationalism and Irish feminism is most tellingly revealed. In a 1904 hand-lettered advertisement included in

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that year's *Leabhar Dun Eimire*, Irish women are emphatically encouraged to demonstrate their support for indigenous cultural revival through acts of conspicuous domestic consumption:

Decorate your house
with Dun Emer tufted rugs,
embroidered portieres and sofa
backs, put Dun Emer tapestries
on your walls and Dun Emer
books in your bookcases.
This is the duty of an Irish
woman. (1904: n.p)

In locating the duties of Irish womanhood so firmly within familial and household contexts, Dun Emer echoes the well-established rhetorical traditions of the Catholic Church – advocating the display of Irish identity through the semiotic elevation of domestic space. The appropriation of the Catholic Church's language of female self-sacrifice – hinted at in the final line of the advertisement – is here tempered by a more explicitly *political* appeal to Irish women to support the country's economy by purchasing items manufactured locally, such as those Dun Emer was producing. Through buying fine Irish handicrafts, the prospective purchaser is awarded the twin laurels of both feminine homemaker and patriotic economic participant.

A decade later in 1914, the outbreak of the First World War and the prolonged delay in granting Home Rule effected subtle variations in the tenor of Cuala advertising, for while the support of local industry remains a constant theme, vague appeals to “the duty of an Irish woman” have become eclipsed by the more immediately pressing demands of wartime patriotism:

Owing to the War, the usual exhibitions have not been held, and the promoters of this Industry find it very difficult to keep their girls employed.

On patriotic as well as artistic grounds it would be a great pity if the movement were allowed to suffer for want of the necessary encouragement, and it is hoped that all interested in Home Industries

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will take this opportunity of seeing and acquiring some of this beautiful work. (Miller, 1973: 68)

The exact nature of the patriotism encouraged here is artfully blurred: culturally it is clearly Irish, although it remains unclear whether in political terms such an Irish patriotism is in support of the Greater British war effort, or whether, on the other hand, it supports the view of the First World War as a battle for the preservation of English imperial interests, and one thus at odds with the nationalist cause. By remaining ambiguous on this divisive political question Cuala is, tactically, multiplying the range of its potential customers. Cuala's advertising thus walks the difficult line between emphasising a distinct Irish cultural identity for its products without alienating Protestant anti-Home Rule sectors of the Irish and English public by insisting on a similarly distinct Irish political identity.

By 1923, amidst the daily anarchy of Irish life during the civil war, Cuala's verdict on the appropriate level of intervention by women in public affairs reaches its most explicit – and highly conventional – articulation. A poetic tribute to Cuala penned by the writer Susan Mitchell, entitled "Cuala Abu!", was included in A Message for Every Day, a private printing commission undertaken by Cuala for the philanthropist Emmeline Cadbury:

Cuala Abu!
Gladly we come to our work every morning,
Daughters of Ireland, faithful and true;
Some setting stitches to help your adorning
Some printing magic words, Cuala, for you.
Let men talk politics, throw words or brandish
sticks,
Little we care what their folly may do,
Ours not to talk or fight, but work with all our might
Building up home here in Cuala for you.

We are the daughters of Maeve and Finuala,
Of fair Fionavar and of great Granuile,
Proudly we strive here as children of Cuala,
Still to be worthy the race of the Gael.
O Mother Country dear, surely your day draws near,

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Let us not shirk aught women may do,
But make ourselves more fair, and lovely homes
prepare,
Fit for the Queen you were. Cuala Abu!
(Hardwick, 1996: 223)

Depicted as elegantly cloistered from the turbulence of Irish politics, Cuala's workers are here celebrated for ensconcing themselves in a sedate world of feminine handicraft, awarded praise for their nationalism as "Daughters of Ireland" precisely because they have removed themselves from the bruising mêlée of actual nationalist activism.

Susan Mitchell's poem "Cuala Abu!" here stands in interesting counterpoint to contemporary developments within Irish women's politics. The turn-of-the-century *Inghinidhe na h'Eireann* had, like Dun Emer, aimed "to support and popularise Irish manufacture" and to "encourage the study of Gaelic, of Irish literature, History, Music and Art". These laudable constitutional objectives were, however, emphatically subordinated to the group's primary objective – "the re-establishment of the complete independence of Ireland" (Ward, 1983: 51). Yet once *Inghinidhe na h'Eireann* had been largely incorporated within the umbrella group of *Cumann na mBan*, its identity changed from that of an autonomous women's political group to that of a women's auxiliary, the new group's constitution still idealistically committing itself to the goal of "Irish liberty", but now prescribing the inherently helpmeet means of "assist[ing] in arming and equipping a body of Irishmen for the defence of Ireland" (Ward, 1983: 93). *Cumann na mBan*'s organisational identity was closely tied to that of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and, though it raised money for the IRB's 'Defence of Ireland Fund', in reality it wielded no decision-making power at the level of policy formation. The eclipse of Irish feminist identity on the wider political stage by the nationalist debate is reflected in the increasingly conservative tone of Cuala's advertisements after the failure of the 1916 uprising. If ever Cuala had portrayed itself as a women's

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business, or at least as one with a special appeal to the loyalties of Ireland's politicised female citizenry, it now subsumed all such appeals within a decorous insistence on women's moral – not political – power for change.

The gradual process of ossification by which Cuala changed from a women's organisation prepared to place advertisements in the *Inghinidhe na h'Eireann's* feminist and nationalist newspaper, *Bean na h'Eireann*, to one espousing decorous female removal from the national arena where “men talk politics, throw words or brandish sticks” is illustrated by two key incidents. At both points – one in 1916 in the wake of the “terrible beauty” unleashed by the defeated Easter Uprising, and one in 1923 during the guerrilla conditions of the civil war (Yeats, W. B., 1990: 228-30) – the cloister-like peace of the Cuala Industries' cottage in Churchtown near Dundrum was shattered by emissaries from a wider sphere of political action. In both incidents the Yeats sisters' disparaging verdicts on these seminal events in the Irish independence struggle are noteworthy for their outright condemnation of female involvement.

The short-lived Irish Republic proclaimed from the steps of Dublin's General Post Office in April 1916 appears to have acknowledged the intensity of women's political involvement in Ireland since the turn of the century, both in its equal inclusion of the sexes in its proclamation – demanding the attention of “IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN” – and especially in the prominent combat role played by Countess Markievicz, who held the strategic post of the Royal College of Surgeons on the west side of St. Stephen's Green in central Dublin (Mitchell and Ó Snodaigh, 1985: 17-18). Yet at Cuala, the Industries' middle-class Anglo-Irish directors discerned a gulf of political sympathy between themselves and the working-class Irish girls they supervised:

I have Cuala open and going on as usual, I don't discuss things at all with the girls. Eileen Colum [sister of the Republican figure Padraic Colum] has a silly elated look . . . two of the girls were gone yesterday

when I went back after lunch, they both have Sinn Fein brothers, they both appeared again this morning looking happy, I asked no questions. (Lewis, G., 1994: 133)

Lily Yeats's impatience with the naïve idealism of Eileen Colum's "silly elated look" may in part reflect the then-current Irish popular opinion that the uprising was ill-timed and misconceived – "a piece of childish madness", as Lily remarked in correspondence with John Quinn (qtd in Murphy, 1995: 201). But, read in conjunction with later comments by her sister on several of the work-girls' involvement in low-level nationalist demonstrations in 1923, Lily's remarks can moreover be interpreted as encoding disapproval of female meddling in the emphatically masculine political sphere:

Before the serious trouble of my sister's illness – we had another upset[,] my two printing girls were arrested – the silly girls belonged to the *Cumann na mBan* – the Women's Republican Society – we are finishing the book in spite of this upset. (Miller, 1973: 83)

Irish politics is infamous for its Byzantine complexity and its tendency towards near-infinite factional fragmentation. But it remains a curious anomaly that two women whose personal convictions and economic livelihoods were based on the distinctiveness of Irish cultural identity could at the same time distance themselves so emphatically from contemporary movements to draw that cultural distinctiveness to a Republican political conclusion. While prepared to advertise in Irish feminist and nationalist journals, and willing to invoke patriotic conceptions of the duty of Irish womanhood, the Yeats sisters were nevertheless ambivalent in the extreme about involving Cuala in such networks, convincing themselves of the economic necessity of so doing just as they recoiled from the risk of any possible political taint. In attempting to explain this profound ambivalence, critics have had recourse to the social and economic forces which impinged upon the sisters' lives. Lily – always pining for a life of conventional domestic femininity which her father John Butler Yeats's financial irresponsibility made unattainable – observed at age 45 that the role of breadwinner which she had been forced to assume had proven a drain rather than a liberating force:

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The mistake with my life has been that I have not had a woman's life but an uncomfortable, unsatisfying mixture of a man's and a woman's, gone out all day earning my living, working like a man for a woman's pay, then kept house, the most difficult housekeeping on nothing certain a year, brought up Ruth [her ward], saw to Hilda's education . . . and above all never lived at home except when ill. Next incarnation I hope I will be all woman and have a woman's life. (Lewis, G., 1994: 109)

Lily makes clear that she had been self-supporting through force of circumstance, rather than through preference or conviction. Yet Elizabeth, who had striven to acquire art school training and who thrived on an active life of public engagements, displays a curiously similar reluctance to articulate her position in feminist terms. Her biographer, Joan Hardwick, attributes this to the early, male-dominated atmosphere of the Yeats household, asking "had the way in which [Elizabeth] had been brought up, always pushed to the fringes of political talk, men's talk, robbed her of the confidence to make her own political judgements?" (1996: 179). Focusing less on conjectural psychological causes and more on historical context, I would argue that economic factors underlay Lily's – and especially the more emancipated Elizabeth's – political ambivalence. The aristocratic Constance Markievicz and the orphaned Maud Gonne both benefited from substantial private incomes, allowing them the freedom, both financially and socially, to engage directly in controversial political activity. The Yeats sisters, required to work long hours to ensure even a basic livelihood for their family, and struggling socially to maintain their grip on middle-class respectability, could not afford to indulge any such desire for direct political involvement. Lacking the free time which private wealth might have secured for political activity, they also lacked the insulation which that wealth would have ensured from disparaging public criticism. If there appears to be a troubling contradiction between Elizabeth's belief in higher education and paid work for women and the absence of her expressed political views to the same effect, it appears less contradictory when placed against the socio-economic background of early-twentieth-century Ireland: Elizabeth was forced to make concessions to the status quo in order both to receive

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financial and critical credit for her work and simultaneously to circulate within the middle-class cultural circles which she felt to be her own.

WOMEN IN THE PRIVATE PRESS MOVEMENT

In critical work about the European English-language private press movement there is a tendency to classify presses according to two peaks in the artistic revival of private hand-printing and publishing: the first is taken to occur around the late-1880s when William Morris and typographer Emery Walker established the Kelmscott Press; the second peak is located as beginning in the years after the First World War and continuing into the 1930s. Considered in relation to this chronological sequence, the Cuala Press appears remarkable for its longevity: begun as the Dun Emer Press in 1902, the press ran under Elizabeth Yeats's direction until her death in January 1940; it was subsequently continued under the guidance of George Yeats, W.B. Yeats's widow, until its last title, Elizabeth Rivers' Stranger in Aran, was published in 1946. Between September 1969 and 1986 Cuala was revived by the Dolmen Press's Liam Miller and W. B. Yeats's offspring, Anne and Michael B. Yeats, publishing a selection of titles relating to the various members of the Yeats family.⁷ Thus, taking into account all three of its phases, the Cuala press was operational for a total period of around 60 years, bridging the two periods usually considered to represent the highpoints of private press achievement, and outliving the later period by several decades. The broad expanse of Cuala's operational history has attracted comment on the press's association with Morris, Walker and the publishing luminaries of the first period (Miller, 1971 and 1973; Smythe, 1973; Cave, 1983), yet the

⁷ Titles from the revival phase of Cuala include: Reflections by W. B. Yeats (passages selected from the poet's journals, 1971); A Little Book of Drawings by Jack Yeats (1971); Letters from Bedford Park by John Butler Yeats (1971); and The Speckled Bird (a novel by W. B. Yeats, 1973) The constant recurrence of the Yeats surname reinforces the suspicion that by this stage the press had begun to live off its literary capital.

contrasts between Cuala's practices and those of other modernist presses in the second period have generally been overlooked. This omission appears particularly problematic in the light of a feminist analysis of Cuala, given that several of the prominent private presses of the interwar period were controlled, or jointly managed, by women. Such contextualisation of Cuala thus highlights its place within a western European women's publishing tradition, while at the same time underlining the specific geographical, social and economic factors which distinguish Cuala from its more wealthy – though often less professionally-minded – contemporaries.

Four private presses run by women flourished in the 1920s and early-1930s, providing a striking contrast to the goals and organisational methods of Cuala: Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas's Plain Editions was active in Paris between 1930 and 1935; Harry and Caresse Crosby's imprints, Editions Narcisse (1927) and The Black Sun Press (1927-31), published English-language poetry and prose for the Parisian and expatriate American avant-garde; Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press developed from its roots as an archetypal modernist hand-press in 1917 to establish itself as a still extant commercial trade publishing house; and Nancy Cunard's Hours Press, active in Normandy and later Paris from 1928, published contemporary poets such as Robert Graves, Laura Riding and the early Samuel Beckett, whom it claims credit for discovering. Because three of these presses were established outside of Great Britain, they fall largely beyond the scope of this survey and, aside from the Hogarth Press – which first published Virginia Woolf's groundbreaking essay in feminist materialist criticism, A Room of One's Own (1929) – they are difficult to represent as direct antecedents of 1970s commercial feminist publishing developments. Second-wave feminist publishing houses make reference to Cuala as an historical precursor, yet they less frequently draw explicit connections between women in modernist publishing and their own politico-literary preoccupations. Hence these interwar publishing houses are

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revealing more for their contrast with the contemporary Cuala than they are significant in foreshadowing the outlines of second-wave feminist developments. In analysing their financial bases and literary agendas, Elizabeth Yeats's print professionalism and unwavering commitment to high-standard typography and design emerge more distinctly.

Private presses may be arranged along a continuum strung between the twin poles of vanity publishing and non-commercial experimental publishers. While the two types of press are not – strictly speaking – mutually exclusive, this approach, when employed in relation to the presses analysed here, suggests a division between Plain Editions and the Crosby imprints on one hand (presses which can be regarded chiefly as self-publishing outlets) and the Hogarth Press and Hours Press on the other (presses whose commitment was to an encompassing literary movement beyond the friends and immediate associates of the owners themselves). Yet underwriting all four of these presses were private incomes, often (as in the case of the Crosbys and of Cunard) substantial ones (Crosby, 1955; Chisholm, 1979). This economic buttressing immediately distinguishes the nature of such operations from the committed, but perpetually cash-strapped, workings of Cuala. For the Yeats sisters' publishing goals could be summarised thus: to create an audience for progressive modern Irish literature; to generate sufficient capital to ensure the continuance of the publishing programme; and to sponsor employment for local Irish girls. What is made manifest is Cuala's self-conception as a component part of broader cultural and economic networks; it conceived of itself as a contributor to complex and interdependent human groupings both material and cultural.

The Parisian private presses, by contrast, are distinguished by their financial and political isolationism. Harry Crosby, who with his wife Caresse founded Editions Narcisse (named after their pet whippet) in 1927, underwrote his impulsive diversification into publishing with his immense inheritance as the nephew of American banker, J.P.

Morgan. The first Editions Narcisse list, the printing of which was subcontracted to a local Parisian firm, consisted of two slim volumes of poetry by Harry Crosby and two by Caresse.⁸ The lofty summary of the press's foundation penned by Caresse in her autobiography, The Passionate Years (1955) heightens its air of vanity publishing and of amounting to a rich couple's *divertissement*: "We knew that some day we must see our poems in print – it did not occur to us to submit them to a publishing house – the simplest way to get a poem into a book was to print the book" (156). Editions Narcisse was thus not so much a commercial publishing house as the result of authorial fiat.

The tiny print runs for Editions Narcisse and Black Sun books – often as low as 30, and with even these copies sometimes marked "not for sale" – immediately distinguishes the Crosbys' conception of publishing from that of Cuala. Elizabeth Yeats did not allow her conviction as to the cause of Irish literature to obscure her awareness that only a press recording a profit could hope to espouse any cause at all. The penny-pinching revealed in the minutely-detailed accounting books collected in the Cuala Press Archive at Trinity College Library stands in marked contrast to Harry Crosby's grandiose high-mindedness when pestered with prosaic financial concerns:

For the poet there is love and there is death and infinity and for other things to assume such vital importance is out of the question and that is why I refuse to take the question of money seriously. (qtd in Ford, 1975: 201)

The precariousness of Cuala's financial existence – its recording of postage costs for each book or letter sent, its brushes with bankruptcy when reams of unused paper turned mouldy – tempers the preciousness that informs so much private press publishing with an awareness of business realities and the exigencies of daily office administration. The precise *extent* of Cuala's association with wider feminist and nationalist circles was, during its own lifetime, subject to fluctuation (and is now equally subject to critical

⁸ These were Painted Shores and The Stranger by Caresse Crosby, and Red Skeletons and Sonnets for Caresse by Harry Crosby (all 1927).

debate), but the impinging *reality* of those external links and associations remains incontrovertible.

The second facet of Cuala which distinguishes its operations from those of other, non-commercial, presses run by women is the extent of its staff's involvement in the publishing process. For Elizabeth Yeats, as later for Virginia Woolf and Nancy Cunard, the essence of publishing was not the launch of the finished book, but the painstakingly involved processes which led to its appearance. All three women mastered the technical practices central to the hand-printing and publishing processes: design, typography, composition, inking, backing, compiling and finishing. The remarks of Gertrude Stein in relation to her imprint, Plain Editions, by contrast suggest a couple playing at being publishers – a lesbian equivalent of the Crosbys' financially-cushioned self-absorption. This pleasantly self-sustaining delusion was made possible by the fact that Stein and Toklas published, but did not themselves print, the five Stein books which appeared under the press's colophon:

Here we are in business, at least Alice is the imaginary editor and I am the author but then I have always been the author and she has always been the manager but now in despair at using up our energies to shove the unshoveable we have concluded it will take less energy and get more results if we do it ourselves. (qtd in Ford, 1975: 236)

Stein's deliciously robust distillation of non-commercial publishing's *raison d'être* – to “shove the unshoveable” – is as appealing in its staccato expression as it is undeniable as economic fact. Yet behind this admission that Plain Editions was a means to circumvent commercial houses' repeated rejection of Stein's experimental prose lies a substratum of economic privilege. It calls into question the dividing line between a private press, dedicated to publishing the literary expression of an artistic coterie, and a vanity press, existing primarily to bolster the artistic conceit of its owner. The remarks and poetry of Caresse Crosby perhaps exemplify the risks inherent in any non-commercial

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press underwritten by affluent egotism: "If I composed a sonnet before breakfast [Harry] would have it in print before dinner" (Crosby, 1955: 155). The Cuala Press may at times have appeared to constitute a Yeats family self-promotional exercise, but it maintained virtually across its lifespan a sufficiently diverse group of writers and a constantly high standard of printing to rebut any charge of self-indulgent dilettantism. In so doing, it suggests that for any press to be understood as 'feminist' not only is the managerial involvement of women crucial, but so too is an attitude of outward-looking social commitment and the assumption of a responsibility to proselytise to a larger public. As the contemporary publishing commentator and Virago founder Carmen Callil observed in a very different context, "it was not enough for us to publish for ourselves".

CONCLUSION: THE IMPLICATIONS OF REVIVALISM

Much feminist literary history utilises metaphors of loss and recovery – of 'lost' women writers rediscovered by resourceful critics, of archaeological digs to unearth forgotten women's histories – yet the Cuala Press as a publishing entity can hardly claim to have suffered the slight of obscurity, for revivals have proven its veritable stock-in-trade. Since the death of Elizabeth Yeats in 1940, the press's name has rarely been absent from Britain and Ireland's records of fine publishers. Beginning with Liam Miller's revival and re-establishment of Cuala in 1969, Cuala's academic and literary fortunes have proven remarkably buoyant: in 1970 the Irish University Press began to produce limited facsimile editions of the whole of the Dun Emer/Cuala backlist; the Cuala poetry sheet A Broadside was revived and hand-coloured illuminated copies of W.B. Yeats's poems were sold from the press's new base in Dalkey, Co. Dublin; the National Book League in June 1973 mounted a prominent exhibition of Cuala's works; and by the mid-1970s the press had been well integrated into the Dublin Celtic tours experience. Nor does this nostalgic trend display signs of imminently abating: the Vermont-based company Sean N6s

advertises on the Internet its facsimile Cuala Press prints under the heading “A Unique Tradition in Hand Printing and Illumination” (1997-98)⁹. But amidst these displays of interest in the legacy of the Cuala Press, what was in its time an innovative and principled cultural endeavour has ossified into conveniently digestible Irish kitsch – ‘Oirish’ culture which, as the Sean Nós Webpage somewhat confusedly has it, “bespeaks a unity of mind and heart” and “evidence[s] a rootedness ever-the-more unique in our own age”.

The question of how the reputation of the Cuala Press can have consistently risen while that of its founder and director, Elizabeth Yeats, has been repeatedly belittled goes to the heart of political, academic and publishing trends in the Republic of Ireland since the Second World War. Because the Cuala revival period developed against the conservative background of Eamon de Valera’s Roman Catholic theocracy, those responsible for engineering the press’s resurgence tended to emphasise its connection with the esteemed name of W. B. Yeats (Nobel Laureate and Irish Senator) and the politically-fashionable period of the Irish Renaissance. The effect of this manoeuvre was that a press staffed, organised and headed by women came to be understood primarily in nationalist – rather than feminist – terms. In part this reclassification of the press away from the category of women’s history is attributable to the still-embryonic state of the Irish women’s movement in the late-1960s and early- to mid-1970s. Yet the personality and convictions of Elizabeth Yeats herself also militated against the mounting of feminist analyses of Cuala. Elizabeth Yeats’s Laodicean political outlook and her seeming conservatism on gender issues appeared pale enticements to a modern academic women’s movement beguiled by the activist dynamism of Sheehy Skeffington, Gonne and Markievicz. Yet, as academic feminist research into Irish women’s history has developed since the 1970s, the urge to create a feminist historical pantheon has waned, and much productive research has emerged from utilising insights and methodologies derived from

⁹ The Internet address for the Sean Nós 1997-98 Webpage is: <http://www.seannos.com>.

feminist historiography to analyse the lives of women who would not themselves have identified as feminist. Viewed in this light, recent feminist-informed work about Elizabeth Yeats such as Hardwick's biography and Lewis's press history move beyond their subject's stated distrust of Edwardian feminism to critique the complex ways in which gender assumptions informed Elizabeth Yeats's subjectivity, and her own highly ambivalent internalisation and rejection of the movement's ideas. It is not a question of attributing to Yeats a retrospective, closet feminist identity, but of contextualising the subject of *Cuala* within a specific moment of Irish historical consciousness.

That the *Cuala* Press has, within the forgoing decade, begun to be reconceptualised as a women's publishing operation derives in part from the trade prominence of feminist publishing houses, whose editors (such as Pandora's Philippa Brewster) have employed their industry status to commission books reflecting the history of women's involvement in print media. The existence of Irish feminist publishing houses, such as Dublin's Attic Press, moreover demonstrates a market niche towards which such books can be directed.¹⁰ The implicit corollary of this situation is, however, that the visibility of women's publishing history is tied to the continued market prominence of contemporary women's publishers, and that, were the contemporary feminist book market to falter, the production of books about women's publishing history would atrophy accordingly. The fluid connection between past lives and present consciousness may thus work against the maintenance of feminist historical knowledge exactly as, in the past 30 years, it has appeared to work in its favour. Women's studies is a discipline that has long bemoaned the necessity of 'reinventing the wheel' in having

¹⁰ Attic Press is still in existence, though in an Autumn 1998 news update on its Internet homepage Attic announced its sale to academic publisher Cork University Press. The report cites Attic's co-founder and Publisher, Róisín Conroy: "it is time for Attic Press to pass the pen to a new and younger generation of women at Cork University Press . . . who are emerging with fresh ideas and approaches. These are the minds that now need to demand the further changes necessary for women into the next century". Attic Press's Webpage is: <http://www.iol.ie/~atticirl>.

continually to *re*-recover the texture of women's historical experience (Spender, D., ed., 1983). The realisation that the visibility of the entire academic field may be further dependent on fluctuating publishing industry profits comes, therefore, in the guise of a sobering realisation. Women's publishing history represents more than a talismanic image with which modern-day feminist publishing collectives can decorate their publicity flyers and validate a claim to historical continuity. The proliferation and availability of research into the legacy of women's print communication stands, in effect, as an augury for the health of their modern-day inheritors.

‘BOOKS OF INTEGRITY’: DILEMMAS OF RACE AND AUTHENTICITY IN FEMINIST PUBLISHING

We are idealists in our aims but realists in our publishing practice. We have to make difficult choices between ‘good’ politics and ‘good’ writing, between a too-expensive book and no book at all, between passion and survival.

– The Women’s Press, “Feminism and Publishing” (1979: 33)

In the early years of the 1970s, a newly revitalised feminist movement combined a focus on the position of women in society with the New Left’s conviction that the written word was subject to political control. The result of this fusion was a powerful critique of the contemporary publishing industry. Literary and commercial presses did not, feminists argued, act in the role of benevolent men of letters, graciously eschewing base commercial motive in their crusade to disseminate culturally improving titles. Rather, they acted as gatekeepers for public discourse. By bestowing or withholding the crucial imprimatur of publication, publishing houses furthered specifically *ideological* ends. Cultural practice in general, and publishing in particular, were reconceptualised by the women’s movement as forms of covert political policing of a distinctly *unfree* market of ideas. This recognition of the fact that the commercial book trade operated not according to the high-minded dictates of liberal tolerance but according to capitalistic, masculinist interests potentially in conflict with the second-wave feminist agenda was the primary understanding on which feminist alternative publishing practice was based. Recognising that publishing was inherently ideological, the women’s movement vowed to appropriate such practice for explicitly women-centred political ends. Radical political consciousness would, it was assumed, prevent feminist publishers from wielding

the power to publish as a tool for silencing, as had mainstream presses before them.

Political integrity – that notoriously slippery quality – would act as a check on demagoguery.

Feminist publishing's conviction of its ethical self-consciousness was, perhaps, what left the movement so vulnerable to attack in the late-1970s and 1980s from women of colour who felt alienated from the predominantly middle-class, first world agenda of the feminist presses.¹ Searching in vain for prominent black authors on the lists of the

¹ Throughout this chapter, and the thesis as a whole, I utilise various terms to discuss race-based activism within the women's movement: black (or Black) feminism; third world feminism; women of colour activism; multicultural feminism; Chicana/Latina feminism; and womanism. Because this chapter maps over 20 years of developments in women's movement thinking, and because it uses transatlantic examples to counterpoint the British publishing experience, no one term can hope to capture the multifarious nuances of debates around gender and race across the period as a whole. Rather than select a single term, and thus preserve in aspic the parameters of the debate at any one point in time, this discussion utilises the terminology preferred by the writer or publishing house under discussion. Many writers and critics, for example Barbara Smith, moreover employ terms such as 'Black' and 'women of colo(u)r' simultaneously, thus further mitigating against the use of a misleadingly universalist terminology in framing this discussion (Smith, Barbara, and Beverly Smith, 1983).

Briefly, the diverse origins and political associations of the various terms might be summarised as follows. 'Black' has become the most popularised term in racially-focused feminist thought, continuing as it does the tactic of validating a formerly derogatory adjective originally championed by the Black Consciousness and Black Power movements of the late-1960s and early-1970s (see Smith, B., [1977] 1986; Davis, A., 1981; hooks, 1981; Collins, 1991). The merits of capitalisation constitute a further sub-debate in this area, with some critics regarding the use of uppercase as a logical extension of the valorisation strategy. Others regard capitalisation as tactically inappropriate "until the label white is also capitalized; otherwise the effect is, once again, the special and prejudicial setting aside of blacks as Other" (Kramarae and Treichler, 1992: 73).

The term 'women of colo(u)r' arose in protest against the dichotomising tendencies of the black/white binary, and it attempts to destabilise such thought patterns by highlighting both the diversity of non-Caucasian women (for example Puerto Rican-American women, Latinas, First Nation Canadians, Maori women and Aboriginal Australian women), as well as their commonalities and allied concerns (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983). The denomination 'third world women' achieved prominence in the early- to mid-1980s in response to demands that first world feminists (including feminists of colour) look beyond the borders of developed nations to acknowledge the international economic relationships which serve to perpetuate women's oppression in the developing world (Davies, Miranda, 1983; Brydon and Chant, 1989).

'Multiculturalism', a term recurrent in the policy statements of political parties of the centre-Left during the 1980s (Cashmore, 1996), indicates a desired ethnic and cultural pluralism which is not only multiracial (in the sense of advocating the peaceful interrelationship of black and white populations) but which also embraces the variety of ethnic identifications amongst Caucasians (for example Jews, Serbians, Greek-Australians, Italo-Canadians and Polish Americans). Finally, the term 'womanism', associated specifically with the African-American writer Alice Walker, proposes a means for black feminists to distance their socio-intellectual programmes from the white, middle-class, WASP priorities traditionally associated with the term 'feminism'. Walker derives her neologism from the adjective "womanish", used in black

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women's presses, women of colour critiqued the self-selecting and elitist character of feminist concerns, arguing that only a women's movement representative of *all* women was worthy of the name (Smith, B., 1986 [1977], 1989; Smith, B., and Moraga, 1996; Gabriel and Scott, 1993). The impact of this debate around issues of race was not of course confined solely to the field of feminist publishing; it in fact radically reshaped the identity and profile of feminism as a social and cultural movement over the course of the following two decades (Simons, M., 1979; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983). Yet within feminist publishing, the debate initiated a return to critical speculation about the specific nature of feminist press practice of a kind not undertaken with such analytical vigour since the early-1970s: what structure characterised a truly 'feminist' press; what degree of multiracial representation on its list was appropriate; could the cause of women of colour be strategically advanced through publishing their writings, or was the presence of these women at editorial decision-making level an indispensable element of any multicultural politics? As attention turned to the varieties and priorities of feminist publishing practice, the mere existence of feminist presses was increasingly perceived to be, of itself, inadequate. Having achieved a degree of market leverage within the book industry, feminist publishing now came under attack from groups sufficiently close to its ideals to feel its impact, but sufficiently alienated from it campaigns to demand expansion of its agenda. As an internal critique, this rigorous re-appraisal of the industry's aims was undoubtedly necessary and significantly overdue. Yet, like all internal debates, it ran the risk of creating divisive factions within the fragile feminist press community which were vulnerable to exploitation by a largely hostile publishing mainstream.

vernaculars to describe young girls displaying "outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behaviour (Walker, 1984: xi).

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In charting the development of this important internal debate over diversity in feminist publishing, I identify three stages in an on-going feminist discussion, moving from an incipient awareness of feminist publishing's racial specificity, through challenges from alternative, women-of-colour-controlled presses, to agitation for representation of black women and women of colour at managerial level across the entire publishing industry. In tracing this pattern of development I am conscious of imposing a somewhat specious academic order on what was and is an infinitely interlinked and complex publishing sector. Further heightening the artificial orderliness of such an analysis are the wild discrepancies of scale which cluster about any such discussion of feminist publishing and its social context. For racial issues of enormous social significance were embodied in presses staffed by only a handful of women, although these presses in turn demonstrated a market for books by women of colour with broad-scale commercial and cultural ramifications. In this sense, feminist publishing acts as an intriguing microcosm of trends across Western feminism as a whole in the late-1970s and 1980s: it operates as a focal point where debates over access to cultural image-making achieve their most concrete manifestation.

My analysis of dilemmas of race in feminist publishing focuses on those British women's presses most closely associated with multicultural writing – The Women's Press, Sheba Feminist Publishers, Black Woman Talk and Urban Fox Press – although I also invoke the distinctive experience of transatlantic women's presses, in particular the ground-breaking New York City imprint, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. Beginning with the issue of organisation and autonomy in feminist publishing, I analyse how second-wave feminism – an intellectual and social movement in its origins critical of capitalist structures – moves into the publishing marketplace in order to proselytise its political message. Taking as my focus The Women's Press, Britain's second largest feminist house, and a press with a distinctive profile for promoting third world and black

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women's writing, I analyse how oppositional politics can achieve a precarious reconciliation with capitalist economics, and the multiple tensions which may arise as a result. Turning to publishing initiatives by women of colour, in particular the 1980s British presses Sheba and Black Woman Talk, I consider challenges to the corporate nature of The Women's Press and these collectivist presses' championing of writing by British black and South-Asian women. Finally, I focus upon the vexed question of women of colour's access to editorial and policy-making positions within the publishing industry, calling into question the concept of 'authenticity' in debates over racial representations. These investigations prompt potentially unsettling questions about the directions in which feminist publishing is currently developing: specifically, can feminist publishing broker alternative and more favourable terms to ensure its future financial survival and continued cultural receptivity?

THE WOMEN'S PRESS:

LIVE AUTHORS. LIVE ISSUES. LIVELIER BOARDROOM

The Women's Press enjoys a high public profile and one of the most distinctive brand name identities amongst English-language publishers. Its B-format paperback fiction titles sport stripy spines, a joky steam iron logo ("Press = iron – geddit?" as the Sunday Times once quipped) and original cover graphics (Macaskill, 1991: 84). The Press has come to be identified by the book-buying public, and in particular by feminists, as indelibly associated with new varieties of feminist writing (Macaskill, 1991: 84; Bonner et al., 1992: 100). In particular, the Press trades in its advertising on its association with black and third world women's writing and the committedly political, cutting-edge tone that this lends the firm: in the mid- to late-1980s it proclaimed itself the harbinger of "Live Authors. Live Issues" and in the late-1990s it promises "Books of Integrity by Women Writers" (The Women's Press, 1998: 1). Given that two perceptions – that of a

small independent press and that of a press committed to writing by women of colour – constitute the twin poles of the public perception of The Women's Press, it is salutary to outline a brief company history and to show that both assumptions are, in fact, distortions of the corporate reality. Furthermore, this discussion takes The Women's Press's ambiguous status *vis-à-vis* issues of independence and of black women's writing as a starting point to spark a broader discussion of the dilemmas surrounding feminist publishing as a whole. Firstly, can editorial autonomy ever be ensured without financial ownership or shareholding power on the part of committed editors? Secondly, what are the ideological ramifications of a press run predominantly by white women marketing itself as an outlet for the voices of women from racial minorities?

The foundation of The Women's Press was prompted by the notable success of Virago, Britain's first feminist press, set up in 1972. Relying on a list of forgotten women's classics which mainstream houses had allowed to drop out of print, Virago was able to capitalise on second-wave feminism's thirst for antecedents by producing feminist-informed texts in attractively packaged trade paperback format. The Women's Press followed in Virago's wake with the initial steps towards its organisation being taken in 1977. It was established both in emulation of Virago's proven success as a feminist publishing venture, and in challenge to Virago's monopoly on the expanding feminist book-buying market. Like Virago, The Women's Press initially comprised a core of dedicated individual women, surrounded by "a volunteer advisory group of feminists involved in publishing, scholarship and the media" (The Women's Press, 1979: 33). Yet from its inception, The Women's Press was keen to distinguish itself from its more established rival by casting its radical intent in the right-on language of late-1970s political psychology:

We reflect the wish to externalise and thereby change and form women's reality, the reality of our perceptions, potentialities and selves. As feminist publishers we express the cultural element of a

consciousness-raising dynamic, a questioning awareness of value and power which has its roots in each of our consciousnesses and its collectivity in the WLM [women's liberation movement]. (The Women's Press, 1979: 32)

The association between the two presses goes further than competition for the same market, and in fact runs also to structural issues of ownership and financing. Virago's first ten titles had been published with the necessary financial backing of Quartet Books, Virago only leaving the Quartet group in 1976 after sharp disagreements over the extent of its founders' editorial decision-making power. Subsequently, Quartet was itself purchased by Palestinian businessman Naim Attallah's Namara group, a disparate collection of entrepreneurial, retail and publishing interests (Spicer, 1996; Owen, U., 1998). Hence, when New Zealand-born editor Stephanie Dowrick approached Attallah in 1977 with the idea of setting up a feminist press, Attallah was able to discern both an immediate market and an appropriate niche within his media empire for such an enterprise.

The Women's Press presents a startlingly incongruous profile within the Namara group, sandwiched as it is between Attallah's ownership of the right-wing Literary Review, and his managing directorships of the Establishment hallmarks Asprey's and Mappin & Webb.² It is a politically precarious position for The Women's Press, and one which led to a degree of scorn from Virago quarters during the period when Virago was itself an independent operation. In large part this veiled disdain arose from Attallah's constant self-presentation in the media as an urbane connoisseur of women, betraying him as a man with an archaic conception of gender relations. The dismissive tone of

² Attallah divested his Namara group of Asprey's in June 1997, selling it to Prince Jefri of Brunei. The Soho-based Literary Review, edited by Auberon Waugh, was threatened with the withdrawal of Attallah's financial backing in November 1995 on account of its continued losses. Fortunately for the magazine's editorial board, powerful financiers John Paul Getty and Lord Hanson "admire[d] the magazine and Bron Waugh's contribution to British life" sufficiently to cover its debts ("Review Saved", 1995: 8). The Women's Press, facing a similar cash-flow crisis four years earlier, was conspicuously denied a commensurate financial bailout.

Virago's directors also betrays the moral superiority of a firm which had risked a management buyout rather than compromise its integrity by remaining within Attallah's group. For this reason the directors of Virago generally considered The Women's Press a pale imitation of the original, a view which The Women's Press's second managing director, Ros de Lanerolle, perhaps unintentionally reinforced when she referred to her press as Attallah's ersatz Virago: "I think he half regretted that he had let Virago go. And owning the Women's Press does have a certain cachet" (Macaskill, 1991: 85). Criticism was also forthcoming from outside of feminist circles: baffled as to why Attallah guaranteed The Women's Press an overdraft to publish in the (then) virtually unheard of area of women's writing, business rivals slyly dubbed The Women Press 'the Ayatollah's folly'.

The accession of Ros de Lanerolle to the managing directorship of The Women's Press in 1981 signalled a reorientation of the house's list spurred by de Lanerolle's own political interests. As a South African and a seasoned anti-Apartheid activist, she expanded The Women's Press's investment in new Commonwealth and third world women's writing and in addition presided over the firm during the time of its greatest success in 1983 with the British publication of Alice Walker's bestseller The Color Purple. Yet the publishing recession of the late-1980s and early-1990s plunged The Women's Press into losses of between £105 000 and £300 000 (the exact figures are disputed by the firm's key players of the time) and precipitated a boardroom struggle for control of the Press's direction (de Lanerolle, 1991: 4). Attallah alleged that the losses were the result of over-concentration of the Women's Press list on risky third world writers (Pallister, 1991: 38; Steel, 1998: 28); de Lanerolle countered with evidence that the operating deficit was, in fact, declining and that recessionary economics were the true cause of a drop in sales (1991: 4). It is a dispute which bears outlining as emblematic of

the dilemmas which feminist publishing faces in its quest to remain simultaneously provocative and solvent.

In late 1990, in a move which provoked widespread opposition from de Lanerolle's supporters within the firm, Attallah appointed sales director Mary Hemming (a staff member more sympathetic to the owner's plans for the Press) to the position of deputy managing director. The second stage in the increasingly acrimonious owner-director conflict was de Lanerolle's attempted buyout offer of £500 000 in February-March 1991 (Pallister, 1991: 38), the rejection of which resulted in Attallah maintaining control over the firm, its internal structure and publishing policy. De Lanerolle was subsequently offered the lesser position of chief editor at the Press as a trade-off for relinquishing her role as managing director – a deal which she refused (Ahmad, 1991: 13). The results were catastrophic: de Lanerolle was forced by Attallah to resign and to accept a redundancy pay-out; Attallah appointed himself the firm's interim managing director; five of the small press's senior editorial, publicity and rights staff resigned in solidarity with de Lanerolle; and Stephanie Dowrick, the Press's original managing director, was recalled to Britain to act as temporary head pending the appointment of the current joint managing director, Kathy Gale. Mary Hemming, having weathered hostilities which she has since summarised as "a very awful time for the Press", was rewarded for her loyalty to Attallah with the post of joint managing director, working in tandem with Gale (Steel, 1998: 28). As Rukhsana Ahmad observed at the time in Spare Rib, one of only a handful of publications to cover the events, the fracas "might have earned the title of a boardroom coup if the cast had been all-male" (1991: 10). What the affair highlights starkly for alternative publishing is the impotence of editors to set their own publishing agendas if they lack financial clout within their press's corporate structure, and the corresponding power of unsympathetic owners effectively to gag writing which they decree to be unprofitable, and hence to deny it public exposure.

This brief history of the firm is designed as a critical corrective to those who assume, on the basis of The Women's Press's commitment to edgy, oppositional women's writing, that the firm must be a feminist collective, or at least a small independent company struggling valiantly against publishing's notoriously low and slow profit returns. Though the Press has indeed struggled, it is its existence as a wholly-owned subsidiary of Attallah's Namara group which in fact goes to the heart of both its successes and its dilemmas. Attallah guarantees the Press an overdraft (the exact amount is undisclosed though it is undoubtedly substantial) which grants The Women's Press the financial cushioning to publish and promote risky writing from marginal groups. But this same outside control of the purse-strings can obliterate a particular list direction if it is deemed to be unprofitable, thus seriously jeopardising The Women's Press's public profile amongst feminists aligned with minority women's causes. This delicate corporate relationship has existed since the Press's inception; in a 1979 article in the radical magazine News from Neasden an anonymous author (most probably Dowrick) writes of "the support of our guarantor with whom we share formal 'ownership' of the company" (The Women's Press, 1979: 33). Given how fraught an issue Attallah's power within the Press was to become twelve years later, the fastidious picking out in typographical tweezers of the distastefully capitalist notion of 'ownership' appears both ironic and devastatingly naïve.

The second area in which closer analysis of the Press's history rebuts public misconceptions relates to the Press's association with writing by women of colour. Undoubtedly The Women's Press was a key player in promoting culturally diverse women's writing during the 1980s, with the success of Walker's The Color Purple (winner of the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction), Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions (winner of the Africa section of the 1989 Commonwealth Writers' Prize), and

Pauline Melville's Shape-shifter (winner of the 1990 Guardian Fiction Prize). Beyond these individual titles, however, the Press committed itself to dedicating a significant portion of its list – and a commensurate proportion of its advertising – to promoting writing by women from those minority groups marginalised by early-second-wave feminism: black women, women from ethnic minorities, working-class women, lesbians and disabled women. Ros de Lanerolle, in an article entitled “Publishing Against the ‘Other Censorship’ ” (1990), expanded the original tenets of feminist publishing to their logical (and more representative) conclusion:

A fundamental principle of women's publishing has been the idea of space for those who have *not* had space in the mainstream. And if this applies to women in general, it applies particularly to some classes of women. Lesbians, for instance. . . . [and] black women. (1990: 9)

Yet, in addition to ideological inclusiveness, this policy also made exemplary business sense, for the agitation by women of colour for a representative voice within feminism opened up previously under-exploited markets amongst book buyers from minority groups, while at the same time expanding the book buying potential of white feminists who may already have been purchasers of Women's Press titles, but who were keen to keep abreast of developments within feminist politics. In export terms, a list constructed along lines of racial and ethnic diversity also opened potentially lucrative channels for international sales and foreign rights trading. With authors from New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Canada, India, the Caribbean, and many Commonwealth African countries, de Lanerolle stated with some justification that “we now have one of the most international lists in publishing” (Neustatter, 1988: 20), a list which moreover fused symbiotically with the growth of post-colonial theory amongst literary academics during the 1980s (Cobham and Collins, 1987; Dangarembga, 1988; Nasta, 1991; Butalia and Menon, 1993).

De Lanerolle in a 1991 interview acknowledged that The Women's Press's high-profile "Live Authors. Live Issues" campaign was adopted in part as "a dig at Virago" and the slightly safe, middle-class tone of its Modern Classics series (Macaskill, 1991: 84). The implication of this campaign – one which The Women's Press was keen in its marketing to emphasise – was that Virago had cornered the market on the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century feminist canon, but that the new ground in radical and racially-diverse feminist writing was being broken by The Women's Press. Yet this demarcation of Virago's and The Women's Press's publishing strengths into past and present spheres of influence oversimplifies and distorts in the way that all attempts to construct set house identities do. The reality of both houses' publishing interests reveals far greater diversity and multifacetedness than the "Live Authors. Live Issues" campaign suggests. Virago had much success in promoting contemporary authors such as Angela Carter, Pat Barker and Margaret Atwood, and achieved bestseller status and solid backlist sales with the five volumes of black American author Maya Angelou's autobiography, beginning with the highly successful I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969), for which Virago secured the British publication rights in 1984. This book, with its insistence on an African-American perspective and the circumstances of working-class women's lives, aligns perhaps more closely with The Women's Press's house identity than with Virago's. Yet, Caged Bird's third reprinting within its first year of publication secured Virago's fortunes in the same manner in which The Color Purple had in the previous year secured The Women's Press's (Angelou, 1984: iv). Angelou's autobiographical volumes became a financial rudder of Virago's backlist for the whole of the following decade, with numerous reissues, changes in cover design and television tie-ins.³

³ Virago's 1998 Spring/Summer Catalogue reveals that Angelou remains a crucial literary asset for the press (2-3). The fifth volume of Angelou's autobiography, Even the Stars Look Lonesome (1998), was Virago's leading frontlist title for the season, flanked by Dolly A. McPherson's critical analysis, Order Out of Chaos: The Autobiographical Works of Maya Angelou (1998), and the "stunning new-look" reissue of the preceding four volumes of Angelou's memoirs (2). Given that

Further complicating the reality of the two houses's market identities is The Women's Press's first list in 1978 – a collection of five reprints of forgotten women's classics including Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh, Jane Austen's juvenilia entitled Love and Freindship [sic], and Kate Chopin's The Awakening. This list's nineteenth-century focus and its mirroring of the emergent academic feminist canon is highly reminiscent of Virago. It highlights the extent to which Virago and The Women Press, as Britain's most visible feminist publishing houses, constructed protean house identities which could be simplified into discrete niches for publicity and marketing purposes but which, in reality, maintained a fluid and multifaceted dimension. In this way each house could avoid being identified too closely with yesterday's publishing trends and retained sufficient manoeuvrability to be able to capitalise on a rival's publishing successes by emulating its list strengths.

The Women's Press thus in many ways confounds the expectations aroused by its own advertising. Although a significant percentage of Britain's book-buying public may well nominate it as the archetypal feminist press, taking as its cue the Press's high-profile twentieth anniversary celebrations in 1998 (refer appendix), the discrepancy between public profile and company reality is marked. Far from independent, it is a fully-owned subsidiary of a corporate media group and has been since its inception. The Press has successfully marketed writing by women of colour as central to its political identity, yet the ratio of black authors to white authors on its list was – even under de Lanerolle's radical influence – almost exactly the same as that at Virago: approximately 1:5 (Ahmad, 1991: 12). In 1998, the Press was still deriving its public identity from a minority of books on its list: in August 1998 the company sponsored a highly-visible

Angelou is one of only four women of colour frontlisted in the catalogue, Virago's promotional tactics raise disconcerting questions about black women's subsidisation of white presses.

“Top 20 promotion” of books by black and third world Women’s Press authors, but this followed a previous publicity campaign in March of the same year in which the Press selected a general “top twenty titles” – only three of which were written by women of colour (The Women’s Press, 1998: 1; refer appendix). It is not an issue of racial quotas, or of determining optimal representational formulae, but of a press frontlisting occasional books by women of colour while its list continues to be dominated by women from other social and ethnic groups. Yet, despite these ambivalences and discrepancies in The Women’s Press’s relationship to received ideas of what constitutes feminist publishing, the Press has been indisputably radical in other spheres, especially in its willingness to reconfigure author/editor/reader relationships.

Chiefly, the Press’s aim at its outset was to achieve practical and attitudinal change in the ways books were commissioned, edited and marketed, with on-going collaboration between author, editor and reader as the desired goal. Reflecting back on her four years at the helm of the Press, founding managing director Stephanie Dowrick described the kind of institutional change in publishing practice which she pioneered: “I wanted writers to feel there was a continuity of interest between them and the publisher and reader, and out of that support and energy would come a different kind of writing. I think sometimes it did” (Goodkin, 1992: 17). Borrowing from feminist group models such as the collective (with its rejection of hierarchical organisation) and the consciousness-raising group (in which political discovery was designed to take place within an emotionally supportive environment) The Women’s Press intervened in standard publishing practice, attempting to break down rigid demarcations between author, editor and reader.⁴ On a day-to-day practical basis, this policy meant greater

⁴ This is not to suggest that collectivist and consciousness-raising group models are in any way unproblematic or optimal production environments. Chapter 5 of this thesis explores in further detail the complexity of feminist organisational models and their interaction with the commercial publishing process. It is important to note also that models of publisher-author symbiosis like that

attention to unsolicited manuscripts, one of which – Jill Miller's Happy as a Dead Cat (1983) – achieved publication against the general publishing odds of being rescued from the slush pile. The Press also prioritised new writing, devoting greater-than-average list space to the financially high-risk area of first novels from literary unknowns: at one stage 60-70% of Women Press titles were original publications, a fact proudly stated on the books' covers (refer, for example, Nasta, 1991). The strain which this concentration on slow-return titles placed on the Women's Press's finances was alluded to by Attallah in 1991 as justification for his drastic reorganisation of the Press and its list (Pallister, 1991: 38). Yet de Lanerolle's comments at the time reveal that it was not balance sheets alone which went to the heart of the conflict between owner and managing director. Rather, it was the kind of organisational structure and its political positioning of the Press *vis-à-vis* its readers which ran counter to the conventional business expectations of Attallah. As de Lanerolle outlined in her July 1991 letter to Spare Rib: "the major disagreements between Mr Attallah and the majority of the workers at The Women's Press were not simply about losses but about what we published and how we ran the company" (1991: 4). For, in de Lanerolle's analysis, taking publishing risks on first novels made a kind of political and financial sense, as it exposed the Press to new purchasers of its books, purchasers who in turn may produce publishable manuscripts of their own:

We find ourselves part of a creative ferment when women are getting together in writers' workshops, reading to each other and criticising, running therapy centres and support groups – all generating vast quantities of information and campaign material that need to be shared with other women.... And the new readers these writers stimulate will be writing in their turn.... Our readers are our writers and our writers are our readers. (Macaskill, 1991: 84)

Far more than conventional trade publishers, The Women's Press located itself within a broad-scale political and social landscape, cultivating contact with grass-roots

proposed by Dowrick could, when put into practice, be experienced by writers as oppressively prescriptive and artistically inhibiting (see Maitland, 1979).

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feminist organisations such as the London Rape Crisis Centre and the Work Hazards Group, not only in order to remain alert to new directions in feminist politics, but also to know its main market. The Press's self-conception was at times somewhat analogous to that of a community newspaper, pledged to alert its adherents to new trends and forthcoming events. Activities such as author readings, book launches and discussion groups were regarded both as ideological fillips and as sales events, a view entirely in accordance with feminist publishers' original conviction that the act of publishing is itself an ideological act. If so, why not harness profitability to a community consciousness-raising event and simultaneously enhance both awareness and the company bank balance?

OWNING YOUR OWN: DILEMMAS OF CORPORATE INVOLVEMENT

The incongruity of The Women's Press's ownership prompts two questions from the perspective of a feminist analysis of publishing: firstly, do the ideology and political convictions of a publishing house's owner matter in feminist publishing and, if so, to what extent? Secondly, can editorial autonomy ever exist meaningfully without the guarantee of financial independence? The implications of the first of these questions – the impact of an owner's personal politics on a house – are best analysed by investigating in further detail the specific personalities involved in The Women's Press so as to gain an understanding of how Attallah's media role has imposed a programme of self-distancing and damage limitation on the Press.

Naim Attallah has consciously cultivated a media persona in his adopted country in which the 'negative' qualities of his Middle Eastern origins can be neutralised through a complex combination of contrived exoticism and Anglophilia, making Attallah appear both entirely at home in the upper echelons of British society, yet at the same time not

quite of it (see Badawi, 1987; Lawson, 1990; Dougary, 1992). The 'Sheikh of Soho' persona, created originally by Private Eye – although it seems to have been willingly adopted and projected by Attallah – encapsulates this ambiguous national identity. By surrounding himself with attractive young women, usually daughters of British media dynasties, at the Soho headquarters of his Quartet Books, Attallah proves himself both an inside player in the British literary world, yet simultaneously also a figure of detached otherness. His reputation as a “lascivious old chauvinist” (Dougary, 1992: 10) is compounded by a seemingly self-conscious suavity in his published interviews, and a propensity for generalising sweepingly about the experience and feelings of the entire female sex – most notoriously in his 1987 tome entitled Women, a collection of Attallah's selectively-edited snippets from interviews with 319 successful and predominantly white women. Mercifully for The Women's Press, the book was brought out under Attallah's Quartet Books imprint, although this did not stop the obvious and (to The Women's Press) disparaging connection being made: in feminist publishing circles it became known satirically as Women: A User's Guide (Lawson, 1990: 56).

Prior to 1991 there is scant evidence of Attallah having intervened directly in editorial decision-making at the Press. Yet his remarks about the firm – its origins, its directors, and its list priorities – over the course of its history consistently suggest a patronising and chauvinistic paternalism that does no favours to the Press's publicity department. Narrating the details of The Women's Press's foundation in 1977, Attallah chooses the imagery of romantic love and casts himself in the role of benevolent sugar daddy: “A year later this dynamic woman, Stephanie Dowrich [sic], came to me and said ‘Why don't you put your hand in my hand and let's form a company’ ” (Badawi, 1987: 10). Similarly, Virago's 1976 buyout from Quartet, prompted by battles over the content of its first list, is described in terms of its managing director, Carmen Callil's, supposed personal neuroticism: “she was so at war with the boys that I had to let her go” (Badawi,

1987: 10). Given how conscious The Women's Press has shown itself to be of its public profile and the integrity of its image, such remarks by the Press's owner tarnish its credibility, particularly amongst the more oppositional wings of feminism at which the Press particularly targets its marketing campaigns. Styling their firm as the publisher of "Books of Integrity by Women Writers", it is small wonder that The Women's Press's senior figures generally omit Attallah's name in interviews, waiting for the interviewer to first point out and query the seeming incongruity of the alliance (Steel, 1998: 28).

The contradictions inherent in The Women's Press's set-up would appear to under-cut its attempts to market itself as a radical imprint, but they are in themselves insufficient to negate the firm's claims of commitment to women's writing. Feminist print enterprises begun in the 1970s and early-1980s may more commonly have taken the form of collectives, but the particular circumstances of The Women's Press's situation – both radical in intent and financially cushioned – enable the Press to publish a greater number and variety of women's books than most collectives are financially able to produce. The Women's Press's situation within the Namara group was crucial to its steady expansion after the release of its first list in 1978, for the overdraft which Attallah guaranteed the Press protected the house against the cash-flow problems which beset small presses without a strong capital base. Freed from the requirement of turning a substantial profit in its first years of operation, the Press was also untrammelled by interest payments on loans to banks, a financial exigency which, again, can sink small publishing ventures. Current joint managing director, Kathy Gale, also recognises that private backers like Attallah, however they may interfere in the list direction, are occasionally willing to extend credit in situations where commercial banks cannot justify the continued financial risk. Of the 1991 dispute she remarks: "If The Women's Press had been solely guaranteed by a bank, there's no question that it would have gone then" (Steel, 1998: 28).

It is the enormous sales and publicity success which Alice Walker's The Color Purple has brought to the firm from 1983 onwards which illustrates most critically the benefits of the company's sheltered niche within the Namara group. Upon securing the UK and Commonwealth rights to The Color Purple, The Women's Press published their edition to a smattering of reviews and slow sales, a situation which improved once the book secured a 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, and which was transformed into a sales deluge upon the release of Stephen Spielberg's 1985 film adaptation of the same name. The impact of the bestseller on the firm was transformative – turnover increased within twelve months from £150 000 to £1 000 000; new titles rose dramatically from 17 to 60 a year (Macaskill, 1991: 82). Yet the enormous outlay of funds associated with a bestseller, and the need to subsidise frequent large print-runs, mean that a bestseller can easily effect a small publishing house's demise. Ros de Lanerolle, reviewing the process which "nearly killed us" (Macaskill, 1991: 82) asserted: "in terms of sheer logistics, a best-seller is a mixed blessing for a small publisher, and we are conscious of having negotiated a number of rocks that might have wrecked us" (Gerrard, 1989: 23). While editorial and directorial acumen were important elements in the firm's weathering of its success, the financial buffer of Attallah's umbrella group was indispensable, initially in that it allowed The Women's Press to ride out short-term cash-flow problems, and in the longer term because the experience of publishing a sure-fire bestseller such as The Color Purple greatly increased The Women's Press's public profile and imprint recognition. The fact that in 1998, 15 years after its original British publication, The Color Purple was still listed as The Women's Press's strongest selling title, heading its anniversary "top twenty" promotion (The Women's Press, 1998: 1), testifies to the text's crucial influence on the fortunes of its publisher – and by implication also highlights the financial substructure which enabled the Press to survive and capitalise on its success.

Having benefited from the financial protection which a conglomerate structure can provide, The Women's Press in March 1991 experienced the flip-side of corporate ownership, namely loss of editorial independence and the power to publish. The incident illustrates in the sharpest possible terms the price which committed feminist publishers must pay for the trade-off of financial backing: job insecurity; reversals in list direction; and the tarnishing of a house's hard-won reputation for political commitment and integrity. The blow to The Women's Press's image as a champion of black women's writing was substantial, and is directly attributable to Attallah's comments in the press at the time: after trivialising the boardroom dispute as mere "arguments amongst the women", he moved on to indicate that cash, not cattiness, lay at the true foundation of the power struggle (Pallister, 1991: 38). Attallah alluded specifically to an ostensibly misguided over-concentration on low-return black and third world women's writing, stating that "sales were suffering as a result" and that "we have to get the balance right" (Pallister, 1991: 38). In a letter to the Guardian (29 March 1991) 23 Women's Press authors – including Merle Collins, Michèle Roberts, Gillian Slovo and Sheila Jeffreys – publicly distanced themselves from Attallah's new management, and deplored the damage which his assessment of third world women's writing as unprofitable had done to the Press's reputation:

Some of us, as it happens, are 'Third World' women. In the light of Mr Attallah's remarks, it is only too evident that anything we might have to offer would be entirely irrelevant to his purposes. (Ahmad, 1991: 13)

Intriguingly, in an interview published only weeks prior to the March 1991 resignations, de Lanerolle outlined the various spheres of power within The Women's Press, firmly demarcating its owner's powers to intervene in editorial decision-making:

His [Attallah's] part in the firm is to guarantee the overdraft. He expects it to be a viable financial venture, obviously. He owns all the shares but he doesn't interfere. Occasionally he may say that these

kinds of books don't sell, but he wouldn't say "Don't publish that book". (Macaskill, 1991: 85)

What may appear in retrospect to be a disastrously ill-timed assertion of independence becomes more explicable when read not as a *description* of the status quo between Attallah and the Press, but as a *prescription* by de Lanerolle of what degree of intervention by Attallah into the Press's internal affairs was acceptable. Yet, if this was an attempt to circumscribe Attallah's role by creating a public expectation that he would not use his financial clout to bully the Press's management, it was a singularly unsuccessful one: the spate of firings and resignations followed within a month of de Lanerolle's interview appearing. Attallah, as the owner of the Press, was the party in the dominant position during the ensuing dispute, and he was able to achieve the outcome he desired: the dismissal of de Lanerolle; a revamping of the Press's list priorities away from Commonwealth and third world writing; and the appointment of a more commercially sympathetic management team. Former employees, authors and feminist sympathisers staged a war of attrition against Attallah which included cancellation of his Frankfurt Book Fair travel bookings, defamatory leaflets, a stink bomb let off at Quartet's Frankfurt stand, and a boycott of selected Women's Press titles (Moncur, 1992: 23). But the petty scale of these retaliations further underlines the power discrepancy between the parties to the dispute. A letter by de Lanerolle to Spare Rib at the time of the crisis recognises the comparative impotence of the feminists and their supporters, reworking the familiar (and here apposite) maxim that 'freedom of the press belongs to those who own one':

The point is that Naim Attallah has the right to withdraw his support from the kind of publishing programme and the kind of women's enterprise that The Women's Press once represented, for *whatever* reason. He owns the press. (1991: 4)

Essentially, the affair highlights sharply for feminist publishing the enormous detriment in terms of loss of editorial power which involvement in a corporate network

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may bring. De Lanerolle's bleak realisation that "if someone owns 100% of the shares, the other directors have no power" suggests that feminist integrity and financial protection may – in the bruising competitiveness of the publishing marketplace – prove mutually exclusive options.

LOCAL COLOUR:

REPRESENTING THE DIVERSITY OF BLACK BRITISH WOMEN'S WRITING

In the decade before the underlying tensions in The Women's Press's corporate structure erupted to public prominence, criticism of the Press's outlook and style of working had already been voiced. The long-running debate around feminist publishing and its intersection with the politics of race led to the formation of British women's presses specialising in writing by women of colour – presses which were organised collectively and which were highly conscious of their political 'authenticity'. Two of the more prominent of these black women's presses, Sheba Feminist Publishers (est. 1980) and Black Woman Talk (est. 1983) emerged at a point in time when writing by black women was beginning to be promoted by white feminist presses and, to a lesser extent, by the mainstream publishing industry.⁵ But the *means*, rather than the simple *end*, of publication energised the collectives of Sheba and Black Woman Talk, both of which aimed to expand black women's involvement in all stages of the literary production process in order to militate against the publishing world's belittling view of minority women as "exotic flavour of the year" (Black Woman Talk Collective, 1984b: 28).

⁵ When it was established in 1980, the Sheba collective consisted entirely of white women but, after lengthy internal debates over the imprint's racial make-up in 1983-84, it became increasingly multicultural and established a distinctive public profile as a publisher of books by British women of colour (Sheba Archive; Loach, 1986: 18-21). The enormously complex and involved politics of this collective are considered in Chapter 5 as part of an analysis of group publishing models.

The early manifestos of The Women's Press may have invoked the radical language of "a conscious-raising dynamic . . . which has . . . its collectivity in the WLM", but by the early-1980s its nature as a corporate-owned and hierarchically-organised business venture was apparent to radical black women involved in feminist circles. Partly in response to these supposed 'Establishment' elements of The Women's Press, and partly because they were unlikely to find a wealthy entrepreneurial backer of their own, Sheba set up in 1980 as a women's collective, without the fiscal safety-net of a guaranteed overdraft. As an anonymous member of the collective optimistically stated in Rolling Our Own: Women as Printers, Publishers and Distributors (1981), "we could either set ourselves a time limit and get money together and all that, or we could just literally plunge in" (38). Similarly, Black Woman Talk was initiated in 1983 by a group of unemployed black women in London "who felt strongly about creating the space and the means for our voices to be heard" (Black Woman Talk Collective, 1984b: 28). In the early years of the 1980s, with the Greater London Council still in existence and with public grants money available for community-based alternative arts projects, black women's publishing groups were able to launch themselves with a speed and self-confidence which is hard to recreate in the vastly more constrained economic climate of the late-1990s.

The fact that alternative feminist publishers sprang into existence so readily in the period is attributable, in part, to the generally buoyant economic climate of the early Thatcher era, but it is also due in large part to the period's continued boom in feminist book sales. The peculiar paradox of the period is that, at the same time as the Left and feminists steadily lost political and parliamentary sway, their influence in cultural and intellectual circles continued to rise. Without the background of this expansion in the feminist book market, the readership for works by black women would have been unable to sustain such a proliferation of radical women's presses. Expansion, and not saturation,

of the existing market in black women's books therefore became the key priority for the newer presses. The likes of United States authors Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou had achieved bestseller sales for The Women's Press, Picador (Pan Macmillan) and Virago respectively. But Black Woman Talk and Sheba insisted upon the need to make audible British black women's voices, so that the multifarious nature of black and South Asian local women's experiences was not threatened by trans-cultural assimilation into the quite distinct perspective of African-American women. Hence Black Woman Talk, in an early position statement published in Feminist Review (1984a), regarded the success of Walker and other writers of colour with critical reservation, suspicious of the ease with which the challenge of their literary 'otherness' could be neutralised by publishing industry tokenism:

More recently, it appears that there is a growing awareness amongst some of the established mainstream and feminist publishers of the need to make Black voices heard. Unfortunately, their enthusiasm to publish works by Black women, particularly from America, seems to stem from their recognition that such books have a lucrative market, rather than any genuine commitment to making publishing accessible to Black women writers in Britain. Afro-American women seem to be the vogue for feminist publishers such as the Women's Press [sic]. (100)

At the heart of such guarded assessments of the publishing industry's motivation lies a deep-seated opposition to literary ventriloquism on the part of white feminist publishers: a refusal to allow black women's writing to be fed through the cultural filter of white feminists' perceptions, and then to be marketed to largely white, middle-class audiences as diverting handbooks to black women's experience. Sheba, in particular, attempted to build into its organisational structures mechanisms for preventing such liberal appropriation of writing by women of colour, ensuring that both a white woman and a woman of colour worked on the editing of all Sheba manuscripts, and by using the expertise of black collective members in marketing titles to British ethnic communities. The media angle on black women writers as literary novelties was understood by such

presses to constitute only a more oblique form of racism than outright literary exclusion. Cognisant of the reality that “black women are often promoted by the mainstream media in ways that are racist”, Sheba’s *modus operandi* was designed as an ethical corrective: “It’s a small thing but its [sic] there as a kind of check” (Loach, 1986: 19).

From the vantage point of 1999, the relative merits of radical black feminist publishers and The Women’s Press may appear definitively settled: The Women’s Press recently celebrated its twentieth anniversary with a glossy, year-long promotional campaign and author tours by international women writers; Black Woman Talk, Sheba, and the West Yorkshire-based press, Urban Fox, on the other hand, are now all defunct. If the primary responsibility of a political print organisation is to remain trading, The Women’s Press may be considered an overwhelmingly more successful feminist enterprise – the 1991 débâcle notwithstanding. Yet I would argue that both Sheba and Black Woman Talk were crucial in pushing the feminist agenda and breaking new literary ground during the politically difficult period of the 1980s. For without these presses’ insistence on British black women’s experience and autonomous organising, the feminist publishing sector would be still more open to the charge of commercial co-optation of black writing without a proportionate ceding of institutional power. Having been marginalised first in the Black Power movement by the cult of black machismo, and later in the women’s liberation movement, with its emphasis on white, middle-class careerism, black women by the early-1980s sensed that only autonomous organising would prevent the hijacking of their activist energy for others’ political ends. That black feminists made their position broadly felt is evidenced by changes in the racial profile of The Women’s Press’s list by the mid- to late-1980s: stung perhaps by Black Woman Talk’s singling out of their press for particular criticism in its 1984 manifestos, The Women’s Press in 1987 produced Rhonda Cobham and Merle Collins’ anthology Watchers and Seekers: Creative Writing by Black Women in Britain, as well as

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numerous novels by black British authors, including Joan Riley's classic of cross-racial dislocation, The Unbelonging (1985). In 1991 (immediately prior to the forced resignation of de Lanerolle) The Women's Press moreover produced Susheila Nasta's anthology Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia, in the Introduction to which the editor explicitly locates the text within a recent outpouring of multiracial British women's publishing. In so doing, Nasta manifests a consciousness of the text's political and publishing specificity which would appear incongruous without the radicalising impetus of black women's imprints.

Yet, for all The Women's Press's success over the last decade in promoting the diverse voices of British women of colour, troubling ambiguities remain encoded in the company's organisational structure and outlook. There is a reluctance to draw out the lessons of 1991 to their logical (albeit unsettling) conclusions. If, as Ros de Lanerolle was forced to acknowledge, freedom of the press belongs to those who own one, then only a stake in the financial ownership of a press can guarantee feminists' editorial autonomy and political integrity. Yet, on this count it necessarily follows that only a press in which women of colour have commissioning power and managerial clout can avoid the taint of tokenism and the risk that black women's writing will again be silenced once the multicultural wave is deemed to have crested. In a final ironic twist, the market dominance of the late-1990s has produced a bizarre state of play in the publishing industry: only those with firm economic power can now ensure the undiluted tenor of their oppositional politics. The early radical women's publishing theorists such as June Arnold have thus had their vision of an autonomous women's literary culture both stunningly fulfilled and – at the same time – utterly disproved.

BLACK INC.: BLACK WOMEN AND ACCESS TO POWER IN THE
PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

The crucial political importance of black women's autonomous organising was not entirely obscured by the disbanding of Black Woman Talk, Sheba, and Urban Fox Press but in fact continues in the form of the New York City-based Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press – an operation which in organisation, scale and ideological perspective strikes interesting contrasts with The Women's Press. Editorial autonomy and the means to ensure it were grounding principles when US black feminist critic and theorist Barbara Smith established Kitchen Table Press in 1981. Her conception was of a feminist press in which the freedom to publish books which the editors considered important was backed up by financial independence: company autonomy would underpin and secure intellectual autonomy. Of prime importance was her conviction that black women must make certain that their voices are heard in all stages of the production of their works, in order to avoid their oppositional message being compromised either by explicit editorial changes or by the more covert methods of silencing achievable by misrepresentation in marketing, poor distribution or low-quality production standards.⁶ The concept of an 'authentic' publishing product, one determined at all stages by the groups about which it speaks, was Smith's fundamental conviction: paramount was "our need to determine independently both the content and the conditions of our work and to control the words and images that were produced about us" (Smith, B., 1989: 11). Significantly, Smith identifies alternative and white-controlled feminist presses as just as likely sites for such literary disenfranchisement as mainstream houses:

The founding . . . [of Kitchen Table Press] was partially motivated by our need, as Third World women, to have complete control over both the content and the production of our words – control which is usually

⁶ Refer Chapter 6 for a discussion of the power of mainstream book marketing to dilute or contradict the oppositional force of feminist texts.

not available even when working with feminist and alternative publishers. (1984: 24)

In an important dialogue in May 1993, representatives of North America's various feminist-of-colour presses – Kitchen Table, Aunt Lute Books in San Francisco, and Women's Press of Toronto⁷ – came together in an alternative session to the usual meeting of feminist and lesbian publishers at the industry trade fair, the American Booksellers Association (ABA). The edited account of their discussion, published in Sojourner magazine as "Packing Boxes and Editing Manuscripts: Women of Color in Feminist Publishing" (1993), marks a watershed in the debate around racism in feminist publishing, as the representatives of the various presses express anger and incomprehension at the increasing careerism and financial expediency they perceive amongst white North American feminist presses. Most revealing, in the context of discussing the risk of British women's presses tokenising black literature, are the observations of the group on the subject of internal press dynamics. The participants express a profound cynicism about the motivations of white women's houses, a tactical political judgement hardly rebutted by the alleged railroading of the joint meeting by white feminists on the previous day. Lillian Waller of Kitchen Table Press encapsulates the group's conviction that any penetration of the publishing industry by black women is inadequate and subject to reversal unless it infiltrates at the level of management:

The white women's presses – which is what they are even if they have one or two women of color working for them – are just that, ultimately: for white women. And if they happen to publish a few books by women of color, that's fairly incidental or they're riding the wave of some trend in colored people. ("Packing", 1993: 11)

Waller's contention provokes urgent questions about the racial politics which underlie The Women's Press's foundation. It urges analysis not only of the content of the

⁷ This Canadian press, founded as a "non-profit socialist feminist collective" in 1972, bears no official relationship to the British press of a similar name (Gabriel and Scott, 1993: 27).

Women's Press list, but also of the politics implicit in the company's set-up and organisation. What contradictions can be read in the situation whereby a press run and dominated by white women specialises in publishing works by black and third world women writers, to the extent of incorporating such writing into the Press's core political identity?

Crucial to the emergence of a distinctive black feminist voice since the 1960s has been the concept of authenticity – the belief that representations of black women and their experiences should be self-determined, cast in their own language and should posit black women as their dominant point-of-view. Alexis DeVeaux conceives of this as: –

A struggle to express ourselves. To be heard. To be seen. In our own image. To construct the words. To name the deeds. Confront the risks. Write the history. Document it on radio, television and satellites. To analyse and live it. (Hernton, 1984: 144)

Arguably, this implies a contradiction implicit in the nature of The Women's Press's set-up. Feminist publishing enterprises took as their first premise the conviction that publishing was an industry dominated by white, middle-class males, and that the publishing decisions made by an industry so dominated would reflect the interests of the privileged group. By extension, presumably a feminist publishing industry in which white (and generally tertiary-educated, middle-class) women occupy decision-making levels will be to a greater or lesser degree removed from the central concerns of women of colour. Certain spheres of feminist publishing are at risk of promoting identity politics while remaining conveniently oblivious to the homogeneity of their own identity.

For feminist publishing the dilemma has two specific aspects. Firstly, can a feminist press staffed predominantly by white women accurately identify issues of vital concern to black women's lives, and market its books so as to reach this audience successfully? Secondly, given that feminist classics publishing has tended to be heavily

reliant on academic works reclaiming a tradition of women's writing, and given that the industry's republication of these texts has helped to entrench a particular feminist canon, is there a risk of feminist publishing and women's studies colluding – perhaps unintentionally – in the marginalisation of black women's writing? Responding to the strongly WASP tone of much early feminist literary history, Barbara Smith – in the foundation essay in this area, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" (1986, [1977]) – anatomises the silencing inflicted by a political movement which claimed to give voice to the culturally disenfranchised:

I think of the thousands and thousands of books which have been devoted by this time to the subject of Women's Writing and I am filled with rage at the fraction of these pages that mention black and other Third World women. I finally do not know how to begin, because in 1977 I want to be writing this for a black feminist publication. (1986: 172)

In setting up Kitchen Table Press in 1981, four years after the date of this instigatory essay, Smith went some way to alleviating the absence of avenues for black women's political and literary self-expression. Kitchen Table made a telling point about the feminist publishing industry's priorities when it obtained the rights to what is now a foundation text in black women's studies, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's anthology This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (1983, [1981]). The book, which has since sold in excess of 86 000 copies for Kitchen Table and which won the 1986 Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award, was originally published by the Massachusetts-based Persephone Press, a "white women's press" (n.p.) which (the Kitchen Table edition of the book notes pointedly) allowed the book to drop out of print after a single print-run. Having regained the rights, the editors chose to publish a second edition with Kitchen Table Press and they note, significantly, in the preliminaries to this second edition that it has been "conceived of and produced entirely by women of color" (n.p.). Moreover, it is still very much in print, currently selling its tenth reprinting. The publishing history of this individual title prompts

searching questions in the sphere of feminist publishing generally: can presses which identify publishing and politics as inextricably linked afford to remain oblivious to the political assumptions inherent in their granting of editorial control almost exclusively to white women? Furthermore, does such a press risk accusations of ventriloquism and political containment by publishing black women's writing according to white women's precepts and selling it to a predominantly white, middle-class feminist readership?

Since 1996, the directorship of Kitchen Table Press has been relinquished by a chronically over-worked Barbara Smith and, under a Transition Coalition Committee backed by The Union Institute in Washington, D.C., the press has been adequately capitalised for the first time in its 19-year history. However, the range of stringent checks built into the transition agreement reveals that the arguments voiced at the impromptu feminists-of-colour ABA meeting in 1993 have since attained currency within feminist circles. The Union Institute exerts "no editorial control", "*no policy-making influence*", "*no control over day-to-day finances and operations*", and it "does not involve itself in the hiring of staff" (Grant, 1996: 1027) – thus rebutting the over-easy and fallacious assumption of one onlooker that Smith had "turn[ed] the press over to white women" (1032). Between 1995 and 1996 the transition team raised almost double Kitchen Table's former annual turnover by approaching grants bodies and private fundraising ventures, raising hopes that Kitchen Table may perhaps transcend the painful committed publishers' dilemma of choosing between political credibility and solvency. Were it to attain such an elusive goal, it would effectively have evaded the two key problems which pervade the British Women's Press: women of colour would themselves hold editorial decision-making power, and they would not be tied to the whim of an unsympathetic financier. Such a position may well be tantamount to feminist publishing utopia.

In The Women's Press's defence it should be stated that the company has, over the preceding decade, evinced an awareness that their staff make-up is white-dominated, and has attempted to ensure a more representative group of co-workers through placing recruitment advertisements automatically in the black *and* the mainstream press (Duncker, 1992: 49). But a marked under-representation of black women continues to characterise British literary publishing as a whole, and The Women's Press – despite its public image – is not immune to this imbalance. At the time of the 1991 Women's Press crisis, the firm did not have a single black woman editor, and Virago – with Melanie Silgado – employed only one (Ahmad, 1991: 11). The threat, as black British critic and publisher Margaret Busby points out⁸, is that of a growing discrepancy between the market boom in black and third world women's writing and a dearth of representatives from these groups in the publishing industry, let alone in positions of managerial and decision-making authority. Implicit here is the suggestion that presses are cashing in on identity politics, without having to relinquish institutional power:

Is it enough to respond to a demand for books reflecting the presence of 'ethnic minorities' while perpetuating a system which does not actively encourage their involvement at all levels? The reality is that the appearance and circulation of books supposedly produced with these communities in mind is usually dependent on what the dominant white (male) community, which controls schools, libraries, bookshops and publishing houses, will permit. (1984: 12)

Writer and critic Barbara Burford, in an impassioned article for Spare Rib entitled "The Landscapes Painted on the Inside of My Skin" (1987), reiterates Busby's analysis of resistant industry schema, but goes further than Busby in perceiving in commercial success itself potentially the greatest threat to the future evolution of black women's literature:

As Blackwomen writing and being published in Britain today, we have to make sure that, this time, we do not remain a liberal fad, that we are not merchandised and commersialized [sic] into obsolescence. This

⁸ Margaret Busby is co-founder of the British publishing house Allison and Busby. She also edited the important multicultural anthology of black women's writing, Daughters of Africa (1992).

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time we must not allow ourselves to be turned on and off, and we must not disappear quietly, when it is decided that we as an 'issue' have suffered from over exposure. (39)

The question of whether it is predominantly white, liberal women who read black women's fiction is difficult to answer, primarily because sales statistics are rarely kept on the racial backgrounds of book purchasers, but also because a book's sales figures may not accurately reflect its readership. This discrepancy may carry particular weight with a market sector such as black women, whose generally lower socio-economic status may direct their reading habits towards borrowing from public libraries or acquaintances rather than book purchasing. Therefore a single copy of a Women's Press title placed in a municipal library could be read by up to 100 women within a few years of its publication. What can be assessed with greater accuracy are the race and gender backgrounds towards which The Women's Press markets its list, and the ways in which this contrasts with the house practice of Kitchen Table Press.

Dowrick founded The Women's Press with the conviction that feminist books should be packaged enticingly, a conviction which was underlined by the contemporary sales success of Virago's glossy Modern Classics series. In commentator Nicci Gerrard's words, both firms' marketing strategies represent an attempt to overcome "feminism's discomfort with profit in connection with the arts, or with the lucrative business of packaging, marketing and selling creativity" (1989: 16). The political implications of cover design decisions are discussed by Smith in relation to Kitchen Table books when she asserts that the group would not package a black or third world woman's book so as to suggest that it was the product of a more 'mainstream' author or in such a way that "the only way to determine that it was written by a woman of color would be to turn it over and look at the author's picture on the back" (Smith, B., 1989: 12). It is a design policy which stems from the Press's insistence on authenticity and the

political necessity of positing black women's experiences as central, though it springs also from the Press's identification of its core market as people of colour – "not solely women of color or lesbians of color, but the entire gamut of our communities" (Smith, B., 1989: 12). The white feminist readership is viewed by Kitchen Table Press as supplementary to this primary market: "being explicit about our books' subject matter does not decrease this particular [white] audience, while it does ensure attention from our target audience of women of color" (1989: 12). In this race-specific conception of book design I perceive links with the contemporary British black publisher X Press, the "resolvedly commercial" house whose paperback covers invariably feature black protagonists as a device for attracting their target audience ("X Press", 1996: 56). The sexual politics of these covers are, however, grist for a further design debate, echoing as they do the guns-and-women motifs of Blaxploitation films and the iconography of the cult of black machismo.⁹

I would suggest that Kitchen Table Press's prioritising of target markets through advertising stems from two causes. Firstly, it reflects the political conviction of the Press's directors that racial oppression is the primary oppression encountered by women of colour, and that it is therefore politically essential to reach women of these groups via the context of their communities (Smith, Barbara, and Beverly Smith, 1983: 114-15). Secondly, it reflects the demographic strength and political profile which African-Americans have achieved in the United States. A similar programme of targeting books at black communities would not be financially viable for The Women's Press in the UK, as non-white communities in Britain tend to be more ethnically diverse and have still to achieve the level of political and institutional organising around issues of identity that African-Americans have striven to achieve. The Women's Press's conception of its

⁹ Refer, for example, to the cover of X Press's controversial 1995 bestseller, Sheri Campbell's Wicked in Bed.

primary market in terms of gender rather than racial identification stems also from its cross-racial list structure: given the high proportion of white authors published by the Press, it would be unrepresentative and perhaps unprofitable to market its texts to attract a predominantly black or minority readership. White women do largely control marketing and design decision-making within the firm, yet there is no attempt to disguise the racial perspective of Women's Press books by black authors: indeed the covers of titles by high-profile black writers such as African-American Alice Walker positively proclaim – and celebrate – their author's racial identity.¹⁰ The contrasting approaches to marketing displayed by the two presses arise, it appears, from the confluence of a number of factors: the individual racial identities of editors; their ideological perspectives on oppression; and encompassing demographic and political contexts.

FEMINIST PUBLISHING - AT RISK OF BEING REMAINDERED?

How, then, should feminist communities and the wider literary world assess the current state-of-play in women of colour publishing? My motivation in counterpointing the nature of The Women's Press with its radical British rivals and with an American house publishing in broadly the same area is not to set up an ideological league table of feminist publishers, in which extra points are awarded for progressive organisational structures and deducted for non-feminist corporate owners. Rather, my examination of The Women's Press in the light of markedly different kinds of political print ventures aims to illustrate the varieties of response to the market for feminist publishing, and to

¹⁰ The cover of the 1998 Women's Press title Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism by Alice Walker is such an example of author-photo prominence (see also Kanneh, 1998 for a rare analysis of the racial dynamics at work in book design and marketing). The cover of the recent anthology of Black British women's writing, Bittersweet (1998) features a close-up photograph of braided hair, unmistakably demarcating its target audience – Britain's African and Afro-Caribbean communities. The cross-racial cover appeal of The Women's Press's young-adult Livewire! title, Sorrelle (1998) by Millie Murray, may illustrate how the very diversity of Britain's ethnic populations could itself become a marketing strength.

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investigate the ideological, financial and marketing implications of certain kinds of organisations. It is not so much a valorising of one system over all others, as an examination of the ways in which the market in feminist literature is capable of supporting a spectrum of feminist publishing endeavours. In particular, writing by women of colour, an area in which all of the presses considered in this chapter have focused their efforts, now faces the difficult transition from a distinct niche market to merger into the general trade in upmarket literary fiction. While the public thirst for books by women of colour does not at present show signs of having been slaked, the key question for feminist publishers is how can they ensure that they, as opposed to multinational publishing conglomerates, continue to break the new ground in multicultural writing – *and* ensure sufficient profit from such a publishing programme to stay in operation. Brand loyalty and reader recognition constitute key weapons in the trade arsenal of small alternative publishers, but in an increasingly corporatised and consolidated publishing environment it is uncertain whether “books of integrity” will – in themselves – be sufficient to keep alternative feminist publishing alive.

Emerging at a particular juncture in late-1970s feminist consciousness, The Women’s Press made specific compromises to balance the demand for political integrity with the exigencies of commercial competition. The Press saw as its highest priority the need to make feminist books available cheaply and plentifully to self-identified feminists and to the mass of potential converts. To this end, Dowrick and her successors as managing director sought to broaden the then-current definition of feminism to make it relevant to women from different racial and class backgrounds, seeking at the same time to construct a list which showcased living writers engaging with contemporary racial and cultural issues. Structurally, The Women’s Press adopted a loosely hierarchised organisational model, rejecting the consensus decision-making of a collective, but attempting to retain an element of the creative support and collaboration which

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collectivism – at its best – can provide. Crucially, The Women's Press recognised that a feminist press can only act as a lever for social change if it continues in operation, and to this end Dowrick decided that firm financial backing, even if this necessitated outside ownership of the Press, was a non-negotiable requirement. The decision resulted in a Press better able to produce high-quality, widely-distributed and well-marketed titles, and one able to survive the exigencies of rapid expansion and bestseller success, but one also in which final editorial control lay in the hands of a person uncommitted to the ideology of the women's movement. Hence the 1991 resignations crisis at the Press signals both an already remarkable longevity for a small press in a tumultuous industry, and the final clarification of where the power to publish actually lies in any fully-owned publishing corporation.

Kitchen Table Press, by contrast, views the mere continued existence of a politically-identified press as in itself inadequate, unless decision-making power lies in the hands of those whose cause is being promulgated. To that end, Kitchen Table Press is run democratically, employs only women of colour and – despite criticism from some feminist quarters – publishes only writing by black and third world women (Smith, B., 1989: 13). It is a prioritisation of authenticity and editorial integrity over list expansion: though founded within four years of each other, Kitchen Table has published 15 books as compared to The Women's Press's current backlist of 388 titles. Sheba and Black Woman Talk loosely identified with the version of identity-politics publishing championed by Barbara Smith – Black Woman Talk going so far as to denominate Kitchen Table Press "our sister press in America" (Black Woman Talk Collective, 1984a: 100). Yet without the driving-force of a writer-director of Smith's stature, and without the lifesaving funds injection of a scheme like The Union Institute transition coalition, both presses folded under the weight of financial over-extension and collective burn out.

The juxtaposition of these presses poses a fundamental question: has there now been sufficient public demand for texts by black women writers that a press run exclusively by black women such as Kitchen Table Press has become superfluous? Given the enormous sales and literary plaudits achieved by writers such as Walker, Morrison and Angelou, has the idea of a women-only house along the lines of The Women's Press now been politically superseded and rendered quaintly redundant? I would argue that conditions in the broader publishing industry make the continued existence of such presses an issue of political and cultural urgency. Although Virago and The Women's Press have succeeded in their aim of bringing writing by women – and in particular by women of colour – into the literary mainstream, there is a danger in assuming that cultural space, once won, is incapable of being reclaimed. Furthermore, to analyse a literary movement's success only in terms of sales made and reputations established is to overlook the issue of political power as wielded within the publishing industry itself. The fact that women in general, and more especially women of colour, are still grossly under-represented in per capita terms at managerial level in the publishing industry highlights the difference between a publishing trend and achieved institutional change.

There is no reason why the mainstream trend for black women's writing which arose in the mid-1980s should not fall foul of publishing fashion, sinking as rapidly as it seemed to rise in the bookselling firmament. Given that the broader publishing industry publishes according to profit margins and not on the grounds of ideological commitment, there can be no assurances that mainstream publishing channels will remain open to black women's writing, especially to those texts of an experimental cast and those informed by strongly oppositional politics. Hence the issue of editorial control as wielded by women cannot be dismissed. The most pressing issue for extant houses such

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as Kitchen Table and The Women's Press is how to maintain their revenue flow *and* political bite while competing against vastly more powerful mainstream firms for the market in writing by women of colour which they – in a sense – are responsible for having created. It is a juggling act made more difficult still by feminist firms' need to adapt and grow this writing and its markets so that the voices of black women remain generally audible once the fickle attention of the mainstream publishing industry has shifted elsewhere.

**'DEEDS AND WORDS':
THE WOMAN'S PRESS AND THE
POLITICS OF PRINT IN THE
EDWARDIAN SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT**

Our movement has had to combat all the conditions of an era of darkness, ignorance, and barbaric repression. When newspapers will not accept, publishers will not print, and booksellers will not sell the true facts concerning us, then a rapid means of irrepressible communication had to be sought.

– Constance Lytton, Prisons and Prisoners: Some Personal Experiences by Constance Lytton and Jane Wharton, Spinster (1914: 66)¹

Contrary to the popular impression, to say in print what she thinks is the last thing the woman-novelist or journalist is commonly so rash as to attempt. In print, even more than elsewhere (unless she is reckless), she must wear the aspect that shall have the best chance of pleasing her brothers. Her publishers are not women. Even the professional readers and advisers of publishers are men. The critics in the world outside, men. Money, reputation – these are vested in men. If a woman would win a little at their hands, she must walk warily, and not too much displease them.

– Elizabeth Robins, “Woman’s Secret” (1913: 5-6)

Elizabeth Robins, an American actress resident in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century, well captures the staunchly masculine, frock-coated clubbiness of the Edwardian literary world. Impeccably homosocial, this world comprised interlinked circles of writerly activity in which to be male was to display the badge of membership – to secure the would-be writer’s foot upon the lowest rung of literary prestige. From there it was possible to ascend: the literary world was composed of gentleman publishers, all-male

¹ Lytton was right to charge mainstream publishers with censorship of suffrage ideas, whether overtly or covertly, as her autobiographical Prisons and Prisoners (1914) was itself prefaced with a “Publisher’s Note” from William Heinemann “disclaim[ing] agreement with some of Lady Constance Lytton’s views expressed in this volume” (1914: vii).

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panels of publisher's readers, and tight circles of like-minded male reviewers, guiding the cause of literature forward by their discerning critical labours. Even in its innovations, the Edwardian sphere of the man-of-letters obeyed the cardinal rule of androcentrism: membership of its burgeoning professional societies was overwhelmingly male; legitimising itself as a valid academic discipline, the new subject of English literature was taught by males, in male-directed British universities to largely (or in Oxbridge – exclusively) male students. Seeking to explain the poor representation of women in the world of print and their seeming reluctance to expose themselves to the scrutiny of publication, Robins looks not for explicit restrictions on female literary participation, but focuses instead on a more insidious type of male exclusivity: the cliquish masculine culture of public discourse. So pervasive was this intellectual hegemony that its partiality and tendentiousness were able to masquerade as objective, universal, rational. A self-proclaimedly 'world' discourse was in fact, as Robins and her contemporary, Constance Lytton, knew through bitter publishing experience, a conversation between males, carried on for an audience of males. The "woman-novelist or journalist" may be rendered conspicuous in such a realm by her novelty, but her status is that of a mere interloper and usurper. Precisely because her foothold upon literary respectability is so precarious she must be on her best behaviour, walking warily so she does "not too much displease them". In a literary reflection of the Edwardian ideal of womanhood, the woman writer must remain attentive to the needs and wishes of others – a polite and interested auditor at a discussion in which she plays no active part.

Yet in advising women writers to adopt a placatory tone Robins is somewhat disingenuous. For Robins's essay "Woman's Secret", in which this passage occurs, was published in 1913 at the height of the militant phase of the British struggle for women's suffrage, a campaign in which Robins had for six years been prominent as a lobbyist and organiser. In a memorable phrase, Jane Marcus asserts in her Introduction to Suffrage and

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the Pankhursts (1987) that the rhetorical and historical significance of the militant British suffrage movement lies in its “discourse of interruption” (17): the splitting asunder of “patriarchal cultural hegemony by interrupting men’s discourse with each other” (9). Expanding this concept beyond the predominantly verbal realm focused upon by Marcus, I perceive in the suffragette movement a series of interruptions of and interventions in the tangible and intangible male strongholds of Edwardian public life. Militant suffragism was understood by its instigators as a battle not merely for the vote – only the most basic badge of equal citizenship – but as a struggle to breach the inviolate masculinity of the public sphere itself (Vicinus, 1985; Green, 1997). At its most immediate, this interruption was literal – such as the heckling of Liberal party candidate Edward Grey by Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney in Manchester in 1905, when they demanded “Will the Liberal Government give votes to women?” and were violently ejected and arrested for assault (Pankhurst, C., 1959: 50). At another level, the attempt to intervene in discussion between males, carried on for the benefit of males, was proxemic – as in the suffragettes’ frequent “raids” and “rushes” on the Palace of Westminster in their attempts to address the House of Commons.

What is less commonly acknowledged, however, is that early-twentieth-century suffragettes sought equally to intervene in the discursive sphere of public life by seizing control of their own image-making in the press and in the booming print culture of the day. At least twelve feminist presses were active in publishing suffrage material in the years before the outbreak of the First World War and, allied with the range of suffrage newspapers and shops which mushroomed in the capital and regions, women were, for the first time in the twentieth century, in control of cultural enterprises for disseminating their subversive political message. The most publicly prominent of the militant suffrage organisations, the Pankhursts’ Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) adopted the motto “DEEDS NOT WORDS” as a protest against the empty lip-service paid to the idea of

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women's suffrage by Laodicean members of parliament who failed to translate their personal sympathies into effective party policy. Yet, read in the light of the organisation's astute understanding of the printed word and its radicalising potential, 'DEEDS AND WORDS' perhaps more accurately encapsulates the amalgam of activism and advocacy which lay at the movement's heart.

My research has unearthed at least twelve pro-suffrage presses in operation in London between the opening shots of the militant campaign in 1905 and the outbreak of war in August 1914: the presses of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies; the Woman Writers' Suffrage League; the Artists' Suffrage League; the New Constitutional Society for Women's Suffrage; the International Women Suffrage Alliance; the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association; the Church League for Women's Suffrage; the Women's Freedom League; the "Votes for Women" Publishing Office; the International Suffrage Shop (a publisher as well as a retail outlet for suffrage books and paraphernalia); and the Women's Printing Society (refer Women's Suffrage Collection). The very fact that an essay such as Robins's which is critical of mainstream publishing practice could yet be published implies the existence of a radical publishing subculture in Edwardian Britain. Robins herself circulated at the centre of agitation over women's lack of parliamentary representation, sitting as first President of the Women Writers' Suffrage League (WWSL), and operating as a member of the directing Executive Committee of the WSPU between 1907 and 1912. Moreover, the publishing history of Robins's essay "Woman's Secret" itself bears testimony to the range and dynamism of feminist publishing activity in pre-war Britain: it was edited in pamphlet format for the WSPU's imprint, the Woman's Press, by chief suffrage protagonist Frederick Pethick Lawrence²; the book was sold at the WSPU's Woman's Press shop in Charing Cross Road;

² The Pethick Lawrence surname frequently appears hyphenated, especially earlier in the century when this seems to have been the couple's preferred form of the name. I follow throughout the non-hyphenated style adopted by the couple later in life and used by Fred Pethick Lawrence for his

and it was advertised, along with a wide sampling of suffrage fiction, poetry, drama and propaganda, in the WSPU's own newspaper Votes for Women. While the *content* of Robins's essay accurately indicts the mainstream literary industries for their conservatism and sexual chauvinism, the *context* of its publication highlights a vibrant Edwardian feminist publishing network covering all aspects of literary production from writing to sales and publicity. Clearly, then, there *are* situations in which the woman novelist may be so rash as "to say in print what she thinks"; the only proviso being that she must first guarantee control of the medium before imparting her radical message.

From amidst this vibrant milieu of feminist print activity this thesis selects the Woman's Press, the WSPU's publishing imprint and the hub of the literary suffrage world within which Robins circulated, to focus upon at greater length. In so doing, I am mindful of recent critical disapprobation of academic over-concentration on the WSPU at the expense of investigating Edwardian suffragism in all its ideological and geographical diversity (Leneman, 1995; Joannou and Purvis, 1998). Yet, in choosing to focus upon the publishing arm of the WSPU, my aim is to problematise received understandings of this suffrage wing by investigating not the thrice-trodden academic ground of its tactics or campaigning strategies but, instead, its *discursive* activism in the realm of print. The availability of source materials further prompts such a focus: the annals of Votes for Women, the autobiographical accounts of four of the WSPU's inner circle, and the Pethick Lawrence archives in Trinity College, Cambridge supply a wealth of material about the role of a publishing outlet within a suffrage organisation unequalled amongst lower-profile and less institutionalised women's suffrage imprints.

The existence of the Woman's Press has also been widely recognised within

autobiography Fate Has Been Kind (1943). Pethick Lawrence is commonly referred to in the autobiographies and memorabilia of WSPU members as 'Fred' – an easy familiarity characteristic of the man. This shortened version is used throughout this chapter.

contemporary suffrage research, in part because the autobiographies of the movement's key figures make reference to it (Pethick Lawrence, E., 1938; Pethick Lawrence, F., 1943) and in part because scholars have had profitable recourse to its publications for primary source material about the policies and ideology of the WSPU itself (Hale, 1974; Atkinson, 1992; Green, 1997). Yet rarely have the ideological and historical implications of the Press's existence as a feminist publishing house been explored. This omission is curious and worth rectifying in light of the recent spate of revisionist analyses of first-wave feminism, whether they be critiques of suffragette fiction and drama as female interventions in the sphere of the Edwardian novel of ideas or problem play (Mulford, 1982; Stowell, 1992; Miller, Jane, 1994; Park, 1996); attempts to construct an historiography of the movement (Marcus, 1987; Dodd, 1990; Purvis, 1996; Joannou and Purvis, 1998); or the drawing of connections between suffrage and contemporaneous politico-cultural debates, be they the norms of masculinity (John and Eustance, 1997), the British imperial programme (Burton, 1991), or Irish nationalism (Owens, 1984; Ryan, 1992). Moreover, an appreciation of the nature of suffrage publishing also enhances understanding of current feminist presses, contextualising their activity in an historical framework and disproving the received view (one, admittedly, often promulgated by 1970s feminists themselves) that second-wave feminist publishing exploded without precedent onto the literary marketplace.³ Presses such as Virago and The Women's Press frequently republished key suffrage texts, such as Ray Strachey's 1928 account of the suffrage campaign's history, The Cause (1978), but they did not in their publicity draw an explicit line of inheritance between their own press practice and that of their Edwardian publishing predecessors (Owen, U., 1998).

Where such connections have been drawn, it has tended to be individual authors and

³ June Arnold's landmark article "Feminist Presses & Feminist Politics" (1976) suffers from such second-wave myopia when assessing the chronology of feminist publishing. Arnold states (incorrectly) that "the first feminist movement was briefly just as popular as ours, just as sought after by the finishing press. . . . [But] when they neglected to build their own press, they had access to none" (26).

individual feminist editors who have perceived the intermeshing of suffrage precedent with the contemporary women's publishing industry. Certainly, the tracing of publishing's matrilineal descent has rarely been sponsored by academia. On the Acknowledgements page of Liz Stanley and Ann Morley's The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison (1988) – Chapter 3 of which provides the only previous sustained analysis of the Woman's Press – the instigatory role played by feminist editors in promoting research into women's print history is rendered explicit:

We [Stanley and Morley] would like to thank Candida Lacey of Pandora Press for getting us interested in the first Woman's Press and Ruthie Petrie of Virago Press for suggesting we should make our look at The Woman's Press [sic] an important focus in the book. At the present-day The Women's Press we are everlastingly grateful to Ros de Lanerolle, not least for continuing the honourable tradition of its predecessor. (189)

There is, of course, in a strictly legal sense no formal relationship between the Woman's Press and the modern-day The Women's Press. Yet by juxtaposing the near-identical names of the houses, and by recording feminist publishers' own thirst for their antecedents, Stanley and Morley highlight a weight of feminist inheritance which itself deserves to be the focus of print communications research.⁴

An investigation of the Woman's Press enhances understanding of the nature of feminist publishing precisely because it unsettles both of those key terms – 'feminist' and 'publishing'. Firstly, it prompts a re-evaluation of suffrage feminism by revealing the extent to which the public and political activism of the suffragette movement relied upon literary activity, revealing suffrage agitators' complex understanding of the power of print in moulding public perceptions. In its affiliated groups of women writers, dramatists and sympathetic male literary figures, the WSPU had the writing talent and journalistic experience to fill the columns of its newspaper, Votes for Women, to supply its press with

⁴ This similarity between the names of the two presses has led numerous suffrage historians to mistakenly cite the modern-day press when discussing its Edwardian predecessor (see Hale, 1974: 84; Green, 1997: 3, 95; Joannou, 1998: 106-07).

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manuscripts, and to stock its shops with their works. Its goal was to problematise the British public's uncritical reception of printed information by establishing an alternative media which would in the first instance 'make strange' male hegemony over communications and – by extension – call into question the male monopoly over the parliamentary franchise. In a manner which strikes the late twentieth century as curiously post-modern, the suffrage movement recognised the fluid appropriability of imagery and types, and thus wrestled for the cultural upper hand through a barrage of written, visual and performative propaganda. Throughout the suffrage campaign, the image of the suffragette was a site of intense contestation between pro- and anti-suffrage adherents, and the Woman's Press constituted a key weapon of the WSPU in battling for positive representation and a 'fair press'.

Equally, an analysis of the Woman's Press serves to unsettle concepts of 'publishing', in particular of 'alternative publishing'. Publishing imprints outside the mainstream have tended to view the radical cultural tactic of producing oppositional works as to some extent compromised by the necessary evil of dealing with powerful mainstream sales and distribution channels. In setting up an independent distribution network comprising its own packers, publicity channels, advertising and sales outlets, the Woman's Press realised a degree of industrial autonomy which even second-wave feminist publishers have been unable to sustain, either in its scale or in its commercial strength (refer appendix of illustrations). By refusing to conceptualise 'publishing' as merely the act of getting words onto the page, but instead viewing it as the broader process of getting books into readers' hands, the Woman's Press enacted a radically ambitious conception of politicised publishing. It is perhaps only now, with the development of the Internet and of electronic publishing, that the means to circumvent conventional publishing channels to such an extent is once again within the bounds of women's communicative possibilities.

THE WOMAN'S PRESS: "A RECOGNISED PUBLISHING HOUSE"⁵

The Woman's Press's history, from its establishment as an independent business in January 1907 to its demise in the political uncertainties of late-1914, can be viewed through various interpretative lenses. This discussion contextualises the Woman's Press within three different governing narratives: the British suffrage movement of the Edwardian era; the organisation of the WSPU; and the broader suffrage publishing and distribution network. No individual analytical framework should be regarded as definitive, and indeed, given their very plurality, it would be self-defeating to prioritise any one classificatory context. I adopt this shifting focus on the Woman's Press not simply with an eye on the fashion for polyvocality and lack of closure in contemporary critical practice, but to convey the nature of the Woman's Press as a site of intense debate within the suffrage movement – a movement which was itself prone to factions, splinter groups and surprisingly swift changes of allegiance. Furthermore, the sources themselves prompt such a relativist critical approach. Because the archives of the Woman's Press are no longer in existence, much of what can be gleaned about its activities is derived from autobiographies of the WSPU inner-circle, in particular those of Fred and Emmeline Pethick Lawrence (the wealthy philanthropic couple who sat on the organisation's Executive Committee which was responsible for key policy decisions; 1938; 1943), of Sylvia Pankhurst (an artist, socialist and the second of the three Pankhurst daughters; 1931) and, although she mentions the Press by allusion rather than directly, of Christabel Pankhurst (the eldest Pankhurst daughter and co-founder of the WSPU; 1959). Both the Pethick Lawrences and Sylvia Pankhurst at different points felt the personal and political chill of expulsion from the WSPU at the

⁵ "A little later it changed its name to the Woman's Press, thereby laying the foundation of its present position as a recognised publishing house" (Pethick Lawrence, F. (1911) "The Romance of the Woman's Press." Votes for Women 15 Sep.: 793).

command of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, hence bias and opinion play an even more prominent role in deciphering these histories than is usual in the genre of political autobiography. Even the seemingly more objective accounts of Woman's Press activities contained within the pages of the official WSPU newspaper, Votes for Women, must be interpreted in the light of contemporary interests: firstly, they should be read through the shifting veils of political propaganda; secondly, bearing in mind the WSPU's policy at any given point; and thirdly, taking into account the fact that Fred Pethick Lawrence, the Woman's Press's "first secretary" and effective commissioning editor, was with his wife Emmeline the co-editor of the newspaper in which the accounts appear ("A 'Votes for Women' Clock", 1910: 514).

Above all, it is crucial to factor into the account the Woman's Press's literary and political impetus. It was by no means an independent high art press fuelled by *belletristic* enthusiasm, but rather a component part of a highly-organised and well-funded lobby group with a singularity of focus which distinguishes it from most political movements before or since. Politics and immediate legislative reform in favour of female suffrage were the overriding preoccupations of the WSPU, and the organisation's interest in literature was as a means rather than as an end in itself. Embracing the highly political nature of the Woman's Press, this analysis will outline the Press's varied role as a suffragette publishing house, before turning to the WSPU's engagement in contemporary print politics and media manipulation, as well as to the ambiguities and tensions created by Fred Pethick Lawrence's role as a male directing the communications department of a feminist organisation. My strategy is to approach the Woman's Press simultaneously from a variety of viewpoints because, given the highly-charged political atmosphere and mercurial nature of WSPU politics, it would be critically misguided to privilege any one governing narrative context. Equally, it would be self-defeating; because it is in the very tensions between contesting accounts of the Woman's Press's development and its achievements that it is possible to

glimpse feminist politics and publishing being simultaneously formulated and enacted.

THE EDWARDIAN SUFFRAGE CONTINUUM

Early-twentieth-century suffrage organisations regarded themselves as divided over the issue of militancy: whether or not civil disobedience campaigns and the destruction of property were appropriate tactics for securing the franchise and, if appropriate, to what extent were they effective? Broadly speaking, the non-militant suffragists, who advocated protest marches, petitioning and public meetings as the most politically efficacious means of securing the vote, belonged to the umbrella group of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) led by Millicent Garrett Fawcett, a self-proclaimedly law-abiding suffragist. The more radical end of the suffrage continuum was occupied by the WSPU, a lobbying organisation founded by members of the Pankhurst family in Manchester in 1903, but which had relocated to London in 1906 the better to pressure the epicentre of national politics with its interventionist brand of militant protest. The WSPU's vocabulary of radical political activism escalated during the pre-war era from heckling and disturbance of public meetings of Conservative and Liberal MPs, to elaborate parades and rallies, deliberately-courted imprisonment, hunger strikes resulting in force-feeding, attacks on public and private property and (in its most extreme militant phase between 1912-14) suicide and arson. The supporting role in the public's view of the suffrage drama was played by the Women's Freedom League (WFL), a splinter group of former WSPU adherents which remained theoretically committed to its parent group's conception of militancy, although in actual practice its tactics aligned the group more closely with the constitutional suffragism of the NUWSS. The tactical ambivalence of the WFL highlights the somewhat artificial and arbitrary nature of such pro- and anti-militant classifications, for many women in fact belonged to more than one suffrage organisation, and special-interest groups such as the WWSL publicised themselves as in support of all brands of suffrage activity, both militant and non-militant (Holton, 1986; John and Eustance, 1997). The

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WWSL pledged as its objective the securing of “the vote for women on the same terms as it is or may be granted to men”, a direct borrowing from the wording of the WSPU’s manifesto (Whitelaw, 1990: 69). Yet its prospective members were also targeted with a carefully non-specific stance on militancy: “Its methods are those proper to writers – the use of the pen” (Whitelaw, 1990: 69). In addition, even organisations officially opposed to women’s suffrage, such as the Conservative and Liberal parties and the mainstream churches, fostered suffrage auxiliaries (as the names of the suffrage presses already mentioned indicate), a state of affairs which the scrupulously independent WSPU loudly decried as a propitiatory sop to disenfranchised womanhood.

“THE WRITTEN WORD HAS . . . TO SUPPLEMENT THE SPOKEN WORD”⁶

Viewed within the context of British women’s suffrage politics as a whole, the Woman’s Press appears easily classifiable as the publishing arm of the militant wing, distinguishable by its opposition to the tactics of the NUWSS. Yet the deceptive simplicity of this mental shorthand dissolves once the analytical context is altered. Viewed within the context of the WSPU’s administration, the Woman’s Press emerges again as a complex entity, fulfilling variant roles for the numerous strong personalities within the Union. Most striking for the modern observer is the seeming contemporaneity of the WSPU’s organisation: in its professionalism, its division into financially independent departments, its successful fundraising and its administrative efficiency, the WSPU anticipates the contemporary political lobby group. Ray Strachey, a participant in and historian of the suffrage movement – and a not always sympathetic chronicler of the WSPU – cannot but extol the scale and excitement of WSPU campaigning as co-ordinated by the vast Clement’s Inn central London office:

All, indeed, was action! action! and as fast as money came in it went out again, spent upon organisation at Headquarters and in the country, upon the weekly paper and the vast educational campaigns. Everything was turned to good account – meetings, processions, posters, leaflets, flags, banners,

⁶ Pethick Lawrence, F. (1911) “The Romance of the Woman’s Press.” Votes for Women 15 Sep.: 793.

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drums, shows, ribbons, coaches, omnibuses, and even boats; anything, in fact, which could be used to make a noise and a stir and keep enthusiasm burning and the Cause shining in the public eye. (1928: 311)

The WSPU's nominal president was its co-founder Emmeline Pankhurst, always the Union's biggest drawcard speaker and public figurehead. Yet after the relocation of the WSPU to London in 1906, she was increasingly inclined to delegate Union policy-making in favour of undertaking a hectic national and international public speaking schedule. From 1906, the Union's ideological position and political tactics were dominated by a triumvirate comprising Christabel Pankhurst, the Pankhurst daughter most closely involved in Union activities, and Fred and Emmeline Pethick Lawrence. As a result of his financial skill, journalistic experience and Bar qualifications, Fred Pethick Lawrence headed the Union's accountancy, publishing and newspaper departments as well as providing legal representation in the wake of suffragette raids and protests. Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, an Executive Committee member and the Union's honorary treasurer, engineered vast fundraising meetings in London's Royal Albert Hall and other prestigious venues which were designed to fill the Union's "war chest" (Pethick Lawrence, E., 1910: 514). Yet, because of their highly stage-managed theatricality, these fundraising events garnered widespread press attention and were in themselves considerable public relations coups.

Although the Woman's Press fell, strictly speaking, within Fred Pethick Lawrence's sphere of duty, so vital a component of the WSPU's vast propaganda arsenal was too important to escape the attention of other members of the WSPU inner circle. While a communality of interest reigned as to the Press's ultimate goal – the securing of the vote for women – the *means* by which the Woman's Press was to translate that goal into actuality were perceived differently by each individual. In the eyes of Emmeline Pankhurst, a highly charismatic orator famed for her impassioned rhetoric, the Press's role was to record for posterity the text of speeches delivered in the heat of mass meetings. It represented a means

of extending the audience for a verbal event beyond those physically present at the time of delivery. The implicit hierarchy of communicative media which this view suggests is confirmed by reference to Emmeline Pankhurst's statements on her preferred propagandising methods. Her primary medium of communication was oral rather than written – even her autobiography appears to have been ghosted with the assistance of a sympathetic journalist – and her private correspondence records her conception of written prose as a second-best alternative to the improvisational heat and immediacy of political public speaking: “Oh, dear, why do I always feel as if I were in the dentist's chair when I try to write?” (qtd in Marcus, 1987: 9). Christabel, by contrast, was at ease in both oral and written modes, her legal training at Manchester University underpinning her celebrated court advocacy in suffragette trials, and her lead articles and editorials appearing regularly in the pages of Votes for Women and its successor, The Suffragette. The Woman's Press published texts derived both from her public speeches and from her written articulation of Union policy. Yet, significantly, Christabel appears to have taken less interest than the Pethick Lawrences in the propagandising possibilities of reaching a non-politicised audience through publishing suffrage fiction and drama.

The literary and artistic figures who contributed to the Press's list seem largely to have been maintained within the Woman's Press stable by the diplomatic and networking skills of the Pethick Lawrences. No records or day books for the Press remain in existence, but private networks of acquaintanceship as reconstructed through letters and autobiographies suggest that the influential social circle around the wealthy Pethick Lawrences was instrumental in recruiting liberal writers such as John Masefield, Evelyn Sharp, Israel Zangwill and Laurence Housman to the Press. Evidence derived from annual publishing lists would also seem to support the contention that it was the Pethick Lawrences who grasped the potential of politically-informed fiction and drama for furthering the Cause. Between 1907 and 1912, the Woman's Press published two classics of suffrage drama,

Cicely Hamilton and Christopher St. John's How the Vote Was Won (1909) and Elizabeth Robins's Votes for Women! (1910), in addition to Evelyn Sharp's short stories of suffrage activism, Rebel Women (1911), and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's feminist classic, "The Yellow Wall-paper" (1910).⁷ After the Pethick Lawrences' dramatic expulsion from the WSPU in 1912, the Woman's Press list became geared almost exclusively towards non-fiction propaganda pieces such as Christabel's exposé of male immorality and venereal disease, The Great Scourge and How to End it (1914b), Gertrude Colmore's suffrage hagiography of the 1913 Derby martyr, The Life of Emily Davison: An Outline (1913), and the 11th edition of Emmeline Pankhurst's standard suffrage vade-mecum, The Importance of the Vote (1914). The Union's heightened seriousness and the hardening of its political position in the face of the Liberal government's cynical scuppering of a parliamentary suffrage Bill during the years 1912-14 to some extent explains the narrowing of the Woman's Press list during this period. But the overwhelming preponderance of the Pankhurst surname amongst the author lists in the post-1912 period reflects another political reality; having purged the Pethick Lawrences and their more stalwart supporters from the Union, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst were pursuing an increasingly autocratic policy within the organisation, demanding unswerving political allegiance along military – rather than democratic – lines. Small wonder then that against this background of increasing political stalemate outside the Union and an officially-sanctioned cult of personality within it, the always politically-informed nature of Woman's Press publications ossified into trenchant reiteration of the party line by the Union's leaders.

⁷ Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story has played a pivotal role in feminist publishing endeavours throughout the twentieth century. Aside from the Woman's Press's 1910 edition of the story (first published in the United States in 1892), contemporary feminist press editions of the story and critical compilations about it have included: Ann J. Lane's The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader: The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Fiction (The Women's Press, 1981); The Yellow Wallpaper (Virago Modern Classics, 1981); and The Creative Imagination: A Casebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper" (The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1992).

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"UNDER THE CLOCK": 156 CHARING CROSS ROAD⁸

In considering the Woman's Press within the context of WSPU leadership politics there is a tendency to cast the Press as a pawn in various power struggles and as a tactical enhancement to individual public profiles. While there is an element of truth to this picture, it would be unrepresentative to emphasise the Press's role in terms of its owners' careers without highlighting also its role in the lives of its readers. The most startling element of the Woman's Press project is the boldness of its scale: having experienced viciously hostile press coverage in the mainstream media, and having become inured to mainstream publishers and booksellers refusing to distribute their material, the WSPU leaders at Clement's Inn determined to bypass these networks altogether. Rather than attempting to placate or cajole conventional publishing channels, the WSPU would subvert them through replication – establishing what WSPU militant Constance Lytton dubbed its own "rapid means of irrepressible communication" (1914: 66). Accordingly, virtually the entire life of a WSPU publication took place within a chain of production and distribution directed by pro-suffrage adherents. A book or pamphlet might begin as a speech or manuscript from a suffragette or a member of a sympathetic allied group (such as the WWSL or the men's pro-suffrage societies, the Men's League for Women's Suffrage [MLWS] and the Men's Political Union [MPU]). It would then pass through the editorial department at Clement's Inn headed by Fred Pethick Lawrence and staffed by female "literature secretaries" (Pethick Lawrence, F., 1911: 793), subsequently it would be licensed out to printers to appear under the Woman's Press colophon, and finally it would be packaged by suffragette workers and distributed to its chain of shops for sale to the party faithful or to "passers-by, to whom it is the first introduction of the subject of Votes for Women" (Votes, 1910: 530). The WSPU network of shops was a key tactical advantage in the suffragette campaign. Comprising ten shops within Greater London and seventeen shops in the regions (including branches with a local flavour in both Scotland and Wales) the WSPU outlets aspired to the status of

⁸ "Under the Clock." (1910) Votes for Women 13 May: 533.

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women's community centres, selling a myriad of WSPU-licensed products such as Votes for Women tea, the Union 'colours' in purple, white and green, badges, postcards, china and clothing, in addition to a wide range of suffrage literature. A 1910 postcard depicting the inside of the Charing Cross Road shop shows an artfully-posed suffragette perusing the pages of Votes for Women while surrounded by suffrage regalia, posters for coming rallies and portraits of the movement's leaders. Commenting on a similar picture postcard showing the WSPU's Putney and Fulham branch in the article "Six Suffragette Photographs" (1998), Diane Atkinson underlines the political significance of the WSPU's suffrage outlets, dubbing the cells "nerve centres of local activity" (98). But something more is at stake here, for the postcard in question – a photograph of a shop belonging to a political group, its windows hung with postcards not unlike that held by the viewer – suggests the potentially infinite commercial reproducibility of the suffragette image, its proselytising power radiating centrifugally from the movement's leadership. In its grasp of commercial marketing and the need for easily identifiable insignia, the WSPU again prefigures the modern political campaign, with its reliance on the visual and its blurring of ideology and salesmanship.

The ways in which the various departments of the WSPU intermeshed is well illustrated by the publicity surrounding the opening of the WSPU's flagship store at 156 Charing Cross Road, in the heart of both London's bookselling district and the West End (its exact location is now occupied by the Centre Point building; refer appendix). The 13 May 1910 edition of Votes for Women recorded that the celebrated actress Fanny Brough and novelist Evelyn Sharp (later a Woman's Press author) had opened the new twelve-room premises which would house all aspects of the Woman's Press's activities other than the editorial department, which was to remain under Fred Pethick Lawrence's control at the Clement's Inn Building nearby on the Strand ("Under the Clock", 1910: 533). In the publicity surrounding the opening much is made of the clock attached to the store "bearing

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the letters of VOTES FOR WOMEN in place of the hour numbers" ('A "Votes for Women" Clock' 1910: 514). This fact was a spur for donnish jokes in the mainstream press:

According to the papers the Suffragists' new depot in Charing Cross Road is to have a clock, the figures on the face of which will be Votes for Women. But that will never do – thirteen hours to the day: it wouldn't be cricket. Possibly the papers are wrong, inconceivable as this may seem, and the first word will read, not Votes, but Vote – which is more to the point still. ("Under the Clock", 1910: 533)

In part the move was prompted by commercial considerations: the WSPU's Fifth Annual Report covering 1910-11 reveals that the Woman's Press was generating over £9000 of the Union's total annual turnover of £29 000 and was thus a crucial component of the organisation's finances (Pethick Lawrence, E., 1938: 251). Yet the shops' political role as recruiting centres was also cannily assessed by the Union's leadership, in particular by the commercially savvy Fred Pethick Lawrence. The advertisements carried in Votes for Women, and almost certainly copywritten by him, emphasise the safely conventional nature of the flagship store's location, and the ease with which a visit might be incorporated into a respectable middle-class woman's West End shopping expedition: "This splendid Shop is in a leading thoroughfare, and only Three Doors from Oxford Street, And 50 Yards from the Tottenham Court Road Stations, on the Hampstead and Highgate and Central London Tube Railways" ("The Woman's Press", 1910: 531). Keen to appeal to the mainstream of respectable British womanhood, the WSPU's products, publications and premises were artfully designed to offset the radicalism of the Union's cause and the notoriety of its actions with an aura of feminine decorum and discernment. The as-yet-unpoliticised bourgeois wife might be transformed into a fighter for the Cause if lured inside by the correct blend of suffrage and salesmanship: "No one can gauge the value or the extent of the propagandist work carried on from the many centres throughout the country where the magic words "Votes for Women" are seen over an attractively dressed shop window!" (Votes for Women, 1911: 7).

Respectability was, however, an aura easily dispelled. On 21 November 1911 a mass WSPU demonstration was held in Caxton Hall to protest the government's failure to keep faith on the cross-party Conciliation Bill, which had been ostensibly designed to extend the franchise to women. The more radical suffragettes also met that evening at the Charing Cross Road premises for briefing on the stone-throwing and window-smashing raids to be performed in the West End that evening, resulting in virulent condemnation of the WSPU in the next day's mainstream press and 223 arrests (Rosen, 1974: 153-54). If the shop could serve as a meeting point for militants, safe from the eyes of the Metropolitan Police plain-clothesmen who kept Clement's Inn under constant observation, it had, conversely, also to bear the brunt of public hostility stirred by the WSPU's latest tactic of destroying both public *and* private property. Within four months of the first 1911 window-smashing raid, the WSPU co-ordinated the most famous enactment of its "broken windows" policy⁹: at 5.45pm on the quiet Friday evening of 1 March 1912 over 120 women stationed in the major shopping precincts of Oxford Street, Regent Street, and Piccadilly simultaneously produced hammers and demolished expensive plate-glass windows, a protest which a fulminating Times leading article the following day execrated as an act of "temporary insanity" wrought by "demented and maniacal creatures" ("Suffragist Outrages", 1912: 8). When further "displays of malevolence" on the following Monday evening (4 March) caused widespread damage in the prestige shopping districts of High Street Kensington and Knightsbridge, vigilante groups targeted the Woman's Press's headquarters for retaliation ("Suffragist Outrages", 1912: 8). A highly partisan Times leader of the following day approvingly quotes what are probably fictionalised hecklers, stopping just short of positively egging the stone-throwers on:

A band of 200 young men, who were said to be medical students, marched to the premises of the "Women's Press" [sic] in Charing Cross-road, where a quantity of suffrage literature were [sic] displayed. They broke the

⁹ The title of a 1912 article by Christabel Pankhurst explaining and justifying the WSPU's window-breaking campaign. Reprinted in Marcus, 1987: 123-24.

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windows with stones amid loud cheers from a crowd that had followed them. A large number of men [also] assembled outside the International Suffrage Shop in Adam-street, Strand, and broke the windows there amid such exclamations as "That's right! Let them have it!" and "Pay them back in their own coin!" ("Further Suffragist Outrages", 1912: 8)

That a suffrage shop could be simultaneously political target, commercial outlet and recruiting centre highlights how tightly interlinked the concepts of politics, sales and literature were in the WSPU's strategy. Moreover, it illustrates the pivotal role which the Woman's Press played in mediating the image of the suffragettes for the public at large. When conservative public ire was roused it was, significantly, the Woman's Press shop, and not the well-publicised WSPU headquarters at Clement's Inn, which attracted retaliatory vandalism. In this explosive atmosphere of militant protest and conservative counter-attack, the Woman's Press premises could become quite literally a site of contestation, illustrating in the most concrete form the larger ideological struggles taking place over suffrage identity.

"BANDS OF ZEALOTS"¹⁰ OR THE "MARCH OF THE WOMEN"¹¹: THE STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OF THE SUFFRAGETTE IMAGE

The need to give the WSPU a good press and to infuse the public image of the suffragette with a halo of righteous struggle rather than the brand of hysterical spinsterhood was the primary rationale behind the foundation of the Woman's Press. Yet, on closer examination this broad policy reveals additional and more diverse aims for the Press: a desire to change the nature of suffragette propaganda; to place the movement within a written political present as well as to leave an historical record of its activities for posterity; and a desire to counteract mainstream press misrepresentation and distortion by engaging in

¹⁰ "Further Suffragist Outrages" (1912) Times 5 Mar.: 8.

¹¹ The title of a suffragette marching song composed in 1911 by WSPU member and close friend of Emmeline Pankhurst, Dr (later Dame) Ethel Smyth.

metacommentary on the nature of the communications media. In forwarding this last aim, the Woman's Press constituted only one element of the WSPU's larger print propaganda machine, comprising in addition the weekly periodical Votes for Women (replaced by The Suffragette in October 1912), and the printed and visual ephemera sold in WSPU shops. Yet because all three spheres were co-ordinated from Clement's Inn under the direction of the Pethick Lawrences, the degree of interpenetration amongst WSPU media is high: their glance is directed inwards towards internal WSPU politics and events as much as it is outwards towards parliamentary activities and the non-suffragist world. Suffrage research has long commented upon the centrality of written discourse to the votes for women movement (Pankhurst, E. S., 1931; Marcus, 1987; Solomon, 1991). But critics have less commonly examined the WSPU's keen awareness of external press politics, evidenced by its critical commentary on their organisation's depiction in mainstream periodicals and newspapers. The result of such a manoeuvre was to challenge radically the Edwardian period's confidence in the reliability of the printed word and the self-proclaimed objectivity of the British press. Having sketched the context of the Woman's Press within the political, literary and suffrage landscapes of Edwardian Britain, I turn now to examine the Woman's Press's self-conscious acknowledgement of its own partial position. In unashamedly endorsing explicitly political coverage of current affairs, the WSPU discovered and exploited a curious ideological paradox: that the authority of the printed word can be called into question via the medium of publishing.

Paramount amongst the WSPU's reasons for starting the Woman's Press was the provision of an outlet for suffrage propaganda, and even the Union's key figures had no qualms about using this loaded term – *propaganda* – to describe the output of their Press. Fred Pethick Lawrence, outlining the history of the Woman's Press for a 1910 article in Votes for Women, drew a direct connection between the sales of the Press and potential recruits:

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Figures as to trade may not sound of interest, but when it is remembered that every £1 taken in the sale of 1d. pamphlets means that 240 people are reading about the movement, then a full sense of the propaganda and interest which lie beneath these figures will be appreciated. ("A 'Votes for Women' Clock", 1910: 514)

The Press's director also realised, however, that when assessing the readership of pamphlets and periodicals actual audience size may be significantly larger than sales figures suggest. This is because of the tendency for such publications to be circulated to others, along the principle of the early news-sheets in eighteenth-century coffee houses – one copy of which might be read by 10s of people over the course of a single day. Accordingly, Woman's Press booklets such as those held in the Museum of London suffrage archive are stamped "WHEN READ PLEASE PASS IT ON", and Votes for Women readers are constantly urged to disseminate suffrage literature at social events and especially when on vacation in provincial Britain. In aiming to reach an ever-larger audience through the medium of print, the Woman's Press implicitly acknowledged a key political advantage which British women, and in particular those of the middle class, had over other oppressed groups: namely, a high level of literacy and a sophistication with interpreting political and social debates in printed form. In opening the Woman's Press headquarters in Charing Cross Road, novelist Evelyn Sharp elaborated upon the tactical advantages of attempting to radicalise such a highly literate segment of the population. Alluding to the Cato Street Conspiracy of 1820, in which Radicals inspired by French Revolutionary rhetoric attempted to assassinate the Prime Minister and Cabinet, she cited the Tories' charge that –

it was the fault of education, that if the Radicals had not been taught to read and write, this discontent would never have spread, and that the discontented ought to be kept dumb. This was just what the Woman's Press was not going to do. By means of VOTES FOR WOMEN and other literature the Woman's Press was educating the country, and helping women to make their just demands heard by the Government. ("Under the Clock", 1910: 533)

Given Emmeline Pankhurst's constant reiteration that militancy should result in no loss of life or physical harm beyond that inflicted by suffragettes upon themselves, one cannot but imagine that Evelyn Sharp's Cato Street allusion fell somewhat short of a public relations

triumph in the leadership's eyes. Yet Sharp's key point – the catalyst role played by literacy in fermenting nineteenth-century social revolt – was one that the women's suffrage movement had early imbibed, and which infused the print activism of the WSPU at every level.

Having before them the precedent of an influential mass suffrage agitation in the form of Chartism, the twentieth-century women's suffrage movement could not but be aware of the necessity of recording its ideas and actions in a form available to subsequent generations. This sense of situation at and participation in a key historical moment pervades suffrage literature and rhetoric, but it is enunciated specifically in relation to the Woman's Press in the Introduction to the Press's Suffrage Speeches from the Dock (1912). The book is essentially a collection of selected highlights from the 1912 conspiracy trial of Emmeline Pankhurst, Fred Pethick Lawrence and Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, who defended themselves against charges of having conspired together and incited the widespread window-smashing raids of March of that year. Proud to offer the public "these suffrage speeches from the dock" in a "rather more permanent form", the Introduction frames what follows as not only for the edification and instruction of a contemporary audience, but also as a socio-political document for historians and activists of future ages:

We believe that for the importance of their subject-matter and as oratory these speeches will hold high and permanent place among the great speeches of the world. And truly the criminal's dock is the finest of all platforms from which to utter a vindication of political liberty. (1)

The curious terminological relativism by which one age's criminal may become the next age's champion of liberty was underlined for suffragette leaders by a contemporaneous struggle for self-determination and parliamentary representation: Irish Home Rule. With the knowingness of historical hindsight, the synchronicity of these two protest movements – both thorns in the side of successive Liberal governments and both ultimately (or at least, in the case of Ireland, predominantly) successful – provokes curiosity as to how the WSPU

viewed what was in some sense an analogous struggle. Frequently the Union's response was one of pique that any other issue should monopolise that parliamentary time which Liberal leaders such as Asquith averred was so scarce that space in the parliamentary programme could not be found to pass a Private Member's women's franchise Bill through its final stages. For single-issue political campaigns, the drawing of parallels between on-going struggles inevitably, in some sense, dilutes the movement's proclaimed uniqueness and threatens loss of momentum. In a rare 1912 article in Votes for Women, however, the Irish cause figures not as a potential distraction of the public mind away from weightier women's suffrage issues, but as an inspirational precursor, a case study of the way in which the successful criminal prosecution of a protest movement's leaders may, paradoxically, buoy that movement on a wave of public sympathy:

It is not the first time that "Speeches from the Dock" have made the finest propaganda for the noblest cause of resistance to blind and unreasoning oppression! Every Irish patriot of the last hundred years knows that, and soon our cause will have a volume of such speeches as large and as valuable as Ireland has. (Votes for Women, 1912: 350)

Yet, if the Irish nationalist struggle piqued the interest of Votes for Women, it was as an historical event rather than as a contemporary self-determination movement. In so far as it illustrated the utility of radical rhetoric in printed form to a revolutionary group, Ireland was deserving of the WSPU's attention. But the complex relationship between suffragism and Irish republicanism was, in itself, considered a distraction by the WSPU Executive.¹² WSPU activism in Ireland, such as Christabel Pankhurst's September 1913 visit to Ulster, angered Irish suffragists by its tone of imperialist superiority and its high-handed disregard of the intricacies of the local political situation (Owens, 1984: 70-71). Thus, although the WSPU was enthusiastic in its support of intra-suffrage media commentary, and although it promoted critical analysis of the British media in general, when faced with the complex intermeshing of two contemporaneous radical movements and their media presentations, the

¹² Refer to the discussion of the Cuala Press in Chapter 2 of this thesis outlining the complex inter-relationship of women's politics and the nationalist cause in pre-First World War Ireland.

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WSPU tendency was simplistically to construe Republican tactics as precursors to the main event of the suffrage campaign.

Votes for Women's editorial remarks about the Irish tradition of radical speech-making necessarily direct attention to the role of the Woman's Press as a conduit for transferring the WSPU's powerful oratorical tradition – the court speeches, the mass meetings in the Royal Albert Hall, the soapbox speeches in public forums, and the by-election outdoor rallies – into printed form. The rationale for the translation of the spoken event into the printed word was primarily to attract a geographically dispersed and socially diverse cross-section of the community. Firebrand speeches at rallies and vast demonstrations tended to attract self-identified suffragettes and had the advantage of appealing in particular to working women whose literacy levels and leisure time may have been limited. But, for many middle-class women it was printed books and pamphlets which provided the medium of choice because their purchase involved minimal public statement of allegiance and the books themselves could be decorously sampled and digested within the confines of the home. This untapped constituency of non-aligned middle-class women – the unenfranchised 'swinging voter' of the pre-war age – was one to which the WSPU was particularly keen to appeal, as the involvement of 'respectable' women had power to dispel hostile public perceptions of screeching and ill-kempt suffragettes. Hence Woman's Press publications packaged their radical content in tasteful pastel covers with Art Nouveau-influenced designs and standard layout – an aesthetic tactic which, for the modern critic, appears to prefigure Virago's later marketing triumph of the Modern Classics. Elizabeth Robins, in her role as both actress and novelist, well understood the WSPU's need to mould itself into a multimedia organisation which could sell its speeches as books to middle-class women and which could, conversely, mine its books for vivid spoken quotations to catch the imagination in particular of working-class women. Either medium alone, she emphasises, is an insufficient use of the suffrage propaganda arsenal: "The magnificent platform work

being done from various centres must be supplemented and further spread about the world through the medium of the written word" (Whitelaw, 1990: 71). The immediacy of the rousing speech and the longevity of the printed word were designed to work in tandem so that the WSPU could both initiate and – most importantly – maintain supporter enthusiasm in the midst of a constantly changing political landscape.

Suffragette policies and publicity were continually evolving during the years 1905-14, as each new by-election, deputation to the Prime Minister, showcase trial or spate of activism was assessed for its tactical advantages and political expediency. But one element which remained near constant throughout the years of suffrage struggle was the mainstream press's hostile representation of suffragettes as unattractive, spinsterly, badly-dressed, sexually-frustrated hysterics. This deeply damaging stereotype, perhaps epitomised in the savage Punch cartoons of the period, hit its mark precisely because of its adept inversion of the model of Edwardian womanhood (Fawcett's, 1997; Jury, 1997). It thus presented a formidable obstacle to the WSPU's creation of a positive public profile for the figure of the suffragette. Academic research into the origins and impact of anti-suffragette iconography has, however, perhaps obscured the fact that silence, rather than hostility, represented the greatest political threat to suffrage activists (Tickner, 1987; Rolley, 1990). Outraged insults delivered from the modern pulpit of the Times editorial or the pages of Punch at very least attested to the suffrage movement's existence on the political landscape and its impingement (however negative) on the collective social consciousness. Christabel Pankhurst, in her posthumously-published memoir of militancy, Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote (1959), states that it is press silence which "by keeping women uninformed, had so largely smothered and strangled the movement" (55). Her comment evokes the earlier 1866-67 struggle by John Stuart Mill and Victorian feminists Emily Davis, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and Lydia Becker to instigate public debate around women's suffrage for their women's franchise amendment to the Second Reform Bill. In

seeking to place the issue of women's suffrage on the national liberal agenda, the Langham Place women had benefited from access to Emily Faithfull's feminist printing and publishing house, the Victoria Press (1860-1873) and the monthly the Victoria Magazine (1863-80) of which Faithfull was editor (Bostick, 1980; Nestor, 1982). In its strategic combination of publishing house and periodical news-sheet, the Victoria Press is an important historical antecedent of the Woman's Press, though in the WSPU's embrace of sensationalism and spectacle there is a goading of conservative public opinion at odds with the carefully maintained decorousness of the Victoria print enterprises. Christabel Pankhurst perceived that, for a recently revived political movement seeking coverage in the illustrated penny newspapers, there was no such thing as bad publicity: "Yet even exaggerated and distorted reports, which made us seem more terrible than we were, told the world this much – that we wanted the vote and were resolved to get it" (1959: 70).

This conviction that negative publicity was at least preferable to an obscuring silence prevailed most strongly in the early days of the WSPU, when novel militant tactics were being trialled as a means of provoking debate on a moribund issue. But as the movement for the vote gathered momentum and came to occupy a prominent position on the political stage, *favourable* commentary became a tactical necessity, and WSPU leaders were less given to display wry tolerance in the face of unrelentingly demonising reports in the mainstream British press. Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, in a Votes for Women article entitled "What We Think of Criticism, And our Answer to It" (1909), lambasted the major dailies for the false mask of objectivity they wore to disguise the blatant bias of their opinions, concerned that "sincere and conscientious" women "do not realise that these leading articles are written by those who are personally or officially opposed to women's enfranchisement" (25). But her article concludes on a patronising note that was to become more frequent as the WSPU autocracy strove to instil support for the controversial policy of extreme militancy amongst its grassroots membership: "We must remember how hard it is

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for the majority of women to understand the real meaning of this battle, or the tactics of the campaign” (25). The Woman’s Press and its associated periodical Votes for Women were designed to bridge this gap, stating and elaborating the party line for the movement’s footsoldiers, but there was little toleration shown for criticism of the inner-circle leadership in either medium. The Pankhursts and the Pethick Lawrences were convinced of the need for a ‘free’ press in so far as it would present the suffrage cause in a positive light, but a free and open press at the service of disgruntled factions within the WSPU itself formed no part of their plans for a unified and militant political movement.

The early WSPU belief that negative publicity was at least preferable to no publicity at all underwent revision once it became clear, during the years after 1908, that certain papers were pursuing an unremittingly hostile anti-suffrage line. The suffrage movement, as an outsider political group, with some reason suspected a conspiracy amongst the mainstream editors and newspaper barons to subedit journalistic copy to bring it into line with editorial policy: “We suspected that [sympathetic journalists’] copy was touched up in newspaper offices by those who had no first-hand knowledge of the movement, and that they themselves were perhaps under instruction ‘not to encourage it’ ” (Pankhurst, C., 1959: 70). Moreover, media barons such as the Express proprietor Lord Beaverbrook are indicted by Christabel as part of a conspiracy of newspaper potentates “meeting in conclave and agreeing to be blind and dumb concerning the doings of the militants” (1959: 55). But as the WSPU’s militant tactics escalated in their notoriety and shock-value, the threat of the Cause being relegated to media silence diminished. In its place arose a discursive field of free and fast appropriation of images, arguments and tactics between the anti-suffrage and pro-suffrage lobbies, a field in which the Woman’s Press – because of its status as an independent apparatus of media production – assumed crucial importance for the militants.

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“THE PLATFORM WHICH THE CONTROL OF AN . . . ORGAN OF OPINION PROVIDED”¹³:
SUBVERSION, OCCUPATION, METACOMMENTARY AND THE POLITICS OF NOTORIETY

Contemporaneous with the escalation of suffrage militancy after March 1912 was a corresponding rise in the discursive struggle around the symbolic site of the suffragette. Lisa Tickner, in her detailed study of the imagery of the suffrage campaign, The Spectacle of Women (1987), terms this contest for specific images and their political connotations “intertextuality”:

Representations of the ‘feminine’, together with overt and covert arguments regarding the appropriate moral, social and political functions of women, were constantly produced in such contemporary institutions and discourses. . . . Suffrage propaganda is sited within (and cites) this *intertextuality*, which provided its major themes and the context in which it sought to make its effects. (152)

Because Tickner’s focus is on the visual arts and suffrage – the elaborate banners, posters and pageantry of suffrage parades and spectacles – her tendency is to emphasise intertextuality as an on-going process between the realm of the artistic and the political. Yet the notion of interdisciplinary blurring and discursive cross-fertilisation applies equally well to the literary realm of suffrage fiction and, more specifically, to the literary industries controlled by suffrage groups which secured the entry of pro-suffrage material into the arena of public discourse. That the suffragists’ elaborate semiotic struggle depended upon media outlets remaining in suffrage hands is made clear by the insistence of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst in October 1912 that the Pethick Lawrences surrender control of the Woman’s Press to the remaining WSPU Executive, while being permitted to retain their joint-editorship of Votes for Women. The creation of a new periodical masthead and audience clearly implied a limited degree of campaign disruption, but to have lost the administrative structure, distribution channels and sales outlets associated with the

¹³ “I gathered round me a little circle, to plan out with me how best we could utilize the platform which the control of a daily organ of opinion provided.” Fred Pethick Lawrence on his proprietorship of the Echo newspaper (1901-04) in Pethick Lawrence, F. W. (1943) Fate Has Been Kind. London: Hutchinson: 56.

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Woman's Press would have severely jeopardised the WSPU's programme of discursive interventionism (Stanley with Morley, 1988: 92). To be once again reduced to the state of political aphasia in which "newspapers will not accept, publishers will not print, and booksellers will not sell the true facts concerning us" was, for the publicity-conscious Pankhursts, an untenable outcome.

In the campaign to woo public opinion over the suffrage issue, I identify three key and interrelated tactics exploited by the WSPU in order to transform negative stereotypes into iconic representations: *subversion*; *occupation*; and *metacommentary*. The first of these media skills, subversion, is exemplified by the suffragettes' ability to manipulate their involvement in a superficially damaging event so as to transform it into a public relations coup. Such an opportunity was presented in abundance by the 1912 conspiracy trial of the Union's leaders. During the course of the trial, the prosecution read at length from pro-suffrage tracts – and this material received such a significant proportion of the column inches devoted to coverage of the trial – that suffrage material was successfully and almost surreptitiously introduced into the conservative major dailies. Celebrating the WSPU's victory in infiltrating these pro-government bastions, Christabel in her autobiography pronounced "what a pity there was no broadcasting in those days! That trial, had it been generally heard, would have impressed the whole country and roused the public to still greater sympathy with the Suffragettes" (1959: 213). Christabel's characteristic instinct for publicity and notoriety proved reliable on this issue: the three WSPU leaders were convicted and imprisoned, but the presiding judge's two daughters were so incensed at the judgement that they joined the WSPU – a media relations coup relished by the militants. This kind of subversive media infiltration was foreshadowed when "a great London daily (The Standard) for the first time devoted columns of its space, daily, to full accounts of meetings, deputations, debates, and to articles for and against the Suffrage", thus reducing the WSPU's publicity costs and acting (perhaps unwittingly) as a conduit for potential Votes for

Women subscribers (E. Robins qtd in Mulford, 1982: 191). In the crowded Edwardian print media market, even newspapers locked into seemingly hostile political relationships could operate symbiotically: Standard readers swelling the WSPU's circulation numbers; while Votes for Women readers gleefully scanned thundering denunciations of "Suffragist Outrages" in the mainstream news-sheets.

The second of the WSPU's transformative tactics might be summarised as appropriation or – to employ fashionable critical idiom – occupation: namely, the ability to appropriate a previously pejorative label and to infuse it with positive connotations. The mainstream usage of the term 'suffragette' itself testifies to the political efficacy of the manoeuvre. Early in the WSPU's existence the conservative Daily Mail condescendingly dubbed the new militant breed of suffrage activists 'suffragettes', a term immediately adopted by the Pankhursts and so successfully promoted that, when in 1912 the WSPU sought a name for its new periodical, The Suffragette was chosen – matched with the image of a lithe, attractive young woman proudly selling copies of the new WSPU organ. The last of these tactics similarly reveals the instability of political labels and their connotations, and further highlights the radical implications of the WSPU's press policy. On its front page Votes for Women carried a regular column entitled "The Outlook" in which not only were the latest developments in WSPU policy explained, but coverage of the movement in other newspapers was noted, often with an exposé of the author's bias, closet political affiliations or factual inaccuracies. Thus the WSPU not only encouraged its membership to subject the mainstream media's self-proclaimed political neutrality to rigorous critical scrutiny, but it also suggested, by acknowledging the partiality of its own Woman's Press and newspaper, the inescapable politicality of any pronouncement on current affairs. By promoting metacommentary around the media in general, the WSPU staged what was for Edwardian Britain a profoundly radical cultural manoeuvre. Yet the subsequent conflicts within the WSPU's leadership and the disgruntlement amongst its rank and file members suggest that

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broadcasting the partisan nature of all pronouncements may be inimical to maintaining a political movement's singularity of purpose. There is a fine line, it would appear, between polyvocality and dissent.

"THE MAN'S SHARE"¹⁴: FRED PETHICK LAWRENCE AND THE LIMITS OF
MASCULINE JURISDICTION

What degree of significance should be attached to the fact that, although the Woman's Press was twentieth-century Britain's first high-profile, self-proclaimedly feminist press, it was in fact run by a man? In this thesis's foregoing analyses, male involvement in feminist publishing at managerial or proprietorial levels has generally been detrimental, commonly signalling the dilution of a press's political content and the exacerbation of in-house battles for editorial control. The Women's Press's attempt to contest its owner's reduction of black and third-world writing on its list met with forced redundancies and en masse resignations¹⁵; the experience of Dublin's Cuala Press suggests that investing a capable and independent-minded woman with administrative but not editorial control over a press is to invite irresolvable conflicts over the power to publish.¹⁶ By contrast, Fred Pethick Lawrence's role as "first secretary" of the Woman's Press does not appear – on its surface – fundamentally to have compromised the feminist agenda of the WSPU print enterprise. But the very ambiguity of his role within the hierarchy of the suffrage organisation gives rise to debates over male involvement in suffrage politics and – in particular – in the production of the suffragette image.

¹⁴ The title of Fred Pethick Lawrence's defence of male involvement in the women's suffrage movement, itself adapted from the peroration of his address to the jury in the 1912 conspiracy trial. Refer The Man's Share (1912) London: Woman's Press.

¹⁵ Refer Chapter 3 and also the author's " 'Books of Integrity': The Women's Press, Kitchen Table Press and Dilemmas of Feminist Publishing." (1998) European Journal of Women's Studies 5.2: 171-93.

¹⁶ Refer Chapter 2.

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As a man, Pethick Lawrence was barred from membership of the women-only WSPU, yet his status as manager of its business interests, co-editor of its newspaper, legal representative, effective co-treasurer, chief donor and regular public speaker gave him, in a de facto sense, what Sylvia Pankhurst described as “a large controlling part in the affairs of the Union” (1931: 267). In his memoirs, Fate Has Been Kind (1943), Pethick Lawrence confirms the Edwardian public’s perception of him as not only a key administrator, but also a key policy-maker within the WSPU’s controlling triumvirate: “the daily executive control of the agitation passed for a time unobtrusively and almost unconsciously into the hands of an unofficial committee of three persons – Christabel, my wife and myself” (75). The exact ratio of power wielded by each member of this “unofficial committee” and that retained by the often-absent Emmeline Pankhurst has itself been the subject of extended critical debate (Purvis, 1996; Balshaw, 1997). But it is Fred Pethick Lawrence’s centrality to this group, and the indispensability of the financial and editorial skills he brought to a political lobby group in its early stages, which are vital to a consideration of his role *vis-à-vis* the Woman’s Press. The various statements which Pethick Lawrence made in order to reconcile the contradictions inherent in his position should be read according to the context of the period in which they were articulated, for his comments made in the heat of the pre-war suffrage agitation concede less of the troubling ambiguity revealed in his *ex post facto* justifications.

Pethick Lawrence’s most frequent contemporary explanation for his involvement was as the suffrage movement’s sponsor or “Godfather” (the name by which he was known to the Pankhurst sisters and to the rank and file suffragettes generally), the model of a supportive spouse standing by a cause with social and democratic right on its side (Brittain, 1963: 46):

I am a man, and I cannot take part in this women’s agitation myself, because I am a man; but I intend . . . to stand by the women who are fighting in this agitation. Knowing what methods have succeeded in history, I am not going to say that these methods have been a mistake. I say that because I think in the first place it is not merely that it is a women’s

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battle, it is not merely a battle for women – it is a battle for the good of the people of this country, a battle waged by one half of the community whose deeds are valuable to the other part of the country and should not be excluded. And when I see other men standing out against this agitation, then I am more determined to stand in with it; and I feel this further, but for some of those men who have stood in with this agitation there might be a danger of this agitation becoming a sex war. I say it is because of the men who have stood in the battle that a sex war has been prevented. (Pethick Lawrence, F. W., 1912: 31)

Yet by the time Pethick Lawrence was penning his memoirs in the early-1940s, the battle for equal women's suffrage had long been won, and Pethick Lawrence, in his role as historian of the movement, was able to reveal somewhat more candidly his actual role in suffrage campaigning:

I did not at first deem it my business to take any active part in the struggle. The day had gone by when 'ladies' expected 'gentlemen' to be kind enough to tell them how to get the vote. This was a campaign organized by women and executed by women who were out to show the stuff they were made of. . . . There was no lack of initiative, drive, courage and enthusiasm. But . . . there was a danger that by the very exuberance of its growth the movement would outrun its own co-ordination. There was a need for . . . 'planning' on the business side. (1943: 71)

The battle now won, Pethick Lawrence is freed from the awkward inquiries of the pre-war era as to what legitimate role a man could play in a movement fighting for the self-determination of women. But in his insistence that his role was primarily one of administrative support, Pethick Lawrence understates his own executive influence, obscuring the extent to which his was a powerful voice in the articulation of Union policy. It is difficult to reconcile Pethick Lawrence's autobiographically-endorsed image of WSPU triumvir with that of the attentive husband and self-effacing spouse. The impression left by the account in Fate Has Been Kind is of guardedness on the issue: Pethick Lawrence seems aware of an ideological inconsistency, yet he is simultaneously loath to deny his important role in suffrage history.

Just how significant Pethick Lawrence was in the administrative and organisational hierarchy of the WSPU is highlighted by one of the rare references to the Woman's Press in

the private correspondence of the Union's leaders. In a frostily formal exchange between Emmeline Pankhurst and Fred Pethick Lawrence, written in the immediate wake of the latter's forced 1912 departure from the Union, Pethick Lawrence enquires as to how the business affairs of the Woman's Press should be transferred to the Pankhursts and thus disentangled from the accounts of the Pethick Lawrences' remaining interest, Votes for Women. "The Woman's Press account," Pethick Lawrence writes, "at the present time is in my name and is operated on by my signature. . . . Will you please let me know to whom I am to hand over the balance?"¹⁷ Commissioning editor of the Woman's Press, chief publisher, reader and – by this evidence – sole signatory on its account, Pethick Lawrence's control over the suffrage publishing house was near complete. Furthermore, Pethick Lawrence's power base within the Woman's Press could potentially have left him vulnerable to allegations of a conflict of interests, given that he acted as both author and commissioning editor of numerous Woman's Press works. Prolific in his written defence of Union activities, he in 1908 produced the pamphlet The Opposition of the Liberal Government to Woman Suffrage, and followed this with the book-length propaganda piece Women's Fight for the Vote (1910), and his intriguing defence, cited earlier, of men's involvement in the movement, The Man's Share (1912). Despite this latent potential for conflict, it is unquestionable that Pethick Lawrence used his far-reaching influence with discernment and produced books and booklets in greater profusion and of a consistently higher literary and production standard than those of other British suffrage presses. What decided Pethick Lawrence's fate as a suffrage publisher was not, in the end, his immense commitment and practical achievements but his ideological anomalousness in a women-only cause – a Pankhurst-decreed fate not so much kind as politically expedient.

¹⁷ Pethick Lawrence Papers. Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge, UK. Dated 15 October 1912. PL Box 9.33. Subsequent references to this archive appear in the text as PL followed by the box number and item number.

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An organisation so attuned to the politics which underlie media representations and so alert to the mainstream press's power as gatekeeper of public discourse cannot have failed to realise the vulnerabilities of their arguments for women's self-determination in the face of Pethick Lawrence's actual role in the WSPU's organisation. In the event, the Pankhursts' decision that his detrimental impact had begun to outweigh his self-sacrificing contributions to the Union did result in a more consistent WSPU policy. But, ironically, in attempting to buttress the public image of the Union, they severely compromised the status of the Woman's Press as an independent publisher of progressive fiction and drama. By 1914, the range of its output drastically curtailed and its list of authors reduced to Pankhurst-loyal WSPU insiders, the Woman's Press had declined from a lively centre of suffrage debate to an obedient service press. The Press had, of course, always produced propaganda, but under the editorial auspices of Pethick Lawrence it had sought to infuse the term with the concept of a politically-committed but polyvocal literature, not merely to connote the publishing of tendentious, repetitious broadsides. The striking of this uneasy balance between art and politics was to prove perhaps the most difficult of feminist publishing's precarious reconciliations over the later decades of the twentieth century. Yet for the period between 1907 and 1912 the Woman's Press appears – however fleetingly – to have achieved this delicate balance.

CONCLUSION

PUBLISHING'S TROUBLED MATRILINEAL DESCENT: PLACING FEMINIST PRESSES IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

How is it that a vibrant feminist publishing culture such as that which existed in Britain during the pre-war years could have become so eclipsed by the mid-twentieth century that details of its existence were confined to occasional footnotes in suffrage autobiographies? It appears inconceivable – with publications flooding out from the Woman's Press, from the publishing departments of the WFL and the NUWSS, from the International Suffrage Shop,

and from at least eight other feminist identified imprints – that the very idea of feminist publishing could subsequently have become so obscured that by the early-1970s a women-run press appeared ground-breakingly innovative and breath-takingly unprecedented. More curious still is contemporary feminist academia's comparative disinterest in Britain's feminist book publishing tradition, a broad-scale indifference which persists despite the initiatives of feminist editors, and in spite of a recent preoccupation amongst media scholars with the nature of cultural industries and their role in nurturing politico-literary movements. The comparatively sparse discussion of the Woman's Press found in secondary suffrage material focuses overwhelmingly on the Press's role within the internal organisational politics of the WSPU, bypassing the complexity of the WSPU's involvement in the media politics of the Edwardian age. The WSPU well recognised that an independent publishing organ was a crucial weapon in any oppositional group's political arsenal. But they simultaneously recognised that a relationship of strategic *interdependence* existed between the radical and mainstream media: the suffragettes depended upon sensational publicity in the commercial media, but at the same time reserved the power to critique, subvert, parody and reappropriate such coverage in the media outlets over which they maintained exclusive control. The Woman's Press, as a publishing house, was a crucial addition to these suffrage media industries, lending suffrage writings the permanence and prestige of the book format, and penetrating markets for feminist fiction and drama which may have proven resistant to suffrage propaganda couched in more ephemeral forms. In its most tangible manifestation as the Woman's Press at 156 Charing Cross Road, the Press illustrates its centrality to the WSPU campaigning machine: meeting point; merchandising outlet; propaganda powerhouse; and publicity opportunity – the venue epitomises the interlinked strands of politics, profit and spectacle which structure the WSPU identity.

What reasons can be given for the eclipse of the Woman's Press after 1914? In large part, the fortunes of a press so assimilated into the campaigning machinery of a

political organisation are dependent upon the continued viability of that organisation. The transformation of the WSPU and its print organs into a pro-war patriotic lobby group in 1914 tended to place the suffrage issue on the back-burner of public consciousness, with a resultant shrinkage in the Woman's Press's list of suffrage propaganda. Interestingly, the Woman's Press was not transformed into a pro-war propaganda outfit in the way the Pankhursts in 1914 converted their new WSPU newspaper, The Suffragette, into the jingoistic Britannia. In the changeable political climate of total war, the long lead and preparation times required in publishing appeared a hindrance to the speedy dissemination of information and opinion, thus the Pankhursts – as ever scenting the best mode of publicity for a new turn of events – invested their political capital almost exclusively in newsprint.

The shift of public attention away from women's suffrage after the declaration of war boded ill for the feminist presses, and the increasing relegation of feminist issues to the margins of public consciousness was compounded after the granting of full women's suffrage in 1928. A political movement which has achieved its goal of equal suffrage leaves its publishing house without a *raison d'être*. Yet the Woman's Press could perhaps have transformed itself into a literary press concerned with women's issues and fiction after the war: it boasted a high-profile and politically-committed stable of writers such as Cecily Hamilton, Elizabeth Robins, Israel Zangwill, Laurence Housman and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Moreover, many of these individuals had demonstrated through their publications with the Woman's Press and by means of their involvement with affiliated suffrage lobby groups that they understood writing as a political act, and that – by extension – they perceived media industries as organisations wielding both political and cultural power. It seems probable that the literary connections and artistic will could have been found to transform the imprint into a private press along the lines of the Yeats sisters' Cuala Press or Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press. But the collapse of the WSPU after the war

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effectively relegated the Press to silence and obscurity.

Given that the two high points of feminist publishing activity this century have been the suffrage presses of the Edwardian period and the second-wave women's presses of the 1970s and 1980s, it is tempting to juxtapose the two experiments to distil principles and practices common to feminist publishing enterprises. Both movements drew direct links between the power to publish and the power to enter public discourse and thus effect political change; both employed almost exclusively female staff and identified the politicisation of their workforce as central to feminist politics; both movements embraced new marketing and publicity developments and recognised in notoriety an opportunity to advance their political message. But, more intriguing than the similarities between the two periods and their presses are the differences, for in the space between the Woman's Press on the one hand, and Virago, The Women's Press and collectivist feminist presses on the other, it is possible to discern a politics of feminist publishing evolving in the face of changing socio-political realities and media technologies.

The Woman's Press, engaged in a feminist political campaign focused on a single goal in the form of the vote, exploited the possibilities of publishing for applying pressure to the Liberal government. Exciting broader social and cultural change was crucially related to this task, but WSPU propaganda constantly reiterates the belief that diffuse cultural change without franchise reform is in itself inadequate. Because its activities swung increasingly towards the illegal (as opposed to the merely radical) pole of political life, practical distribution issues affected the WSPU with an urgency greater than that experienced by previous (constitutional) women's suffrage societies. In response to the threat of state silencing, the WSPU directed its resources towards establishing an ambitious distribution network of shops in which the conditions under which its texts were sold could be controlled directly. Second-wave feminist presses, by contrast, grew out of a women's

movement whose energies were directed towards a gamut of political and social reforms. It was a movement political in its self-conception rather than party-political in its affiliation. As a result of this crucial ideological difference between the goals of the two movements, the feminist presses of the 1970s and 1980s generally envisaged their role as one of effecting political change *via* cultural change, rather than perceiving their role as primarily one of lobbying for specific legislative reform. Indeed, Virago's most recent transformation into an imprint for savvy, iconoclastic – but not necessarily feminist – writing suggests that some second-wave feminist houses may now read their connection to a political women's movement as non-essential. Yet, conversely, in an era obsessed with representations and the power of imagery, specifically *cultural* dissent may itself be sufficient to win the badge of radicalism. This does, however, leave contemporary 'feminist' presses charting their way through an ideological minefield: either they have retreated from the difficult terrain of 'real' political change, or, in seeking to transform cultural norms through challenging gendered literary tropes, they are mounting the most arduous and fundamental political challenge of all.

For feminist media critics, the juxtaposition of the Woman's Press with its descendants of the 1970s provokes a final, highly-unsettling line of inquiry: do successful feminist publishing enterprises herald their own demise by winning over the very mainstream they seek to transform? Basing their self-conception on opposition to prevalent cultural norms, do feminist publishing imprints leave themselves with nowhere to stand and stripped of their *raison d'être* once they successfully insert themselves into the cultural mainstream? Certainly, this appears to have been the case with the Woman's Press: while the campaign for the vote continued, its feminist publishing programme was characterised by highly efficient administration and tight policy focus, yet the advent of war and the subsequent winning of the franchise signalled a loss of identity and rapid dissolution. In an analogous manner, Virago, champion of neglected and marginalised women writers,

achieved such success in its campaign to transform mass-market reading habits and the male-dominated literary canon that it initiated wide-spread mainstream imitation – with the result that what had once appeared a radical publishing agenda came to look somewhat tired and expended.

Arguably the ideal for a feminist publishing house – and more broadly for any radical cultural organisation – is to remain on the margins of political acceptability, shifting ground and pushing parameters in response to changes in the centreground of political debate. But such agility is difficult to maintain, even in a small-sized organisation, let alone in a mid-sized corporation with its attendant bureaucracy and institutional inertia. Most significant of all, the requirement of periodic self-reinvention adds yet another complication to the set of dualities which feminist publishing must seek constantly to reconcile into a workable compromise: political commitment versus commercial viability; artistic merit versus short-term political expedience; radical innovation versus the need to retain a core readership and market base. That the Woman's Press reconciled these conflicting pressures into a viable arrangement bears testament to the possibility of feminist publishing successfully walking this difficult commercial/ideological tightrope. But the brevity of the Woman's Press's active life simultaneously suggests that such a balancing act is always and inevitably highly precarious.

COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS: THE DEMISE OF RADICAL FEMINIST PUBLISHING

I've watched the rise of what I call "Failure Vanguardism" – the philosophy that if your group falls apart, your personal relationships fail, your political project dissolves, and your individual attitude is both bitter and suicidal, you are obviously a Radical. If, on the other hand, your group is solidifying itself (let alone expanding), if you are making progress in your struggle with lover/husband/friends, if you have gained some ground for women in the area of economics, health, legislation, literature . . . and if, most of all, you appear optimistic – you are clearly Sold Out. To succeed in the slightest is to be Impure. Only if your entire life, political and personal, is one plummet of downward mobility and despair, may you be garlanded with the crown of feminist thorns. You will then have one-upped everybody by your competitive wretchedness, and won their guilty respect. Well, to such a transparently destructive message I say, with great dignity, "Fooley". I want to win for a change.

– Robin Morgan, "Rights of Passage" (1977: 13)

During the course of the 1990s, Britain's two highest-profile feminist publishers – Virago Press and The Women's Press – both celebrated their twentieth birthdays with a flurry of promotional material and with befitting self-congratulation on their publishing achievements to date. For a critique of twentieth-century British feminist publishing these anniversaries are of particular significance, given the media debates which they both generated around feminist publishing's socio-literary impact and its continued relevance to the multinational-dominated publishing industry (Bennett, C., 1993; Macaskill, 1993; Griffey, 1998; Steel, 1998). Simultaneously the publicity has, however, encouraged an overly simplistic conflation in the public mind of these two individual presses with the phenomenon of feminist publishing as a whole. This reduction of a movement to an emblematic pair of presses invites critical reassessment, firstly because it works to obscure earlier twentieth-century feminist publishing developments (as

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explored in the foregoing chapter's analysis of the Woman's Press) and, furthermore, because it effectively casts to the periphery of critical attention the radical, collectively-run women's liberation presses burgeoning during the same period. It is this more radical segment of the second-wave feminist publishing spectrum which this chapter explores in order to disrupt the over-easy popular conflation of Virago and The Women's Press with a publishing movement of which they are but two of the many manifestations. The fact that these two publishing houses have now achieved a degree of mainstream recognition and assimilation should not obscure the fact that many of the most politically engaged and radical rationales of feminist publishing emerged from the separatist wing of the 1970s women's liberation movement.

Scholars would be amiss to interpret the demise and subsequent collapse of the radical women's publishing sector during the 1980s and 1990s as necessarily an indictment of the movement's ideas. For, at the same time that collectivist feminist presses largely disappeared from the commercial market-place, radical women's publishing has proven the seedbed of influential developments in feminist thinking. The fact that high-street booksellers now devote prominent portions of their shop-floor displays to books of "gay and lesbian interest", and that a mainstream publisher such as Routledge annually produces a glossy catalogue of gender studies titles on topics as diverse as the politics of sexuality, the nature of lesbian identity, and the construction of motherhood, testifies to the percolation of radical feminist discourse into mainstream cultural discussion.¹ Radical feminist publishing is thus in the curious position of being rendered conspicuous as much by its presence as by its absence: the *content* of its ideas has increasingly been embraced, yet the *context* in which it propagated those ideas is

¹ Further evidence of radical feminism's posthumous influence can be found in the chainstore book retailer Books etc.'s sampler of women's fiction, Women etc., published to coincide with the announcement of the shortlist for the 1997 all-women Orange Prize for Fiction.

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dismissed as redundant for 1990s feminist practice. As a result its influence appears, paradoxically, to be both everywhere and nowhere.

The central tenet of radical feminist publishing – and that which places it in contradistinction to corporate feminist presses of the Virago or Women’s Press models – is its conviction that women’s entry into the sphere of cultural production involves the transformation of *process* as much as it does of *product*. Radical women’s presses were characterised by non-hierarchical, collectivist structures, an emphasis on political engagement over profit generation, and a heightened self-consciousness of their position *vis-à-vis* the corporate mainstream. In Britain prominent radical feminist publishers have included the “radical feminist lesbian” (“Zest”, 1997) house Onlywomen (est. 1974), the Leeds-based Feminist Books (est. 1974), the influential pro-lesbian multiracial collective Sheba Feminist Publishers (est. 1980), Scottish feminist imprint Stramullion (est. 1980), and the Afro-Caribbean and South Asian British women’s press, Black Woman Talk (est. 1983). The writing which emerged from these presses is crucial to an analysis of the kind undertaken here, in that it frequently marks out cutting-edge publishing territory subsequently exploited and popularised by corporate feminist and multinational houses – thus illuminating the dynamic by which mainstream publishing feeds upon and transforms vibrant subcultural genres. Furthermore, radical British feminist publishers reiterate and rework defences of radical feminist press activity emerging from the US women in print movement of the early- to mid-1970s – in particular from writers associated with the east-coast imprint Daughters, Inc. and the San Francisco-based Women’s Press (Arnold, 1976; “Ma Revolution”, 1975, Shelley, 1976). The contextualisation of British radical feminist publishing within the broader scope of international women’s liberation media theory highlights the specificities of the local movement, in particular the ways in which its financial resources and racial profile differed in important respects from those of its US, Canadian or Australian counterparts.

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The decline in British radical feminist media thus derives both from a repudiation of separatist feminist activism which was experienced internationally as well as political, economic and literary trends specific to the domestic scene.

The politics versus profit conundrum which both plagues and energises other varieties of feminist publishing is no less prevalent amongst radical feminist presses, although the issue operates upon the far left of the alternative publishing sector in specific ways. The underlying dilemma is exacerbated by a combination of external and internal factors. During the 1980s and 1990s, British feminist publishers suffered under the economic rationalist, low public spending policies of the Thatcher, Major and now Blair governments and were forced to seek alternative sources of funding in the wake of these governments' abolition or restructuring of grants awarding bodies such as the Greater London Council (GLC) and the London Arts Board (LAB). Yet, contemporaneous with the contraction of the public sector and recession within the publishing industry, radical imprints were also negotiating the contradictions inherent in their structure as politically-committed organisations trading in the commercial sphere. The feminist priorities of political engagement, staff consciousness-raising, skills-sharing and the development of theoretical analysis pulled in the opposite direction from the quick decision-making, individualism and financial opportunism which constitute the prerequisites for survival in the competitive publishing realm.

As has been the case with feminist publishing enterprises throughout the twentieth century, the tensions which stem from condemning the gender policies of the mainstream media and setting up alternative media to challenge its marketshare can be crippling. To exist simultaneously outside of a system ideologically, while needing also to co-operate with it for the practical purposes of distribution, sales, finance and sheer survival is an exercise in political acrobatics and labyrinthine self-justification which

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severely taxed the separatist print movement. Radical feminist publishers' dilemma in this regard clearly deserves sympathy and an informed understanding. But I also discern two fundamental assumptions in 1970s radical feminist thought which hamstrung women's attempts to create a strong alternative media base: namely, an under-examined allegiance to non-hierarchical organising; and secondly, an undisguised suspicion of profit-making and the commercial imperative. These two assumptions account for a large share of the failure, self-recrimination and personal animosity which is the unfortunate legacy of much radical women's media activity. Anyone who has interviewed women centrally involved in this publishing scene will recognise the glazed-eyed, head-in-hands, disillusioned response which the question "what is your experience of collective organizing?" invariably provokes (Gerrard, 1995b; Butterworth, 1998; Hennegan, 1998). The dominant tone – one of bafflement mixed with despair – echoes testimonies to be found in the periodicals of the 1970s women's liberation movement itself: disgruntled and genuinely questioning personal testimonies which ask how attempting to put feminist politics into practice could result in such dismaying counterproductiveness (dell'Olio, 1970; Freeman, J., 1970; Winant, 1975). In a contribution to Polly Joan and Andrea Chesman's Guide to Women's Publishing (1978), a co-founder of Canadian non-sexist children's books publisher Before We Are Six articulates the contradictions of this experience. According to Susan Shaw Weatherup, the presumed benefits to feminists of working collectively and of downplaying the profit motive are largely illusory:

It has been hard, as our political beliefs have often brought us together, but once there we have found that attempting to run a business & survive with many of those beliefs takes twice as much work. Yes, I often feel discouraged. How much easier it would be to view Before We Are Six strictly as a business with the only motive being profit. . . . (116)

The archival material, articles, books and interviews which comprise the primary source material for an analysis of radical British women's publishing indicate that these

publishers were cognisant of critiques of collectivism emerging from the US and local UK women's movements, and were intellectually habituated to subject their personal experience to theoretical analysis. Yet, despite these tactical advantages, radical women's publishers in Britain have manifestly failed in their aim of developing a robust, financially and organisationally autonomous women's communications network, and have frequently proven unable to sustain even individual women's publishing enterprises for periods sufficiently lengthy to constitute anything approaching a threat to the corporate mainstream. That the individual women involved in such projects were not lacking in their commitment to radical publishing ideals is proven beyond doubt by contemporary sources. Thus feminist media critics are forced to shift their focus to a re-examination of the movement's central goal – that of institutional autonomy. The chill conclusion suggested by such an analysis is that the collective separatist model and profitable publishing are, in practice, mutually exclusive options.

The implications of such a conclusion are clearly of crucial significance to contemporary feminism, yet such academic discussion of feminist publishing as does exist tends to shy away from addressing the failings of the collective experiment directly (Spender, D., 1981; Spender, L., 1983a, 1983b; Gerrard, 1989; Duncker, 1992; Butalia and Menon, 1995). Considered at the level of theory, this critical silence is problematic because of the women's movement's insistence that political analysis be constructed in dialectical relation to personal experience. For feminist media studies to ignore a wealth of publishing experience on its own doorstep – however uncomfortable the implications of that evidence – amounts to an indefensible intellectual inconsistency on the part of feminism. Moreover, in practical terms, feminists would be advised to make use of the much media-heralded 'death' of feminist publishing to mount a timely review of the radical print movement's achievements and failings. For women now embarking on a professional career in the media or reaching their prime as media consumers and

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commentators, such a critical re-evaluation is especially pressing as feminism searches for strategies to ensure the continued visibility of feminist ideas within ever-more-powerful multinational media conglomerates. Given that free-market economics and multinational media moguls show little sign of retreating from the publishing sphere, the obligation on feminist critics must be to resist the overly-dichotomised 1970s view of authentically 'radical' publishing as by its very nature diametrically opposed to the mainstream industry. Instead, the onus is on such critics to replace this view with a theoretical analysis attuned to the changed politico-economic circumstances in which feminist publishing finds itself. Such an analysis must avoid the neat dogmatism of endorsing a single variety of feminist print endeavour while decrying all others as irredeemably tainted by mainstream collaboration. For it is not purity but *survival* which has come to constitute feminist publishing's uncongenial reality, and flexibility based on market diversity and tactical interaction with the mainstream is likely to prove its optimal survival strategy.

COLLECTIVE v. CORPORATE FEMINIST PUBLISHING

In any analysis of radical feminist publishing the question of what exactly constitutes 'radical' press activity presents itself as an initial definitional challenge. The notion of radicalism is, in the broad sense of the term, fundamental to *all* feminist publishing enterprises, for they all seek to redress a perceived absence in mainstream publishing practice and to amplify the voices of women marginalised from the centres of literary discourse. Hence, in the general sense of the word as outlined by Raymond Williams, Virago might be said to constitute a 'radical' endeavour in that it opposed contemporary mainstream publishing's under-representation of women writers (Williams, 1983: 251-52). It is crucial, however, to distinguish this generalised use of the term 'radical' from its more specific sense in which it denotes a particular limb of second-wave feminist

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activism which eschewed the reform agenda of liberal feminism and favoured withdrawal from the existing structures of social power. The radical feminist agenda – in publishing as in its more activist political manifestations – conceived of this withdrawal of support for capitalist and established political systems as a necessary prerequisite to a more fundamentally subversive political manoeuvre: the creation of alternative women-centred systems which, it argued, would initiate the downfall of the status quo (Echols, 1989). In this sense, radical feminist organisations claimed to serve both prefigurative and directly revolutionary ends.

In the sphere of feminist print activity, radical presses are identifiable less by their self-description as such (for individual presses analysed in this chapter may not necessarily embrace the political connotations of the term) than by their internal structure; collectivist organisation, non-hierarchical operating practices, job-rotation, skills sharing, and a low prioritisation or even disregard for profit-making commonly characterise radical feminist publishing endeavours. Yet this discussion resists the academic predilection for airtight classification in its handling of the term ‘radical’. As the migration of radical feminist ideas towards the lists of mainstream publishing houses over the last three decades itself attests, there is a certain ambiguity and fluidity at the heart of the concept. If radicalism is deemed to inhere in the content of a publishing house’s list, rather than in its organisational set-up, then a press funded by corporate finance and run hierarchically but which nevertheless publishes innovative lesbian fiction would, for the purposes of the definition, be deemed ‘radical’ – an outcome which would seem to miss certain nuances inherent in the broader usage of the term. Furthermore, corporate feminist publishers with large print-runs and high sales figures might with some justification argue that their radicalising influence on the general public outweighs that of coterie collectivist presses publishing for an already card-carrying political minority. Hence this discussion utilises the term ‘radical’ in a shifting sense, remaining

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alive to the nuances, ambiguities and terminological relativism which have accreted to the word over 30 years of British feminist history. I adopt as the term's core meaning the collectively-run, low-budget, all-women publishing houses which predominated – in terms of numbers though not necessarily in terms of press coverage – in Britain during the 1970s and early-1980s. However, in an industry as unstable and as subject to political fluctuation as publishing, this definition can only ever hope to be provisional and to err on the side of inclusiveness.

VARIETIES OF BRITISH RADICAL WOMEN'S PUBLISHING

ONLYWOMEN PRESS

The British feminist press which might be read as adhering most closely to the pattern of a radical women's publishing outfit is the imprint Onlywomen Press, founded in 1974 from a meeting of radical women interested in developing feminist alternatives to the dominant print culture and still publishing under the description "radical feminist lesbian" publishers. A crucial aspect of Onlywomen which distinguishes it from the corporate-backed publishers Virago, The Women's Press² and Pandora Press was its foundation as both a printing *and* a publishing operation. This multifaceted approach to the mechanics of print production in fact aligns the press more closely with its comparatively conservative forerunner, the Cuala Press, than with its second-wave feminist contemporaries. The interpenetration of printing and publishing was understood by press founder Lilian Mohin and the other members of the original four-strong

² Onlywomen Press operated under the name the Women's Press from its 1974 foundation until Naim Attallah and Stephanie Dowrick registered the name for their new Namara-backed feminist publishing house ("Onlywomen", c1977; Mohin, 1998). The original Women's Press had, "in the thrill of political purity", decided against registering the name, and thus could only mount an ineffectual protest at Attallah's actions (Jackson, C., 1993: 48). Lilian Mohin has since remarked: "We came up with 'Onlywomen Press' with unseemly haste – and lived to regret it. People didn't get what we meant by 'only women' and it overlapped too much with The Women's Press" (Jackson, C., 1993: 48). To avoid confusing Mohin's press with the London-based Women's Press, with the Toronto-based Women's Press, or with the early-1970s Californian operation of the same name, I refer to the house as Onlywomen throughout.

Onlywomen collective as serving both the political end of ensuring complete control over all stages in the chain of cultural production, as well as the practical economic end of subsidising publishing activity with periodic commercial printing work. The underlying conviction in all of Onlywomen's self-descriptions is, however, an insistence on the political centrality of separatist organising by radical women, a position which castigates others' attempts to reorient mainstream structures towards feminist ends as, at best, political self-delusion:

Being part of the Women's Liberation Movement has meant to us not only recognising our own oppression, but resolving to overthrow it and, therefore, to withdraw support for any of its systems that we could by establishing on our own. (Cadman, Chester and Pivot, 1981: 33)

In the late-1990s, the picture for Onlywomen has changed in response to dramatic shifts in national economic activity and in organisational fashion. Onlywomen is now essentially run by Lilian Mohin herself from her west London flat, although vestigial remains of the original collective are to be found in the loose advisory group which meets monthly to discuss submissions and policy directions. Their list has also evolved in line with literary fashion: Onlywomen's original 1970s poetry anthologies such as One Foot on the Mountain (1979) have been overtaken by currently-fashionable genres such as lesbian theory and literary criticism, crime novels, feminist sci-fi and – in a recent frontlist title, Jay Taverner's Rebellion (1997) – lesbian historical romance ("Zest", 1997). Currently, their output stands at around three titles per annum. Compared to the slick popularist-driven repackaging which Virago engineered in 1997, Onlywomen remains steeped in the back-to-basics, anti-Establishment politics of mid-1970s lesbian separatism. The press may have nudged its publishing programme in the direction of feel-good feminist genres in recent years, but in basic orientation, practice and rhetoric it stands against the tide of feminist fashion.

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SHEBA FEMINIST PUBLISHERS

In contrast with Onlywomen Press, the radicalism of Sheba Feminist Publishers inhered not so much in rejecting co-operation with the mainstream but in the dynamics of its internal organisation. From Sheba's origins in London in 1980 to its eventual demise in 1994, Sheba operated as an all-woman collective, generally with a membership in the region of seven to ten women, although the actual composition of the collective was subject to constant change. By the time of Sheba's establishment, Virago and The Women's Press already occupied distinct niches of the feminist book-buying market with their respective historical and contemporary list foci. Sheba's avowed aims in seeking to distinguish its list from those of the more established women's imprints was thus to seek out new feminist readerships and to see "both more and a greater variety of publications committed to feminism in bookshops and libraries everywhere" (Cadman, Chester and Pivot, 1981: 37). That Sheba went some way towards establishing the existence of untapped markets for writing by black British women, for feminist/lesbian erotica, and for feminist humour in the form of cartoon collections is borne out by its posthumous influence on the lists of progressive independent and mainstream publishers. The Sheba Archive in London's Fawcett Library confirms the general impression gleaned from contemporary press reports that the house suffered from chronic undercapitalisation throughout its active life (Bardsley, 1982; Fritz, 1986a; Loach, 1986). This fact suggests that it was financial underdevelopment rather than a misreading of the auguries for future trends in feminist thought which led to the press's demise in early-1994.

Although Sheba described itself in its published books as "a racially mixed feminist publishing cooperative", it in fact operated on a modified collective pattern: decisions on commissioning and manuscript selection were conducted by consensus, but within the group individuals specialised in editorial, production, rights and marketing (Lorde, 1987: 76). It was as a publisher, rather than as a print production cooperative,

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that Sheba regarded itself, subcontracting printing and binding to outside firms rather than training collective members to undertake these tasks in-house. Nor did Sheba suffer qualms over dealing with mainstream distribution channels in order to guarantee its books display in the high street: its most successful title, a collection of feminist cartoons entitled Sourcream (1980) was carried by W. H. Smith, thereby selling in sufficient numbers to spawn a sequel, Sourcream II, the following year. The success of these titles, of black women's writing such as A Dangerous Knowing: Four Black Women Poets (1984), of the poetry of American writer Audre Lorde and the fiction of Barbara Burford, suggests that had Sheba not encountered the severe public spending constriction of the Thatcher period, and had it confronted and resolved the conflicts endemic within its collective, Sheba might have profited from its often astute publishing decisions – rather than serving as the shock troops of a more cautious mainstream publishing culture.

SILVER MOON BOOKS (SMB)

A doubtfulness as to what can be achieved on shoestring budgets and by purely voluntary labour characterises the foundation of a very different enterprise: London's Silver Moon Books. Sue Butterworth and Jane Cholmeley were among the small group of women who in May 1984 founded what now purports to be Europe's largest women's bookshop, Silver Moon, in the central London book-retailing district of Charing Cross Road. Like Onlywomen, Sheba and many other radical cultural organisations of the early-1980s, Silver Moon was also a recipient of the Greater London Council's Arts and Recreation Committee subsidies, and the shop also operated for a brief four months on a non-hierarchical job-rotation basis (Cholmeley, 1991: 219-27). This practice was, however, quickly jettisoned in favour of more standardised job demarcation once it became clear, in Sue Butterworth's words, that continuing collective practices would be tantamount to committing "financial suicide" (Butterworth, 1998). She maintains that collectives suffer on account of the varying political and personal commitment levels of what are,

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theoretically, equally responsible members. Cofounder Jane Cholmeley, in her 1991 overview of the venture, “A Feminist Business in a Capitalist World: Silver Moon Women’s Bookshop”, emphasises the daily stresses aggravated by adherence to “the dogma associated with collectives” (229): muddled workspaces; erratic ordering and stocktaking; customer confusion; and a generalised, pervasive “crisis of communication and accountability” (226). In contrast to this chaotic situation, Butterworth observes dryly that having one’s house on the line if the business folds “clears the head wonderfully” (Butterworth, 1998).

Out of retailing success and a determination to chase the high-street pound, Butterworth and Cholmeley in 1990 created Silver Moon Books (SMB), an imprint which does little commissioning but which purchases rights to foreign (usually US) fiction titles, especially in the areas of lesbian detective fiction and romance. Perceiving that this “gap in the market” had been successfully tapped in North America by the Florida-based Naiad Press, Silver Moon Books bought a number of their titles and currently boasts a backlist of 30 self-proclaimedly “schlocky” novels and “Friday night reads” (Butterworth, 1998).³ While benefiting from what is – for a feminist publisher – the unique position of having their own retail outlet for the sale and promotion of house titles, SMB also distributes to major bookselling chain Waterstones, a firm which, in terms of general trade, represents a significant retailing competitor. Interdependence, rather than autonomy at all costs, best encapsulates SMB’s attitude towards the contemporary book publishing and retailing market: their oppositionality lies in the *content* of their books rather than in the *context* of their production. In fact, if anything, the political subversiveness of SMB’s lesbian fiction list derives from its rejection of

³ Titles originated by Naiad and bought in by Silver Moon Books for the UK and Commonwealth markets include Katherine V. Forrest’s strong backlist sellers *Curious Wine* (1983 Naiad /1990 SMB) and *An Emergence of Green* (1986/1990), and the erotic lesbian short fiction collections *Diving Deep* (1992/1993), *Diving Deeper* (1993/1994), *Deeply Mysterious* (1994/1995) and *The First Time* (1995/1996), all co-edited by Barbara Grier.

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explicit politicality as the hallmark of lesbian writing – a familiarly 1990s-style disassociation of lifestyle politics from the policies of previous lesbian feminist subcultures.

This clear-eyed financial realism and informed appraisal of when it is advantageous to interact with the mainstream and when, on the other hand, political commitment necessitates independence, accounts for the fact that SMB is both solvent and expanding. In this it is alone amongst British radical feminist print organisations: Sheba Feminist Publishers ceased trading in 1993 and declared bankruptcy the following year; Onlywomen has dwindled to a front-room mail-order operation with low publicity and slow turnover; Stramullion Press and Feminist Books folded within a decade of their respective foundations; Islington's Sisterwrite Bookshop was wound-up in 1985; and the Spare Rib magazine collective disbanded in acrimony in March 1993. The perusal of this dismal roll-call of failed radical initiatives prompts the speculation that it is adherence to the collective principle and its often-encountered corollary of financial myopia which so compromised commercial feminist endeavours. Initiated with robust idealism and tremendous energy, radical feminist presses all too frequently foundered by naïve insistence upon organisational principles fundamentally incompatible with the surrounding politico-economic reality. The devastatingly ironic result of this fact is that, for all its sophisticated political rhetoric and potentially large market base, radical feminist publishing never constituted a serious commercial or political threat to the mainstream; more commonly it managed to engineer its own spectacular and rapid demise.

RADICAL FEMINIST MEDIA THEORY: COMMUNICATING A NEW REALITY

The rapid development of feminist publishing houses during the early years of the women's liberation movement sparked a commensurate development in feminist media

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criticism – both responses to the mainstream media’s relentless trivialisation of the movement, and defences of an independent women’s communications network. Key manifestos of the women in print movement are frequently North American in origin, notably June Arnold’s landmark essay for the feminist periodical Quest, “Feminist Presses & Feminist Politics” (1976), Alexa Freeman and Valle Jones’s more multimedia focussed “Creating Feminist Communications” (1976), and the Female Liberation group’s “From Us: Thoughts on the Feminist Media.” (1974). Yet, in addition to these important radical feminist media manifestos from across the Atlantic, Britain harboured an indigenous separatist media critique, often developed by feminist media practitioners themselves and benefiting from a close interrelationship of theorising and individual experience (“Feminism: Getting into Print”, 1974; News from Neasden, 1979; “Community Publishing”, 1982).

Characteristic of 1970s radical feminist media theory is a deeply-ingrained suspicion of the multinational corporate publishing sector. Chiefly, this intense distrust stems from radical women’s awareness that capitalism rather than political commitment powers the corporate mainstream, hence women would be deluded in thinking that the Madison Avenue corporate giants would promote texts subversive of the capitalist, patriarchally-endorsed status quo. According to June Arnold’s analysis – one honed during her years at the helm of the feminist press Daughters, Inc. – the relationship between the radical fringe and the corporate centre can never be one of interdependence and cultural negotiation, but is instead driven by the logic of implacable opposition:

The finishing press [Arnold’s term for the publishing mainstream] is the hard-cover of corporate America and absolutely does not want the independent women’s presses to survive. Each time he takes a feminist book from us he weakens us all. (25)

The fear of co-optation articulated in this passage stems from mainstream publishers’ demonstrated interest in the women’s movement as a social phenomenon capable of

generating bestseller sales figures. In search of the elusive bestseller which would serve as *the* indispensable vade-mecum to the women's movement, publishers heavily promoted titles such as Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique (1963), Kate Millett's Sexual Politics (1970) and Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch (1970), prompting feminist critics to remark caustically that "they will publish some of us – the least threatening, the most saleable, the most easily controlled" (Arnold, 1976: 19).⁴ The outright hostility of radical theorists to enterprises "cash[ing] in on the sales value of feminism" (Arnold, 1976: 24) was motivated by the knowledge that women, carrying little policy-making weight in the managerial echelons of corporate publishing, risked having their writing dismissed as commercially *passé* as soon as the feminist 'trend' was deemed to have peaked. As literary agent Anne McDermid cautioned, the power to consume is by no means necessarily coterminous with the power to determine: "I'm afraid we are not more in control of it than we were before, they've just decided that we are a market. . . . If they decide to cut it off, that's it. We should be in control from beginning to end" (Cadman, Chester and Pivot, 1981: 26).

The rigorous separatism of radical feminist communications theorists created a dilemma for feminist-identified authors: should they reap the financial and promotional benefits of mainstream publication, or was it politically preferable to exemplify their women-only rhetoric by publishing – almost certainly without an advance – with a small-scale, woman-run operation. Heated debate on the issue in feminist periodicals levelled charges of "selling out" the movement at feminist literary luminaries who were, it was alleged, manipulating a grassroots women's movement for personal celebrity and – somewhat paradoxically – in the hope of patriarchal endorsement (Arnold, 1976: 22-23;

⁴ Radical feminists' suspicion that mainstream publishers would misrepresent feminist ideas through their institutional control of the editorial, translation, marketing and promotional processes was to some extent justified (refer Chapter 6 – " 'This Book Could Change Your Life': Feminist Bestsellers and the Power of Mainstream Publishing").

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Desmoines and Nicholson, 1976: 128). Women purchasing feminist titles from mainstream publishers and bookshops were also directed to analyse the financial implications of their actions in cutting down the potential market share of radical presses. Such articles tend to propound a brand of ethical consumerism which, since taken up by contemporary organisations such as Fairtrade, Community Aid Abroad and The Body Shop, has a familiarly 1990s ring to it, although the reader guilt-tripping is highly characteristic of 1970s right-on publications:

[mainstream] publishers have been more than happy to cash in on the women's market, even though they worry each year that "the wave is peaking". Many have been clever enough to employ feminists. But this still amounts to no more than tokenism. . . . The fact is that, for any one feminist title on the list, dozens of sexist books still pour into the market. So, for committed feminists, purchasing a book from a commercial publishing house may feel a bit discomfoting: not too different from eating iceberg lettuce or wearing cotton from textile mills in which the workers suffer from Brown Lung "epidemics". Even if the quality is all right, you know where it came from. . . . (Moberg, 1974: 16)

The response of radical women to their financial and political impotence *vis-à-vis* the multinational corporations echoes that of the Woman's Press some sixty years earlier: unable and unwilling to be accommodated by the system on its own terms, radical feminists would subvert the corporate communications network through the tactics of non-cooperation, rhetorical assault and wholesale replication. Only a communications system controlled entirely by women's movement adherents and funded by its supporters could, they argued, withstand the insidiously corrupting influence of the established media:

We must look beyond male-created mass media and create our own forms and designs of feminist communications. Only in this way can we assert uncompromising control over the content and distribution of our message. (Freeman and Jones, 1976: 4)

Radical feminism envisaged that the revolution in media ownership would prove the catalyst for a revitalisation of media formats in line with qualities valorised as specifically female; a heightened "mutuality" in women's media would manifest itself in

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responsiveness to reader interests and in greater managerial openness (Freeman and Jones, 1976: 5). The championing of new literary forms – “the art and politics of the future” – would initiate a groundswell in women’s cultural consciousness which was itself conceived of as inherently political (Arnold, 1976: 20). Thus new genres would herald new political realities – a seductively easy slippage between the vocabulary of literary criticism and mass-movement politics which betrays the mid-1970s women in print movement’s increasing flight towards a politics of ‘women’s culture’ and away from the difficult struggle for a culture of women’s politics.

The radical women’s publishing movement, inheriting its automatic mistrust of corporate involvement from the New Left, fatally over-estimated the degree to which any commercial operation in the developed world – regardless of its political hue – can insulate itself from capitalist processes. It thus failed to incorporate into a responsive critique the crippling organisational problems individual feminist presses faced as they strove to generate profit from women’s books. Instead, the silence of thinkers such as Arnold, Freeman and Jones, and Desmoines and Nicholson on the issue implies that individual failure rather than theoretical oversimplification underlay the collapse of feminist businesses. Without women-run banking networks, distribution chains, accountancy firms, printeries and bookshops of national strength and profile, Arnold’s battlecry that support must be withdrawn “from any woman who is still trying to make her name by selling out our movement” (26) penalised feminist presses while leaving the giants of Madison Avenue unscathed and pleasantly oblivious.

NEW STRUCTURES FOR A NEW SOCIETY

The early women’s movement was pushed towards an embrace of collectivism because, when so much which characterised mainstream society appeared irredeemably infected by patriarchal modes of thought, these equality-based group structures had at least

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recently been revitalised by the Left, and thus were seen as more compatible with women-centred theories than Establishment-propagated hierarchies. Further prompting this choice were the recent experiences of many radical women within the ostensibly democratic structures of the rigidly hierarchical socialist Left. Here the gap between policy and practice, rhetoric and reality, became painfully apparent to women, who were commonly relegated by the machismo leaders of the New Left to secretarial, sexual and domestic inferiority (Wandor, 1990: *passim*). As early women's liberation activists cuttingly expressed it, even the revolution, it appeared, needed its handmaidens.

Despite qualms as to its application in male-centred groups, the non-hierarchical model was nevertheless sufficiently politically modish for the majority of 1970s women's presses to establish themselves along collectivist lines. This was in spite of the fact that their antecedents in the first-wave suffrage presses – such as the WSPU's Woman's Press – owed much of their financial and political leverage to their elaborate systems of administrative subdivision and clear lines of editorial authority. Movements which conceive of themselves as revolutionary, however, are inclined to prioritise innovation over precedent. The radical women's movement conceived of its revolutionary programme as one not only of action but also of structure. Thus the rejection of the Pankhurst-style model of military command was indivisible from the movement's rhetoric of women's equality. Political conviction merged, in any case, with organisational fashion to endorse the collectivist model: as Martha Shelley remarks of the establishment of the San Francisco Women's Press Collective in 1970: "we started off being a collective because that was the thing to be" (1976: 121).

Apart from its innovatory quality, collaborative working also secured strong approval amongst feminist activists because it harmonised with certain assumptions about women's nature being propounded by radical wings of the women's movement.

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With the perversion of patriarchal social encoding removed, radical second-wave feminists believed that women's consultative, peaceful, non-domineering and consensus-seeking attributes would come to the fore, fundamentally transforming the tensions and rivalries of individual behaviour which had traditionally divided progressive social groups. Such sisterly *esprit de corps* was (perhaps in spite of evidence to the contrary) much heralded at the first British second-wave feminist event, the 1970 Women's Liberation Conference at Ruskin College, Oxford (Wandor, 1990), and it is crystallised in literary form in the poem "Councils" (1973) by the influential contemporary feminist writer Marge Piercy. Political working in a psychologically supportive, non-competitive environment would, it was believed, transform women's psyches in tandem with transforming the concept of the political:

We must sit down
and reason together.
We must sit down.
Men standing want to hold forth.
They rain down upon faces lifted.

We must sit down on the floor
on the earth
on stones and mats and blankets.
There must be no front to the speaking
no platform, no rostrum,
no stage or table.
We will not crane
to see who is speaking. [. . .]

Perhaps we should talk in small groups
Small enough for everyone to speak.

Perhaps we should start by speaking softly.
The women must learn to dare to speak.

The men must bother to listen.

The women must learn to say, I think this is so.
(Piercy, 1982: 116-17)

Radical feminist presses were infused with a related and complementary desire:
to demonstrate by example that the corporate mode of production was neither inevitable

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nor desirable. Rather than treating publishing as an industry “turning out products like hotdogs”, radical publishers envisaged a politically and creatively synthesised working environment in which theoretical development would occur in constant dialectical relationship with publishing practice (Cadman, Chester and Pivot, 1981: 35): as Onlywomen co-founder Sheila Shulman observed, “to us women’s printing and publishing wasn’t about a job or a career; it was about politics. We would both be doing the feminist revolution by writing and printing and publishing, and we would be furthering it by the work we were getting out” (Jackson, C., 1993: 46). Surveying the US radical feminist press scene in 1978, Polly Joan surmised in an optimistic vein that the direct democracy model had worked, and that it constituted radical feminist publishing’s international common denominator:

Women’s publishing has accomplished in a very short ten years what the male norm in publishing has always maintained couldn’t be done. Whatever the differences between feminist women in publishing, this rejection of hierarchies is the strong thread that links all of us together. (Joan and Chesman, 1978: 110)

Yet, even within non-hierarchical, all-women consciousness-raising and political groups, competitive behavioural patterns proved difficult to eradicate, as feminists’ lived experience stubbornly refused to comply with the rhetorical ideal of sisterly cooperation and group-mindedness. In the late-1960s, the radical New York women’s group The Feminists instituted a mode of anti-hierarchical organising which aimed for total equality, including an attempt to equalise the amount of time for which any participant could speak at group meetings by means of a “disc system”⁵: “Every member is given 15 to 20 chips at the beginning of the meeting. Each time someone speaks, she throws a disc in the middle of the room. When your chips are used up, you can no longer participate in the discussion for the remainder of that meeting” (Atkinson, T., 1974: 70).

⁵ Radical feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson had in 1968 led a break-away group of the New York NOW chapter, claiming that the overly hierarchical nature of the organisation founded by Betty Friedan served to inhibit revolutionary feminist action (refer Atkinson, T., 1974: 68).

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The Feminists' policies for controlling group discussions implicitly acknowledge the varieties of *de facto* hierarchy, for example of rhetorical skill or of political status, which exist even in the most avowedly 'leaderless' of groups. Although this policy was not followed in the publishing realm which is the specific focus of this analysis, it nevertheless heralds an incipient awareness of the contradictions belying collectivism's professed equality; it points, in an oblique way, to the enormous tensions to which the collective working experience gives rise. It was the failure to examine thoroughly the causes of these tensions and to develop strategies to combat them that set collective women's publishing down the painful path to disbandment, acrimony and financial failure.

FEMINIST CRITIQUES OF COLLECTIVISM

A movement as politically self-conscious as feminism might be expected to subject its theoretical principles to the critical light of its experience. From the early-1970s, the women's movement did produce such a critique of collectivism's tendency to entrench unacknowledged elites by its very claims to openness and equality. The central text of this debate, Jo Freeman's powerful and much reprinted essay "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" was first published in 1970, but was circulating within the US women's movement in mimeographed form for some time prior to that date. Basic to its argument is the assertion that ostensible "structurelessness" in fact serves as a smokescreen for covertly hierarchical groups whose elites remain unaccountable because of group members' inability to prove that power inequalities actually exist within the organisation. Thus a crucial slippage occurs between an officially sanctioned *de jure* equality and disguised *de facto* power relationships:

Thus structurelessness becomes a way of masking power, and within the women's movement is usually most strongly advocated by those who are the most powerful (whether they are conscious of their power or not). As long as the structure of the group is informal, the rules of how decisions are made are known only to a few and awareness of power is limited to those who know the rules. Those who do not know

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the rules and are not chosen for initiation must remain in confusion, or suffer from paranoid delusions that something is happening of which they are not quite aware. (Freeman, J., 1970: 21)

That the oftentimes uncomfortable criticisms articulated in Freeman's essay were the subject of debate within British publishing and bookselling circles is evidenced by a series of articles which subsequently appeared detailing the internal tensions of the Spare Rib collective (Wallsgrove, 1979; Spare Rib Collective, 1979; "Liberation", 1987), of an (anonymous) bookselling collective (Anon., 1979), of a collective editing the anthology No Turning Back (1981) for The Women's Press (Feminist Anthology Collective, 1981), and in the minutes of Sheba's fraught collective meetings throughout its active life (Sheba Feminist Publishers Archive, 1980-94).⁶ In only its second year in operation, Sheba members recorded a lengthy debate about the failings of their modified collective, adumbrating the crucial point that their operating problems are at least as attributable to factors intrinsic to the group model itself as to personal, Sheba-specific failings:

This is not an excuse, but we are attempting to be both a successful publishing house and a successful part-time collective with all the problems (individually and together) those two facets involve. (1981, box 2.3)

Yet, despite their political sophistication with the issues involved, the practical publishing regimen of deadlines and issue dates caused British commercial collectives to perceive the failings of their operating systems without constructing strategies of the kind formulated by Freeman for containing non-democratic tendencies (1970: 25, 42). In this sense, feminist collectives experienced the worst of both worlds: they endured the

⁶ Jane Cholmeley adumbrates the tensions within Silver Moon Women's Bookshop which led to the abandonment of collectivist practices and the forging of a "*modus vivendi*" between capitalist management and collectivist consensus (1991: 224-29). More general discussions of collectivism's failures as a feminist organising practice (though not referring specifically to its implications for the feminist print sector) are found in Evans, Sara, 1980: 222-24; Bouchier, 1983: 217-23; and Randall, 1987: 254-57. Alice Echols in Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975 (1989: 269-81) outlines US radical feminists' 1973-74 debate over the political implications of feminist entrepreneurialism (see also Coletta Reid, "Taking Care of Business", 1974).

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enervation of political disenchantment (at least in part) with the collective status quo, yet they were unable to disavow an ideal to which the group had so publicly nailed its colours. The recorder of the minutes at a 1981 Sheba collective meeting bemoaned this inability of the group to act upon the feminist maxim that 'the personal is political' by restructuring the purportedly structureless model which was so compromising the press's effectiveness. The consciousness-raising/activist ideal had, she despaired, degenerated into "all swapping info on business and floundering towards decisions" (Sheba Archive, 2.3).

COLLECTIVE ORGANISING:

EFFECTING EQUALITY OR AFFECTING QUALITY?

WHEN THE POLITICAL IS PERSONAL

Dutch media theorist Liesbet van Zoonen observes in her essay "Feminist Perspectives on the Media" (1991) that "a constant feature of radical feminist media has been internal conflict about organization and editorial policy" (37). It is possible to trace the origins of this organisational problem to the pre-eminent value ascribed to 'sisterhood' and solidarity in the women's liberation movement, a subtly enforced egalitarianism which tarred those women who advanced 'individualist' solutions with the brush of elitism (dell'Olio, 1970: np; Freeman, J., 1970: 21-23). Although the consciousness-raising model certainly perceived itself to be open, unthreatening and prepared to challenge all orthodoxies, the ultimate unchallengeable orthodoxy tended to be the group model itself. Reflecting on this phenomenon twenty years after the Ruskin College meeting, historian Sheila Rowbotham concludes that 1970s feminists' "faith [in] and enthusiasm for participatory democracy" led inevitably to the tyranny of the majority. As in the ancient Greek *polis*, "when people disagree the only thing you can do is to ostracise" (Wandor, 1990: 41).

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Further aggravating this incipient tension for radical women involved in the production of literature was the nature of the writing process as it has evolved in Western societies. The isolated individualism of fiction writing clashed fundamentally with the group ideal, yet writing penned by collectives tended to lack the dynamism and note of personal authenticity crucial for achieving critical success and high sales. For British collectives engaged only in the publication – as opposed to the writing – of feminist literature, the individualist problem nevertheless persisted, as individuals' literary critical judgements on texts submitted for publication were, invariably, at odds. Elaborate consensus models for arriving at group decisions were implemented, but as the Lesbian Writing and Publishing Collective involved in editing a 1986 anthology for the Women's Press (Canada) confessed, "it is hard to make any generalizations about why a piece of fiction worked for one of us and not another" (8). A collectively-written statement of the group's editorial policies was adopted in this instance as a way of consciously acknowledging value judgements – even if not all the individuals involved actually subscribed to them (refer also Feminist Anthology Collective, 1981: 2). But the subsumption of personal response within a system of literary collective responsibility is inevitably uneasy:

No one wants to talk about the egotism involved in authorship. No one wants to talk about the innately non-collective nature of the impulse to write. . . . How the fuck are you supposed to fit *that* into feminism? *Please*. (Hennegan, 1998)

In the pressured environment of a commercial collective such as a publishing house, this subordination of individual opinion to the group will create especially acrimonious resentments. Essentially, if – as the feminist slogan has it – the personal is political then, inevitably at some point, the political is also personal. For Boston's Female Liberation group, disbanding in 1974, it had already become so: "We are separating because we are unable to work together effectively as a single political unit, since we cannot agree on priorities or political perspective" (Female Liberation, 1974: 2).

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Lamenting that “for the last two years most of our energy has been absorbed by conflicts within the group” (2), the authors of the Female Liberation statement acknowledge that the problems with their working methods have become so acute as to silence the media outlet they built to proselytise feminist ideas. There is a devastating political irony here – that the collective medium which was to be a major component of the message should silence the message itself.

Conflicts over production reached particularly divisive levels during the mid- to late-1980s as they intersected with pre-existing debates within feminism around black women’s oppression and racism within the women’s movement. The already fragile fiction of group solidarity was further wrenched by women of colour’s accusation that feminist publishing itself perpetuated society’s “racist fabric” (Lesbian Writing and Publishing Collective, 1986: 13). Black British women, such as the members of the press Black Woman Talk, faced the dilemma of choosing between white feminist racism, on one hand, and the tokenising interest in black women’s writing of mainstream publishers on the other. Refusing a false choice between equally compromising options, they decided to work outside of both systems and to establish a publishing collective of their own (Black Woman Talk, 1984b: 28). Sheba Feminist Publishers, becoming conscious of its all-white, middle-class origins, in a 1982 newsletter expressed “aware[ness] . . . of our privileged position” (2.3), and through the feminist media solicited for “Asian and Afro-Caribbean women to join what is at the moment an all-white collective” (Bardsley, 1982: 36). Yet, for the members of the Women’s Press Lesbian Writing and Publishing Collective (Canada), such multiracial organising proved insolubly divisive. A prominent five-page statement entitled “Notes About Racism in the Process” was appended to the collectively-written Introduction to Dykeversions (1986), prompting a sobered *mea culpa* from the three white members of the collective which was itself included in the volume’s preliminaries (11-15). Yet the vociferousness of the criticisms aired renders the black

women's avowal "to stay in the collective because of our commitment to lesbian of colour writing" (13) less an approach towards resolving the problem than a deferral of inevitable fracture.⁷

A strong emphasis on group solidarity and a low tolerance for dissent characterises not only the early women's liberation movement, but in fact many groups still in the emergent phase in which they must galvanise support, determine policy and radicalise potential group members. Yet radical feminism in particular has been historically ready to level allegations of 'false consciousness' at those who would take issue with basic tenets of group policy, as an early-second-wave list of "resistances to consciousness-raising" disturbingly highlights. These "wrong" opinions include thinking that "individual solutions are possible, your man is the exception, Women's Lib is just therapy, some women are better than others, and women are already equal" (qtd in Rosenwasser, 1972: 47). It is the combination of such aggressively unrationalised egalitarianism with the self-proclaimed openness and receptivity of the early women's movement which appears most intellectually unsustainable, and which effectively alienated many potential women's movement sympathisers (refer dell'Olio, 1970: np; Randall, 1987: 256). For those women already active within the movement, the tensions sparked by under-examined principles of direct democracy tended more often to burn with a long fuse. As an ex-member of the Manchester-based Moss Side Community Press neatly summed up:

The worst thing about working in a co-op is that nobody can criticise each other, because you're all meant to be operating on goodwill, and goodwill doesn't always work at 8 o'clock in the morning (Cadman, Chester and Pivot, 1981: 65).

⁷ The festering issue of racism within feminist publishing did, in fact, re-emerge at the Women's Press (Canada) in the following year, with a "widely publicised split" precipitated by "divisions over the content of and approval process for a fiction anthology [*Dykeversions*]" (Gabriel and Scott, 1993: 43). Press historians Chris Gabriel and Katherine Scott in their article "Women's Press at Twenty: The Politics of Feminist Publishing" (1993) note that "unable to reach an accommodation, eight members left the Press [in 1987], intending to found a new feminist press in Toronto" (45).

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THE PARADOX OF LEADERLESS DICTATORSHIP

In an insightful article entitled “The Agony of Inequality” from John Case and Rosemary C. R. Taylor’s valuable collection Co-ops, Communes & Collectives: Experiments in Social Change in the 1960s and 1970s (1979), Jane J. Mansbridge enumerates several forms of de facto power within avowedly ‘leaderless’ organisations, developing Jo Freeman’s earlier critique with more explicit reference to sociological and organisational group models. Whether it be the superior status of a group founder over that of recently joined members, the power accorded to those whose verbal fluency or command of complex political terminology grants them a demagogical role, or the subtle and perhaps unconscious distinctions based on race, class background or sexual orientation, power discrepancies in self-proclaimedly democratic groups are a reality over which collectives all-too-frequently implode. As Mansbridge sagely observes, the common outcomes of a collective’s self-destructive “big bang” are “orgies of self-blame and recrimination” (194). When these very real inequalities of status remain unacknowledged, the result is often a serious erosion of faith in the professed ideals of the organisation, a pattern confirmed in the minutes of fraught collective meetings from Sheba’s later years (Sheba Archive, 1990 to 1993). The file of resignation letters contained in the Sheba Archive cites with a depressing frequency communication problems and resentments at being ignored or over-ruled as reasons for members’ decision to leave (8.5). There are complaints over inequitable divisions of labour, of other members’ unreliability or lack of commitment to the general cause, of being over-worked, of lacking assistance, of feeling an outsider at collective meetings and of having no chance to work or plan “any of the things that Sheba is ‘really about’ ” (1981, 2.3).

Magnifying the stresses inherent in any poorly-funded collectivist project was the suspicion harboured by individual Sheba members that the collective structure was being manipulated by a powerful but unacknowledged majority. This they understood as

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giving rise to a group authoritarianism of the kind delineated by both Jo Freeman and by her contemporary movement critic, Anselma dell'Olio: "It was me being afraid to say what I thought about Sheba. Afraid, for God's sake – in a women's group" (1983, 8.5). The issue of dictatorship by the majority crystallised especially in the "agonising" process of voting on submissions (Bardsley, 1982: 36). This was a system of consensus publishing, with provision for a 'no' veto, but without a corresponding 'yes' veto – with the result that a manuscript to which one collective member felt passionately committed could be effectively relegated to oblivion by a non-unanimous vote. On this issue Sheba collective members faced the inverse of the usual problem of attempting to reconcile publishing practice with feminist politics. For, habitually, arriving at a decision of the whole membership is too time-consuming for the group to move sufficiently quickly to sign a promising author or to seize a publicity opportunity with the short-deadline print and electronic media. Here, by contrast, is a plea for a more extended discussion period when deciding on submissions and publishing policy directions. The feminist objective of discussing "issues raised by the material submitted" pulled in the opposite direction from prompt, commercially astute decision-making, thus further exacerbating the existing tensions between group members (Bardsley, 1982: 36). As Freeman observed, with bitterness unmistakably derived from her personal experience of women's movement organising, political self-reflexiveness – however admirable in a theoretical sense – is no substitute for administrative efficiency: "Unstructured groups may be very effective in getting women to talk about their lives; they aren't very good for getting things done" (1970: 24).

THE PERSONAL COST OF THE POLITICAL

It is a safe presumption when analysing radical feminism to assert that no one joins a women's publishing collective out of financial self-interest. The reality of the collective experience is that, while it may provide a congenial, politically-engaged environment in

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the company of like-minded women and a welcome relief from workplace sexism, it offers minimal or no pay, no job security, long hours, no sick leave, no pension schemes or holiday pay, often shabby and under-heated working environments, little or no prospect of advancement, and (either a positive or a negative value, depending upon individual perspective) low-class status in the eyes of the mainstream media. In an era of economic rationalism and the erosion of the welfare state, the decision to live out one's personal politics by joining a women's publishing collective is a triumph of political idealism over financial pragmatism – a fact which has contributed significantly to the decline in such operations' numbers.

The extent of the economic detriment borne by individual publishing collective members is made apparent when the costs aside from low remuneration are examined. Initial start-up costs for press outfits are significant, and the expenses of hiring premises and purchasing business hardware are almost always met out of the founders' own pockets. For example, a member of the lesbian Women's Press Collective, active in printing and publishing in San Francisco from 1970, recalled the crippling expense of purchasing their first printing press, "an ancient German press you couldn't get parts for in the U.S." ("Ma Revolution", 1975: 7). Even once a publishing house is operational, accumulated funds are rarely sufficient to cover production expenses. Thus the paper, ink, illustrating and binding costs of each title must be borne on a book-by-book basis, and the period between outlay and recoupment from sales is frequently long and arduous. It is during this uncertain period that inexperienced and financially precarious presses most frequently collapse into bankruptcy. Catering only to a coterie readership, they can implement no economies of scale, and thus remain trapped in the vicious financial cycle of small print-runs generating limited sales capital:

Each book has its own financing. Often the [Women's Press] Collective borrows money to buy the paper. Everyone keeps track of the number of days worked a month. When the money comes in from

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sales, the collective deducts overhead for the shop, pays what can be paid for the graphics and writing, pays off debts, and individuals take a bare subsistence wage (about \$6.00 a day). (Joan and Chesman, 1978: 180)

What is characteristic about the (US) Women's Press's policy is its relegation of staff wages to the lowest budgetary priority – a commonplace in feminist publishing as women's enterprises have commonly relied upon a stream of voluntary labour in order to remain operational. Many feminist publishing collectives operate entirely on unpaid labour, some – like Sheba Press from 1981 onwards – employ semi-waged workers who are paid minimal wages but each of whom puts in a required day or half-day of unwaged labour per week, and some – like Silver Moon bookshop in its embryonic period around 1984 – pay subsistence wages. Feminists active in press collectives are, understandably, forthcoming about the financial sacrifices they are making in order to forward a passionately held political conviction: again the Women's Press Collective in California assert “we're not making money, not anything near the minimum wage” (“Ma Revolution”, 1975: 8); a spokesperson for Onlywomen in 1986 confided in interview that the press was paying only “minimal salaries to the few working members of the collective” (Fritz, 1986a: 17); Brenda Whisker, an Onlywomen member from 1977, recalled in 1993, “I don't know where all the money from the printing jobs went to . . . but I never made an income” (Jackson, C., 1993: 52). It is acts of faith which, in the final analysis, support non-mainstream feminist publishing enterprises and bestow upon their over-worked and under-paid workers the righteous glow of the politically committed as some compensation for their very real financial sacrifice. Martha Shelley, of the US Women's Press Collective, asserts that it is this hidden substratum of unwaged labour which alone makes many alternative women's publications possible:

What kept the press going, however, was not equipment but thousands of hours of woman labor – hand collating, hand stapling, women caring enough to put in hours and hours of time with no pay in order to get the word out. To a large extent we still rely on that kind of caring

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– either in the form of voluntary labor or donations – women believing in the writing and also in the graphics. (1976: 120-21)

It remains open to dispute, however, whether the exploitation of women's unpaid labour in the name of a feminist communications network is any more ideologically defensible than women's utilisation as an unpaid labour force within the domestic sphere. While early second-wave feminists were adamant that the institution of the housewife epitomised just such a damaging representation of women's labour as somehow 'non-work' in order to justify the economic subordination of women (Friedan, [1963], 1976: 311-14; Oakley, 1976), feminists in general have shied at confronting unpaid women's labour in their own movement on the same terms. To my knowledge, only London's The Women's Press declines to take on unpaid labour because of a conviction that women's work has for too long been exploited under the rubric of volunteerism. But this high-principled decision is (as collective feminist presses are quick to point out) made possible by The Women's Press's guaranteed overdraft from businessman Naim Attallah's Namara group. This is a principle, in other words, they have the corporate-cushioned luxury of being able to espouse.

There may, in addition, be a detrimental aspect to unpaid or minimally paid labour for the collective as well as for the collective member. For a feminist enterprise paying at or below subsistence wages effectively guarantees a self-selecting, middle-class membership – no boon to organisations committed publicly to representing the variety of women's voices. In a sociologically-informed analysis entitled "Conditions for Democracy: Making Participatory Organizations Work" (1979), Joyce Rothschild-Whitt concludes that paying at market rates weakens an alternative organisation, hence such operations "should be structured so that it is *not* economically rational for staff members to seek a career in them" (225). This surprising contention, perhaps reflecting the article's origins in the more economically buoyant 1970s, encapsulates much of what is

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financially self-limiting about the collective mentality as it has been embodied in feminist publishing. For it in effect stipulates that membership of a collective will, as a matter of principle, be economically detrimental to the individual. In its fatalism and unexamined suspicion of profit, it echoes Robin Morgan's diagnosis of "Failure Vanguardism" in the women's movement: the perverse belief that only commercial and personal failure win an activist the badge of political martyrdom – "the crown of feminist thorns" (1977: 13). Any press enterprise which is incapable of generating a profit, or which is reluctant to pay its staff at competitive market rates even if it is solvent, damages not only the morale and security of its workforce, but also jeopardises its own professed cause. For it is blatantly hypocritical of a press to pledge commitment to improving the status of women while lowering the living standards of its own staff.

An early second-wave press in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania which publishes as KNOW, Inc. constitutes an exception amongst radical feminist publishers in its disavowal of the destructive anti-profit mentality. Opposed to the innately exploitative volunteerist ethos, KNOW, Inc. pays all of its collective members, and prioritises profitability as a key step in ensuring its own survival:

Our immediate goals are to make working for KNOW a viable alternative for a feminist who needs to earn a living. We feel that there must be a way to keep us from being constantly near doom and/or losing our skilled people because they must survive and our wages are not survival-oriented. We feel that it is important for KNOW and crucial to the Feminist Movement to keep going. (Joan and Chesman, 1978: 146)

The exceptionalism of KNOW, Inc. on this issue is attributable to its origins as the Pittsburgh branch of the hierarchical liberal feminist organisation, the National Organization for Women (NOW), a lobby group of considerable political stature in the US, and one whose sympathies for the exhaustive metagroup analyses of collectivism are limited (Joan and Chesman, 1978:146). The damaging failure to accept the capitalist nature of the publishing industry and to transform it for feminism's own interests

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effectively doomed many radical publishing initiatives once government funding for such projects began to be drastically curtailed. In the face of the ruthless economic rationalist ethos of 1980s British publishing, the radical feminist press sector clung for too long to the misguided belief that commitment and credibility would ride out uncongenial politico-economic reality. The collective medium was indeed a significant element of the women's movement message, but radical feminist publishing may have fatally overestimated its centrality. In a statement which, analysed retrospectively, reads as a succinct and prescient reading of the auguries, Margie Wolfe surveyed the 1980 Canadian women's publishing scene:

Though it is clear we must continue publishing in the 1980s it looks as if it's going to be more difficult. . . . In the 1980s dedication and commitment are not, it seems, going to be enough. We'll have to become more business-minded if we are to survive. (1980: 14)

STAYING CREDIBLE / STAYING SOLVENT

SUSPICION OF PROFIT-MAKING

The Left has historically harboured a deep-seated suspicion that profit-making is inimical to political credibility and that to make money from popularising an oppositional political cause is, inevitably, to dilute the purity of that cause. Radical feminists of the 1970s commonly recoiled from profit-making initiatives, which they regarded as attempts to cash in on the women's movement in the same way that music and clothing companies had earlier exploited the 1960s counter-cultural ethic. A further complicating issue for committed feminists eager to establish sustainable women's business enterprises was thus the schizophrenia of radical feminism's views on the publishing industry. As has been noted, one of feminism's key contributions to media theory has been its exploration of the ways in which ownership of a medium characterises its content and perspective. Early-second-wave feminism's tendency was to emphasise the inherently ideological nature of publishing by elucidating the ownership links between multinational industrial conglomerates and high-profile publishing firms. June Arnold wittily dismissed all

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Madison Avenue publishers generating profits for their corporate heavyweight parent companies as “Random House”, highlighting their interchangeable sameness from the alternative press perspective (Harris, 1993: xxxii). Backed by the likes of “Kinney Rent-a-Car, Gulf and Western, and RCA”, they are, according to Arnold, “the intellectuals who put the finishing touches on patriarchal politics to make it sell” (1976: 19). Such is the commercial disapproval encoded in radical analyses that the profit-generating nature of cultural industries is presented as though it were revelatory knowledge:

It is a fact which is disagreeable to many feminists that to produce any commodity, including books, in large quantities, it is necessary to become immersed in the aforementioned patriarchal and capitalistic world of business. (Cadman, Chester and Pivot, 1981: 29)

Presses owned by the mainstream which could be discredited as ‘ripping off’ the women’s movement were clearly profit-seeking enterprises. But, by a curious argumentative lacuna, radical feminists consistently failed to confront the uncomfortable fact that *any* feminist operation which continued to publish was *also* – inescapably – a profit-seeking enterprise.

The unfortunate corollary of radical feminism’s failure to seize the propagandising opportunities of the capitalist principle was a movement which declined to give whole-hearted support to the founders of its own print enterprises. Frequently the staff of such undertakings were showered with praise for their ‘sisterly’ commitment, but cold-shouldered as ‘freeloaders’ once they asked for the requisite financial support and for demonstrations of consumer loyalty. Occasionally, articles expressing profound discontent at this self-defeating situation emerge in specialist media. A case in point is an article by Cinema of Women’s Jane Root entitled “Distributing A Question of Silence: A Cautionary Tale” (1985), in which she describes the obstructions her British feminist film distribution collective experienced when trying to encourage feminists to part with their cash in the interests of having a Dutch feminist film on public release in

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selected London cinemas: “some feminists and aficionados of independent film share a particular antipathy for ‘proper’ cinemas like the Screen on the Green [in Islington] and what might be seen as exploitative attempts to cash in on ‘fashionable feminism’ ” (63). The question which this experience necessarily provokes is: do radical women want to see feminist enterprises succeed to the extent that they are prepared to support them – perhaps at some personal cost – even when those enterprises are simultaneously reaching into the mainstream to attract new, as-yet-unconverted audiences?

Fran Winant, founder of the New York lesbian publishing company Violet Press, believes that in any such conflict between ideological purity and hip-pocket nerve, radical feminists display a tendency to appease the latter by scurrying under the cover of the former. Her 1975 article “Lesbian Publish Lesbians: My Life and Times with Violet Press” is a remarkable *cri de coeur* from a woman mired at the treacherous intersection of feminist politics and profit; it may be significant that it appeared in the leftist US cultural periodical Margins rather than in a women’s movement paper such as Sinister Wisdom, off our backs or The Second Wave. The radical wing itself, she implies, bears prime responsibility for the decay of alternative feminist media:

I hadn’t yet learned to ask how much women who want to read Violet Press books or see a press like this continue are willing to contribute to its support. I had created another ‘movement freebee’, like the many other women’s ‘alternative institutions’, (food co-ops, women’s schools and centres, groups putting on non-oppressive women’s dances – groups in which I also freely gave my labour), who didn’t know how to insist that their sisters pay enough to insure the group’s survival. (1975: 62)

Two obvious ways to fund an alternative press such as Violet Press are, aside from requesting charity-type donations, to amass revenue from sales either to already-converted feminists or to women who are not already *soi-disant* feminists but who might be receptive to feminism’s message. This policy, the underpinning of Virago Press’s mainstream market penetration, derives from the commercial knowledge that only an

expanding readership can underwrite an expanding budget for feminist book production (Owen, U., 1998). Publishers engaged in preaching only to the converted are, conversely, condemned to ever-diminishing returns. In attempting to sell Violet Press titles “at women’s get-togethers that I would have gone to anyway” (62), Winant experienced the uncritical anti-capitalist ethos prevalent in 1970s radical feminist circles: “I was treated as a peddler, out to get other women’s money. One woman asked me if I was living on the money I made from the books” (62).

Addressing this question of potential revenue from outside sales, it is time that contemporary feminist media critics broke the party line and confronted frankly radical feminism’s astonishing inability (or unwillingness) to be financially self-sufficient. As Liesbet van Zoonen has commented, feminist media – especially periodical media – tend to serve primarily a “ritual” function (1991: 37), addressing principally a coterie readership with their defensive, highly-oppositional tone, abstruse terminology and tendency to sign articles with first names only (carrying the implication that readers will be sufficiently *au fait* with movement personalities to identify the author of the piece from this clue alone – refer, for example, Freeman, J., 1970: 20; Desmoines and Nicholson, 1976: 129). Spreading the feminist message is everywhere trumpeted by such magazines as crucially important, yet their very tone and specialist distribution tend to militate against the goal of populism. Thus preoccupied with the task of reiterating policy for the already converted, and cocooned within their own oppositionality, radical feminist media have too frequently averted their gaze from the inescapable equation that profitability = longevity = audience (Fairweather, 1993: 12). This fact in itself paints an ominous picture of the wing’s political future. Yet in reading accounts such as Winant’s and Root’s, critics cannot but be aware of the enormous personal cost to feminists in setting up cultural enterprises only to be disowned by the political movement that spawned them.

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GOVERNMENT FUNDING: 'NON-POLITICAL' MONEY

A third obvious source of finance for radical women's presses (obvious, at least, in the 1970s) was public arts funding in the form of local government grants – a source of start-up capital upon which alternative feminist publishing initiatives relied heavily. Two problems arose from these presses' public funds dependency: firstly, a tendency to regard this income as speciously 'non-political'; and secondly, a failure to predict the rapidity with which government funding could be withdrawn or could evaporate altogether. The first of these issues is essentially ideological, and highlights the way in which radical feminism's economic analysis was capable of being clouded when money was acting in its own interests.

Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony was widely influential within the 1970s British Left. The imprint of the Italian thinker's concepts is discernible in feminist theorists' willingness to investigate the economic bases for specific cultural phenomenon, for example feminists' attribution of the 1950s cult of the "happy-housewife-heroine" (Friedan, 1965: 30-60) to the economic interests of the post-war consumer durables industries (Oakey, 1976). Though the radical wing of feminism was eager to point out the industrial substructure of multinational publishing corporations, there was a disinclination to subject the origins of local government arts grants to comparable political scrutiny. While public money could validly be argued to comprise roughly 50% women's taxes, the political bodies distributing this funding were (like all political institutions of the period) overwhelmingly male and frequently as hostile to the demands of their female employees as was the private sector. Given the manifestly unequal position of the women's presses, arguably their best-advised action would have been to take the money regardless of its political ties. This is precisely what most presses did; the minutes of the Sheba collective's original meeting, for example, list "Grants" prominently under the heading "Sources of income for Sheba" (1980, 2.3). It

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nevertheless reads as politically inconsistent to brand as freeloaders entrepreneurial women attempting to sell copies of their books without similarly asking what political leverage local government might stand to gain from granting funds to women's groups. Vested interests exist on both sides, but they deserve equally rigorous examination.

A further negative aspect of government grants funding is as prosaically practical as the foregoing is abstractly theoretical: namely, the time-consuming nature of feminist presses' search for sources of public funding. The hours lost from in-house work by the need to complete application forms, and to write reports on the manner in which grants money had been spent, amounted to a drain on the already scant labour resources of feminist presses. The minutes and daily logbooks contained in the Sheba Archive again testify to precisely how time-consuming such foraging for financial sustenance could prove for a small press already critically understaffed (2.3). Furthermore, government funding was fraught with insecurity both in the short-term, where grants were commonly one-off and inevitably subject to review, and in the longer-term, where the victory of the Conservative Party at successive General Elections soured the political and economic climate for radical independents.⁸ Founded in the earliest months of the first Thatcher government, the Sheba collective may not have predicted how devastating an impact that government's later abolition of the GLC and its slashing of the arts budget were to have on their left-identified enterprise. Margie Wolfe, however, observing a similarly right-wing drift in Canadian federal politics, foresaw that the 1980s would sound the death-knell of generous state subsidy for the arts: "Many feminist publishers began and sustained themselves on grants. These days are over: 'women' are no longer a priority" (1980: 14). Bad political timing, exacerbated by a lack of practical financial savvy, saw

⁸ Conservative opposition was already discernible at local government level by Autumn 1981, when Tory opposition councillors in the Greater London Council responded to Sheba's request for a £20 000 loan by declaring certain of the press's publications both pornographic and blasphemous. After a barrage of adverse publicity in the right-wing press, Sheba reduced their loan application to £12 000 (2.3).

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radical feminist enterprises decimated by the 1980s' increasingly market-driven policies. But could not radical publishers have availed themselves – Virago-like – of commercial opportunities to expound their message? It is a question which strikes at the heart of the radical press agenda, for the pragmatist's argument that the ends justifies the means was inevitably to prove unpalatable to a movement which had long maintained that means and ends were, in fact, indistinguishable.

AUTONOMY / OPPOSITIONALITY / SEPARATISM:

THE PERSPECTIVE OF RADICAL LESBIAN PUBLISHERS

The Achilles heel of radical feminist publishing has, since its inception in the early-1970s, been money and the appropriate attitude to adopt towards it. The complex issues at stake were, in the case of radical lesbian publishers, given particular urgency by the confluence of 1970s debates around feminist entrepreneurialism with a contemporaneous schism over lesbian separatism (Echols, 1989: 269-81). Radical feminists proposed that the significance of financial power for feminism lay in its ability to guarantee independence from male-defined and -dominated systems. Only a press which was financially self-sufficient or which could derive its income from sources not controlled by the mainstream could, it was argued, guarantee its own operating methods and ensure the uncompromisingly oppositional tone of its message. Onlywomen Press, in an early manifesto statement, articulates these central concerns of radical women by insisting that “communication should not be controlled by business considerations or, in some instances, by bookshops” (“Onlywomen”, c1977). For radical publishers still in operation at the time of the Women's Press resignations débâcle in 1991 (in which managing director Ros de Lanerolle and senior staff resigned over the male owner's interference with list direction and commissioning), the interconnected nature of press freedom and press funding could not have appeared clearer. Yet long prior to this concrete demonstration of an unsympathetic owner's power to gag a feminist publishing

operation, the awareness that such an hypothetical risk shadowed any non-independent press had been articulated. In their media manifesto, “From Us: Thoughts on the Feminist Media” (1974), Boston’s Female Liberation group stipulate that the first criteria of genuinely feminist alternative media must be that they are “media controlled and *owned* by women” [my italics] (2).

This cagily mistrustful tone is echoed by Britain’s only radical lesbian publisher, Onlywomen, which stipulated that if women’s words were vulnerable to the processes of co-optation and subsequent commercial rejection, how much more vulnerable were the voices of lesbian women? The particular history of lesbian literature and mainstream publishing bears out Onlywomen’s suspicion at the motivations of the corporate presses, for lesbian love stories and semi-pornographic pulp novels had been a publishing sub-genre throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and had frequently been penned by lesbian writers. But the imperatives of a heterosexual-dominated industry required that lesbianism be portrayed as a tortured, unfulfillable condition, hence the preponderance of the “dilettante-dyke-returns-to-her-husband” plot and the ubiquity of the suicidal lesbian protagonist – a direct descendent of The Well of Loneliness model of the 1920s (Koski and Tilchen, 1975: 42; Adams, 1992). Because of this experience of image distortion and literary ventriloquism, lesbian presses of the 1970s were commonly at the vanguard of the separatist media movement, asserting that the goal of developing “political analysis unhindered by patriarchal values” required the establishment of “our own culture” (Cadman, Chester and Pivot, 1981: 29). Because the ‘double oppression’ model commonplace in radical lesbian theorising from the early 1970s posited lesbian women as two-fold victims of a sexist *and* heterosexist society (Myron and Bunch, 1975), lesbian presses tended to articulate their concerns over co-optation as a more heightened form of the anxiety prevalent amongst feminist presses generally. It is an analysis which, viewed in retrospect, reads with a certain irony. For lesbian fiction and theory constitute

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a recently discovered niche market for mainstream publishers, and only the most hard-line of 1970s lesbian separatists could construe the contemporary visibility of lesbian identity within mainstream culture as politically inimical. Literary separatism, this dynamic suggests, may more profitably serve as a temporary tactic than as a steadfast ideological principle.

RESISTING MAINSTREAM / ALTERNATIVE BINARIES:

A POLITICS OF PROVISIONAL SEPARATISM

If the foregoing discussion of profit and politics paints an oppressively bleak picture of radical feminist publishing's fortunes, the gloom of commercial failure and political retreat may be alleviated somewhat by outlining an alternative model of lesbian publishing, the success of which may point the way towards future reinvigoration of the alternative press sector. The Florida-based publishing house Naiad Press has previously been best known in Britain as the originator of much of Silver Moon Books' (SMB) 30-title-strong list. While SMB has in its own right been innovative in vigorously marketing its books through its "highly visible" central London Silver Moon Women's Bookshop in addition to mainstream outlets, much of its sales success and market distinctiveness must be traced to its US counterpart (Cholmeley, 1991: 217). Of the Silver Moon Books fiction backlist only two titles – Jane Thompson's *Still Crazy* (1994) and *Diamonds and Rust* (1997) – were originated by the London firm. Press director Sue Butterworth aims in the next decade to commission five original titles each year, yet she freely acknowledges that the imprint's financial and literary substructure will continue to derive from buy-ins of the "better" titles from the Naiad list (Butterworth, 1998). Naiad's concentration on previously undervalued feminist genres – in particular lesbian romance, erotica and crime fiction – unearthed a market of women anxiously seeking respite from feminism's often high moral tone in escapist lesbian easy-reads. The distinctiveness of

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Naiad *vis-à-vis* other lesbian imprints resides in the fact that the firm did not emerge from a consciousness-raising group or political meeting, but from a 1973 agreement struck between wealthy lawyer Anyda Marchant and lesbian writer and critic Barbara Grier (who also writes fiction under the pseudonym Gene Damon). Marchant, wishing to develop her literary interests, provided the necessary financial backing and Grier, with her literary connections from long involvement with the lesbian periodical The Ladder and personal writerly experience, recruited authorial talent and acted as editorial manager (Marchant and Crawford, 1976; Hermes, 1992).

Naiad operates separately from the mainstream, but in its relatively sanguine conception of the commercial publishing industry's ideological function it differs radically from other 1970s US lesbian presses such as Daughters, Inc., Violet Press or Diana Press – or from their British counterpart, Onlywomen Press. These committedly separatist lesbian presses conceive(d) of the multinational-dominated world of corporate publishing as not only hostile to lesbian-identified books in the present instance (as exemplified by their insistence that positive lesbian portrayals were not commercially viable) but as *inherently* inimical to lesbian texts because of the industry's saturation with patriarchal values. As a result of this conviction, the rhetoric which emerged from the separatist limb of feminism advocated women-only distribution chains, total disassociation from male literary institutions, and an almost conspiracy-theory conviction that the extinction of lesbian publishing featured strongly on the agenda of the mainstream "finishing press" (Moberg, 1974; Arnold, 1976; Desmoines and Nicholson, 1976). The construction of radical feminism's relationship to the mainstream as one of implacable opposition bound these presses into a binary ontological pattern of embattled political virtue and nefarious institutionalised power:

Every genuinely feminist work of art is a blow at the heart of patriarchal reality. When lesbians control our own publishing and our own printing and our own distributing of our own words, we're

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directing those blows to the target. (Desmoines and Nicholson, 1976: 127)

The constricting political nature of such a position was made manifest, however, by an increasingly conservative political and economic climate. Faced with the collapse of alternative lesbian feminist institutions, separatist feminists were forced into ever-increasing glorification of radical failures as visionary self-sacrifice – the self-deluding martyrdom diagnosed by Robin Morgan. By conceiving of the mainstream as an antithetical Other, rather than as a powerful socio-political force with which lesbian feminist politics enjoyed a shifting, ambiguous relationship, separatist feminists in effect burnt their theoretical bridges. Ineluctably precluded from rapprochement with the mainstream, the collapse of radical feminist institutions permitted escape only through spectacular – but politically defeatist – rhetorical self-immolation.

The radical feminist theoretical model stands in marked contrast to the remarks of Naiad Press's Anyda Marchant, for whom lesbian literature represents more an end in itself than a preliminary step in an on-going political revolution. She, too, bemoans the paucity of strong, well-written lesbian novels and is convinced that "this scarcity is due at least in part to the obstacles in the way of publication", but her press's remedy for this lack is to supply "good quality" and "veracious" lesbian works rather than rhetorically to rehearse the downfall of the mainstream industry (1976: 117). Intriguingly, Marchant's indictment of "the strangling effect of the market conditions that dominate the large commercial presses" (117) allows for the construction of the mainstream not as inherently oppositional to lesbianism, but as only empirically so at a specific historical juncture. That Naiad was "brought into being to protest" (117) against this strangling effect allows for the possibility that, should the attitude of the mainstream undergo a political sea change and embrace lesbian literature, Naiad-style presses may be rendered culturally redundant. It is a manoeuvre that appears to presage the quintessentially 1980s

redefinition of the realm of the 'political' away from an encompassing socio-economically determined reality towards a cultural politics of representation. Were more quality lesbian titles produced via mainstream press channels, this relativist argument implies, then lesbian-run separatist operations may cease to serve their distinctive cultural purpose.

Discernible in the statements of Naiad Press, and constituting a profound shift from the manifesto statements of radical separatist women's print operations, is the concept of *provisional* separatism – viz. lesbians operating their own presses until such time as the mainstream recognises the value of their work and begins to imitate it. It is potentially an argument which lends itself to assimilationism and is far from unproblematic. There is a risk that the absorption of lesbian literature into the lists of mainstream houses may not be paralleled by a similarly rapid elevation of lesbian women into the managerial structures of such firms – resulting in a tokenising discrepancy between cultural profile and political power of the kind which bedevils black women's writing. Moreover, even within women-run houses such as Virago, the prioritising of lesbian literature – commissioned and edited *by* lesbians – is subject to commercial fluctuation: amidst the directorial instability of Virago's board in 1995, the distinctively-branded Lesbian Landmarks series was culled as insufficiently profitable (Pitman, 1995; Hennegan, 1998). Yet Marchant's statements offer a way out of self-defeating binary structures which lesbian publishing should not lightly disregard. They can be read as backing a tactical inter-relationship with the mainstream, in which independent lesbian presses exist to cut the radical edge of new writing, while the mainstream industry remains doggedly a few paces behind, observing the directions which prove profitable and advancing accordingly. Just such a dynamic has been at work in, for example, Naiad's publication of erotic lesbian anthologies with suggestively marketable titles such as Diving Deeper (1993) and The First Time (1995). In the wake of the proven

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commercial success of such titles from feminist houses – including Sheba’s influential collection Serious Pleasure (1988) – mainstream publishers began in the 1990s to move into the market for women’s erotica, publishing profitably in the area (for example, The Penguin Book of Erotic Stories by Women (5th ed, 1996); The Mammoth Book of Erotica (Robinson, 1994); and The Best American Erotica 1997 (Simon & Schuster, 1997)).

This present publishing reality is a long way from the New Jerusalem of an autonomous and dominant radical women’s communications network. But the fact that Naiad and Silver Moon Books have enjoyed consistent financial growth and expansion of market share while trenchantly oppositional collectives have withered on the vine indicates that strategic interventionism may signal the publishing and political future for lesbian presses.

CONCLUSION: ASSIMILATING LITERARY SEPARATISM

In the course of interviewing feminist publishers, I have been struck by the frequency with which they speak of the “next wave” of young women who they anticipate will move into feminist publishing, invigorating it with fresh enthusiasm (Callil, 1996; Mohin, 1998; Butterworth, 1998; Owen, U., 1998). Should that third wave gather force – and there is some evidence in Virago’s 1997 relaunch that it has already done so – its innovations will inevitably be in part a reaction against the perceived failings of its publishing predecessors. It appears crucial, therefore, to initiate debate on the legacy of second-wave radical publishing, a movement which appears now to have drawn to a close. Because of overwhelming changes in international economic circumstances, in publishing industry structures, and in social attitudes towards feminism, the majority of Britain’s 1970s and 1980s radical women’s publishing ventures have folded or have dwindled to a shadow of their former selves. Rightly credited with revolutionising the content of publishing lists across the industry, their rhetoric of political revolution

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appears to be increasingly travestied by the actuality of their demise. The invigorating ‘new blood’ in the women’s publishing sphere cannot begin to make itself generally felt until the pros and cons of a previous era’s record are calculated – a fact which makes feminist media criticism’s overly-respectful silence on the fate of radical women’s publishing not only puzzling, but inhibiting.

In a thought-provoking essay on a related topic, “Gay Fiction R.I.P.?” (1998), Viking New York’s senior literary editor Jonathan Burnham argues that gay culture has now achieved sufficient mainstream recognition that the classification “gay fiction” has a ghettoising rather than a self-affirming effect: “In a world where gay writing has emerged from the ghetto, grown up and significantly broadened its frame of reference, the continuing segregation of gay fiction is puzzling” (33). Without attempting to conflate the gay male literary experience with the quite distinct heritage of lesbian writing, I would argue that the gist of Burnham’s argument translates well to debates around feminist and lesbian publishing. These two over-lapping literary spheres were – like gay men’s writing – previously marginalised by the mainstream yet – again like gay fiction – they too have migrated markedly towards the centre of Western cultural consciousness. Yet, whereas Burnham’s article promotes a largely assimilationist framework in which to conceptualise gay male writing, I advocate for radical feminist writing and publishing a more strategically flexible position located on the outer margins of the mainstream – akin to it, but not of it, as it were.

The 1970s and 1980s feminist press boom demonstrates that a public appetite exists for politicised publishing. The dilemma confronting contemporary feminists now becomes how meaningfully to integrate a consumer demand for *culturally* oppositional texts into a movement for concrete *political* change. Feminist publishing, because of its obvious entrenchment in the cultural – as opposed to the activist – feminist sector has

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always struggled against this threatened tendency towards consumerist containment: namely, the risk of diluting political ideas through their very commodification and dissemination in book form. If anything, the late-1990s drift towards an amorphous politics of sign and representation threatens to magnify this pre-existing problem. A potential resolution of the dilemma may lie in appropriating the all-woman workplace practices of radical presses, so as to ensure political investment by those producing the literature in its content, but repositioning these presses on the margins of the cultural mainstream. According to this argument, radical women's presses will be in the position of fully acknowledging the ubiquity of mainstream culture, but of acknowledging also the permeability of its discursive boundaries. By pushing at its margins and destabilising its certainties, radical women's publishing can capitalise upon its heritage of oppositionality, but from a position sufficiently close to the mainstream to attract new readerships and new adherents. The attitudinal changes which must underpin any such reconfiguration would include the rejection of ostensibly democratic group models which are, in reality, powerless to check oligarchical tendencies, the renunciation of the destructive anti-profit mentality, and an unembraced exploration of ways in which modern marketing techniques may be employed to proselytise feminist ideas. This is not to argue that feminists must abandon critical reflection on mainstream developments, but rather that they should appropriate mainstream tools for feminist ends. Audre Lorde's oft-quoted observation that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" would seem to militate against such a co-optational strategy by feminism (1984: 112). But her statement belies the fact that Lorde's words were themselves disseminated only through feminist intervention in that historical bastion of male cultural hegemony – the publishing industry.

Radical women's publishing has always felt itself to be straddling a chasm: one foot in the righteous realm of marginal politics and the other in the polluting world of

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mainstream profit. By the late-1990s, radical presses are in the advantageous position of being able to reconceptualise their split nature as a tactical advantage: closer to the ground-level issues of women's politics, and benefiting from an enhanced political credibility in the eyes of consumers, they can specialise in cutting-edge writing, constantly pushing at the margins of mainstream respectability and compounding their earlier successes in championing new literary forms and idioms. Their smaller size and independence grants these presses the manoeuvrability to pursue riskier publishing opportunities than their mainstream competitors, while successes – if well marketed – can crystallise public perception of a specialist brand identity. Unquestionably, it is uncertain, little-charted terrain and may involve, as Silver Moon Books has found, working tirelessly to launch new writers only subsequently to see them jump ship for the larger advances and author packages on offer from mainstream competitors (Butterworth, 1998). Politics and profit may yet be far from synonymous terms. But if feminist publishing is to envision a future it is imperative that these concepts evolve from the diametric opposites they represented for many early-second-wave radical women. Accustomed as 1970s feminists were to thinking in dialectics, it is time that the publishing houses they spawned appreciated the interdependency and dynamism at the concept's heart.

**‘THIS BOOK COULD CHANGE YOUR LIFE’:
FEMINIST BESTSELLERS AND THE
POWER OF MAINSTREAM PUBLISHING**

In general the [women’s] movement’s relationship with fiction was uneasy. ‘Authenticity’ required either poetry (with its minimal readership and consequent freedom from commercialism) or the straight talk of non-fiction. In terms of sexual politics The Female Eunuch was generically sounder than Fear of Flying.

– John Sutherland, Bestsellers: Popular Fiction of the 1970s
(1981:83)

Within the twentieth-century women’s movement, literature has always existed in a state of troubled ambiguity – valued for its proselytising potential and communicative power, yet simultaneously regarded with wariness as in some sense an indulgence, sapping revolutionary action by the isolating, individualist nature of its production and consumption. Even in the 1990s, some thirty years since feminist theory began its bid for entrenchment within the discipline of literary studies, a note of lingering doubt is still discernible in the writings of selected critics speculating as to whether the reading, teaching and criticism of literature represent sufficiently *political* engagements with the cause of women’s rights (Wolf, 1993; Stanley, 1997; Walter, 1999; and see also Robinson, L., 1978: 52). As John Sutherland’s observations in his 1981 study Bestsellers: Popular Fiction of the 1970s attest, these debates over the political value of feminist literary-critical activity are not a recent phenomenon. Yet the assumption implicit in the passage cited above – that non-fiction publication represented a less politically fraught manoeuvre for women’s liberationists than did fiction publication – warrants critical re-examination in the light of mainstream publishers’ unabated fascination with the phenomenon of the feminist bestseller.

As explored in the preceding chapter, the risks contingent upon feminists' collaboration with mainstream fiction publishers gave rise to impassioned theoretical debate in the early- to mid-1970s over the merits of separatist print organising. However, when the generic classification of the text to be published shifted from feminist fiction to feminist non-fiction, these debates were not necessarily allayed in the manner that Sutherland's statement may suggest – if anything they were further aggravated. For if fiction publication with the mainstream carried implicit risks of containment and political distortion, how much greater were those risks when the manifestos of the movement were themselves subject to the ideological whim and commercial imperative of the mainstream publishing industry? Having struggled to articulate an oppositional critique in the teeth of social conditioning and Establishment disapproval, feminists found themselves made doubly vulnerable at exactly the point where they sought to communicate their message to a wider public. If, according to Marshall McLuhan's dictum, the medium is indeed the message, then feminists' commercial impotence was tantamount to political silencing.

This chapter explores the mainstream publishing industry's ambiguous treatment of feminist ideas in the period both prior to and since the emergence of the modern feminist press movement. In any examination of feminism and publishing politics in twentieth-century Britain, such a discussion is crucial, for it confronts fundamentally the issue of separate women's publishing houses which has energised – and which currently preoccupies – the feminist press movement. The market successes enjoyed by feminist publishers and examined in the foregoing chapters have been interlaced with, and sometimes compromised by, seemingly endemic structural problems in an undercapitalised, organisationally chaotic feminist press sector. These recurrent problems prompt renewed consideration of feminist presses' original separatist conviction: now that mainstream publishers have successfully promoted feminist titles to diverse readerships, have the women's presses witnessed the erosion of their very *raison*

d'être? In the analysis which follows, I argue for an attitude of critical circumspection when approaching the specious phenomenon of the 'feminist bestseller'. For the mainstream industry has not been simply a neutral medium for the communication of feminist ideas, but has itself crucially *mediated* those ideas through its commissioning, packaging and marketing of feminist texts. Only by analysing the corporate publishing industry's modulation of feminist thought can scholars hope to arrive at a prognosis of feminist publishing's twenty-first-century fate. The machinery of the feminist bestseller potentially foreshadows the brave new world of an industry in which independent, women-run alternative presses have been commercially eclipsed.

Just as this final chapter moves beyond an exclusive analysis of autonomous feminist presses to analyse feminist works emerging from the mainstream, so too must it enlarge its analytical focus beyond the geographical parameters of Great Britain. For in order to understand the products of the contemporary commercial publishing industry, it is necessary to appreciate that this media sector has grown truly international in scope and multimedia in its product-base. To understand 'Britain' as a nation-state with a self-sufficient book publishing culture – one capable of being analysed without regard to the international electronic and print media – is fundamentally an anachronism. The British marketing campaigns for high-profile feminist titles are commonly based upon promotional tactics and commercial feedback derived from recent US book launches. Even in those situations where a multinational publishing corporation chooses to launch a book first in Britain, the motivation is frequently to use the demographically smaller and geographically more compact of these two English-language markets as a test case for an imminent US promotional campaign. There is a shift in emphasis, therefore, in this chapter's relationship to the title of the thesis. What follows is, indisputably, an analysis of feminism and the media in the twentieth century, but the more specific descriptors "feminist presses" and "Britain" must here give way to the more general

analytical landscape of “publishing politics”. For understanding the political sway of the multinational publishing corporations has, paradoxically, never been more pressing than at this moment when national political boundaries appear increasingly permeable. Given the capital, sales strength and media power wielded by the mainstream, critics of feminist publishing must reorient their analytical strategies to place feminist presses against this increasingly powerful *international* publishing backdrop – or else risk valorising a cause at the very moment when it is threatened with commercial extinction.

The discussion which follows centres upon five texts spanning the second half of twentieth-century women’s political activism. In their diverse cultural origins they testify to the geopolitical diversity of second- and third-wave feminist thought: Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex (1949, trans. 1953); Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique (1963); Kate Millett’s Sexual Politics (1970); Germaine Greer’s The Female Eunuch (1970); and Naomi Wolf’s The Beauty Myth (1990). Each of these texts is a ‘bestseller’ in the commonly used sense of the term, having figured amongst the industry’s top 10 or 15 highest-selling non-fiction titles in its year(s) of publication.¹ Moreover, in the case of all five works, commercial turnover has been paralleled by critical inclusion in the canon of feminist books commonly discussed within academia and the wider literary community. Their status as feminist classics has been repeatedly hailed in contemporary reviews and further underlined by subsequent critical commentary. Indeed, this sample feminist canon is in many ways self-sustaining: later

¹ The sales statistics cited throughout this chapter are, unless otherwise indicated, the US sales figures for individual titles as derived from Publishers’ Weekly’s non-fiction “Best Sellers” listing, one compiled with commendable professionalism “on a percentage basis from reports from 48 booksellers in 35 communities in the U.S.A.” (Publishers’ Weekly – hereafter PW – 17 Jun., 1963: 118). Because British bestseller listings in the Bookseller and the Sunday Times did not appear until the mid-1970s, the actual British sales figures for the majority of the books analysed here are unreliable. Sales statistics acquired from British publishers have been included where this information was forthcoming. As Sutherland accurately observes in Bestsellers (1981), “anyone attempting [a] comprehensive and numerically informative account of British bestsellers would face a Herculean task” (13).

books in the group frequently refer explicitly or rely implicitly on the analyses and methodologies proposed in earlier titles – Millett, for example, reconfigures and develops de Beauvoir's analysis of patriarchal literary mores, while Wolf reformulates Friedan's earlier critique of women's magazine culture for a 1990s audience.

In selecting these works as the analytical foci of my discussion I do not, however, wish to reinscribe the concept of a hegemonic canon of feminist writing, one incapable of radical critique or impervious to changes in feminist politics. Rather, by siting these texts within their institutional, commercial and industrial contexts, I aim to interrogate the role of the publishing industry in constructing the category of the 'feminist classic', thereby calling into question the reified aura which surrounds the term. If the status of a 'classic' inheres at least partially in the pre- and post-publication history of an individual text, then potentially *other* texts and *other* feminist authors could equally, depending on their individual publishing histories, have laid claim to 'classic' status. Hence, the deployment of the terms 'classic' and 'bestseller' in this discussion betokens primarily publishing industry endorsement and promotion rather than any innate metaphysical or even intellectual superiority. Other politically-engaged female critics – amongst them Susan Faludi, Ann Oakley, Suzanne Moore, Juliet Mitchell, Katie Roiphe, Rene Denfield and Natasha Walter – could alternatively have been included in this chapter's sample cross-section of texts. Indeed, by highlighting the extent to which canonical inclusion is the arbitrary outcome of publishing industry will and serendipity, I would hope vigorously to problematise, rather than buttress, the notion of canonicity itself.

Acknowledging the mainstream book industry's crucial role in engineering feminist bestsellerdom is highly discomforting to those interested in the production of feminist knowledge. Firstly, the idea that marketing and not pure merit may be

instrumental in denoting feminist classics casts a veil of further complication between the texts of the feminist canon and their contemporary readerships. For now readers are obliged to factor into their interpretations not only developments in feminist thought subsequent to the book's original appearance, but also the *nature* of the book's initial marketing and reception, and the effect that this has had on its subsequent publishing (and academic) fortunes. It is, to say the least, destabilising to recognise that the publishing and commercial interests of which feminism has rightly been so critical may themselves have crucially determined the landmark texts of feminist thought. The net effect is to add a powerful variable to an already complex political equation.

Moreover, the concept of the publisher as prescriber – in addition to mere purveyor – of feminist theory casts an unflattering light on feminism's previous methodologies. Outspoken in its analyses of women's interaction with all aspects of society and culture, feminism would seem simultaneously to have maintained an analytical blindspot with regard to the *publication* of those findings. To return to the argument with which this thesis began, can feminist scholarship be as culpable of ignoring the publishing industry as publishing studies has frequently been guilty of ignoring gender issues? Feminists here risk at best intellectual sloppiness, at worst unconscious political collusion.

The complex interface of feminist thought and mainstream publishing is best explored by tracing the production of a feminist bestseller through the industry's institutional apparatus. Such a publishing-centred analytic model conceptualises the text not as completed article but rather as on-going process, originating with its research and writing by the author, passing through industry-demarcated departments such as contracts, design, translation (where relevant), marketing and publicity, and ending with the text's public release, reviewing, sales and initiation into the canon of feminist

thought. This methodological framework recommends itself because of the light it throws on the immensely complex and labour-intensive processes by which an authorial creation is transformed for public consumption. Literary-critical feminism has illuminated the material and cultural factors governing the writing (or non-writing) of literature by women, and the subtle means by which women readers decode those literary texts. It might, therefore, look upon such a publishing-centred analysis as a critical missing link. Publication is *the* indispensable intervening event by which writers and readers are brought into relation with each other. It is the linchpin which makes feminist literary criticism as it currently stands simultaneously possible and problematic.

While such a product-based framework may appear novel in an academic study, its use is justifiable in that it impresses feminist analysis with the dynamics of the commercial publishing industry. Rather than merely adding publishing terminology and processes to a standard literary-critical analytic framework, leaving that framework substantially unaltered, this modified format has the advantage of radically infusing an academic form of criticism with industry processes – allowing the latter to transform the usual thought-patterns of the former. Because this discussion argues that industry exigencies crucially influence the production of feminist knowledge, it appears important explicitly to factor these exigencies into the construction of *this* critique. Those alleging myopia in other critical schools are well advised to ensure their own critical *modus operandi* is at least explicitly acknowledged.

Two potential objections to such a methodology are best dealt with at the outset of discussion. The first, that a chronological structure would better capture the importance of a given text to its era, warrants careful consideration. Ultimately, however, it proves unconvincing, as a publishing-focused analysis is able to comprehend texts both as articulations of debates contemporaneous with their writing, as well as

contributions to on-going, trans-historical discussions. Secondly, the potential objection that a publishing-based structure homogenises the differences between national publishing cultures is a powerful one. The coterie of writers brought into print by, for example, de Beauvoir's French publisher, Gallimard, in the late-1940s unquestionably had an experience contrasting radically with the material and cultural publishing circumstances of a 1990s title such as Wolf's The Beauty Myth. Nevertheless, a country-specific analysis fails to account for books which enjoy significant sales success across national boundaries and – as in the case of The Second Sex – in translation. The virtue of a publishing-based analysis is that the attention it directs towards issues of marketing and reviewing can help to explain how a text such as de Beauvoir's can receive a vitriolic reception in its home country, yet win heavyweight critical endorsement in the USA only four years later.

Radical feminist media theorists of the early-1970s were inclined to view the publishing industry's capitalist ethos as implacably opposed to the revolutionary zeal of feminist consciousness. The industry's apparent support of feminism was viewed as tantamount to a repressive tolerance which aimed to anaesthetise feminist dissent by publishing "the least threatening, the most saleable, the most easily controlled" (Arnold, 1976: 19). Yet, with the advent and expansion of an independent feminist publishing culture, the lists of mainstream houses have not been populated by a merely token feminist presence (as early radical theorists feared) but have themselves overseen major developments in feminist thought. If anything, the rhetorical positions of publisher and purchaser may have reversed, with publishers increasingly offering radical theories to an apparently satiated and apathetic public. In a jaded 1990 editorial, the Independent on Sunday adumbrated the tedium of a "radical new look at the oppressions of women" being offered to the public "almost every autumn", with "the publisher (if no one else) hail[ing] the book as revolutionary" ("Last Word", 1990: 21). Far from the corporate

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mainstream censoring feminist books outright, publishers appear to have annexed feminism's rallying power to their pre-Christmas publishing schedules.

Yet the fact that the most dire predictions of separatist feminist media theorists have failed to eventuate should not provoke feminists into the opposite response – an unduly sanguine embrace of the mainstream in the belief that feminist views have achieved an entrenched societal endorsement. Such an assertion is vulnerable precisely because it confuses the publishing industry's interest in feminism with what is in feminism's own best interests. Only through critically examining the means by which the corporate mainstream commissions and promotes classic feminist texts can critics be alert to the industry's filtering power. For behind the received canon of feminist intellectual development there stands a spectral apocrypha of texts unwritten or, if written, unpromoted, unreviewed, and untaught. The publishing industry, in its role as de facto gatekeeper of feminist knowledges, urgently needs to be incorporated into the formulations of feminist thinkers. By elevating the publishing industry from the status of an implicit to that of an explicit element in its theorising, feminist criticism stands to gain a heightened awareness of the conditions of its own production.

THE PRE-PUBLICATION PHASE

RESEARCH, WRITING AND LITERARY AGENTS

The means by which authorial inspiration is transformed into written text is a process upon which feminist critics have long trained their attention, producing subtle and culturally nuanced readings of the paths taken by texts from original idea to bound volume. Whether these readings are produced under the rubric of biographical criticism (tracing the circumstances of the individual which were conducive to, or which inhibited, literary production) or of cultural and intellectual history (analysing the broader cultural environment of the period and its influence on the creation of the literary text), the

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fundamental critical insistence has been on contextualising the individual title within an historically-grounded societal framework. The species of materialist-cultural criticism advanced in this thesis must of necessity draw upon the productive insights and methodologies of existing feminist readings, but it must moreover focus specifically on the *institutional* contexts from which feminist texts derive. In particular, a publishing-focused analysis must concentrate on the points at which the individual author enters into the machinery of publication and promotion, initiating the communication cycle which achieves completion once the text is consumed by the reader – only to begin again with other readers and with the writing of still other texts. The benefit of such an approach is that the basic unit of critical analysis shifts from the life-span of a single book, or of multiple books by a single author, to an emphasis on the manner in which the success of earlier books influences the publication and reception of later, generically-related titles. It attempts to balance the cumulative category-driven marketing tactics of the bookselling industry against the specifics of an individual title, formulating an analysis which is alive both to the generic pattern and to the surprise bestseller.

This publishing-specific analytical technique is particularly productive for readings of two early feminist bestsellers: Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex and Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique. Because both texts are commonly regarded as magnificent exceptions to the general malaise of mid-century feminist inertia, critics have tended to overlook the ways in which both texts rework pre-existing discourses and genres to introduce feminist arguments under the guise of adjacent disciplines. Viewed in this light, the texts emerge not as towering achievements isolated from their contemporary literary contexts, so much as sophisticated collusions with an often reluctant publishing industry introducing feminist analysis to a mainstream audience.

Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex, an indispensable starting point for understanding the development of second-wave feminism, owes its origins to de Beauvoir's conversations with Colette Audry in the 1930s about the nature of women's experience. In the third volume of her autobiography, Force of Circumstance (1963, trans. 1964), de Beauvoir characteristically attributes the immediate short-term inspiration to write The Second Sex to a conversation with Jean-Paul Sartre, in which she perceived that her life experience was determined not only by variables of nationality, class and educational attainment but also – crucially – of gender (168, 185). The two-volume study which emerged from this epiphany and de Beauvoir's speculation upon its significance for her own life spans the disciplines of history, philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology and literature to garner evidence for its central tenet that femininity is socially constructed rather than biologically given. To cite de Beauvoir's famous encapsulation of her thesis in the opening words of the French edition's second volume, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (1949d: II, 13). Given de Beauvoir's insistence on social and environmental forces, it is revealing to investigate the pre-publication history of the text itself, for de Beauvoir's previous publications, her public notoriety and industry contacts conditioned the circumstances of the book's reception in crucial ways.

The actual research and writing of The Second Sex took place between October 1946 and June 1949, an extraordinarily condensed period of intellectual production, especially given that for the first four months of 1947 de Beauvoir was on a lecture tour of universities in the United States. The travelogue which resulted from this visit, America Day by Day (1948) was, however, crucial in engineering the 1949 publication of Le Deuxième Sexe (The Second Sex). In conjunction with de Beauvoir's first published novel, L'Invitée (She Came to Stay) (1943, trans. 1954), America Day by Day assured de Beauvoir's publisher, Gallimard, that the author boasted a sufficiently high

literary profile to complement her notoriety within Existentialist circles. Yet the immediate spur which appears to have clinched Gallimard's decision to publish was the opportunity to serialise chapter-length tasters in extract form prior to the book's publication in the leftist monthly co-founded by de Beauvoir and Sartre, *Les Temps modernes*. The three substantial extracts which appeared in 1949 – “Woman's Sexual Initiation” (May, 1949), “The Lesbian” (June, 1949), and “Maternity” (June, 1949) – predictably created a storm of publicity in the socially conservative climate of post-war France (1949a; 1949b; 1949c). The decision of the Vatican in the same year to place The Second Sex on its Index of forbidden books productively further heightened the text's aura of dangerous immorality. An unruffled de Beauvoir later wryly remarked that the book had, “naturally”, been blacklisted by Rome (1965: 190). But in reviewing the book's French publication history, de Beauvoir speculated that perhaps publishing an initial extract so specifically geared to the subject of sexuality may have misrepresented the philosophical tenor of the book:

Perhaps we made a mistake in publishing the chapter on sexuality in *Les Temps modernes* before the book actually came out. That was the beginning of the storm. And the vulgarity . . . (Schwarzer, 1984: 71)

The public's prurient fascination with a book openly discussing the forbidden topics of heterosexual behaviour, lesbianism and abortion was doubtless beneficial for sales, yet the incident represents an early example of a feminist book which receives public attention for a presumed salaciousness rather than for its analytical rigour. Furthermore, in the vicious personal vilification of de Beauvoir which followed the publication of volumes one (June, 1949) and two (November, 1949) of The Second Sex there is a nascent example of what came to be diagnosed 'the feminist star system' – the media-driven insistence that the socio-political agenda of feminism be conveniently reducible to a single individual.

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For author Betty Friedan, writing in the immensely conservative climate of suburban America in the early-1960s, de Beauvoir's text served as both prototype and unwelcome fellow traveller. The Second Sex's dangerous reputation as a sexually explicit book was, in the post-McCarthy US, compounded by de Beauvoir's explicitly socialist political convictions. This simultaneous attraction and repulsion helps to explain why the influence of de Beauvoir which is pervasive in the content of Friedan's The Feminine Mystique nevertheless remains only cursorily acknowledged, a process which Sandra Dijkstra in "Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan: The Politics of Omission" (1980) understands as a dilution of "radical to reformist solutions, from philosophical to popular jargon, and from European to American references" (294). While Dijkstra is right to critique Friedan's reduction of the multifaceted and philosophically-grounded Beauvoirean analysis to the individualistic language of American liberalism, she perhaps underestimates the importance of The Feminine Mystique as a tool for popularising feminist ideas.

The means by which Friedan ensured her book a large readership amongst the suburban heartlands of commuter-belt America was by appropriating the audience for mass-market women's magazines and by utilising their accessibly non-academic writing style to convey a politically radical conception of women's role. Friedan extrapolated from her experience as a journalist on titles such as McCall's and Ladies' Home Journal to mount an influential critique of the role of women's magazines in socialising American women into low academic expectations, domestic careerism and vicarious achievement. Yet, ironically, it was Friedan's existing magazine publication record and industry connections which ensured invaluable pre-publication publicity when extracts from The Feminine Mystique were published in these same magazines to coincide with the book's February 1963 publication by W.W. Norton & Company. The surprising

decision of these magazines' editors marks a triumph of circulation-boosting over editorial consistency:

The letters I got came not only from those who had bought the book itself, but also from those who had read excerpts of it printed simultaneously – in unprecedented inexplicable defiance of custom – by the major competing women's magazines whose feminine mystique I was attacking, the Ladies' Home Journal and McCall's, and earlier, Mademoiselle and Good Housekeeping.^[2] In this fashion, I suppose the book reached five times the 3 000 000 or so who actually bought it.^[3] The unprecedented passion of their response was such that later that year McCall's asked me to do an article about the letters. (1976: 19)

The hybridity of The Feminine Mystique was much remarked upon in the reviews and publishing industry comment which the book generated in the wake of its 1963 publication, hinting at a radicalism as to genre about which later critics have tended to remain silent. The book's critique of Freudian theory and the American psychoanalytic profession's obsession with individual adaptation ensured it coverage amongst psychological and sociological journals such as Contemporary Psychology, American Sociological Review and Social Forces (Engel, 1963; Fava, 1963; Higgins, 1964). These original reviews tend to focus on Friedan's charge that graduate women lack professional opportunities, understanding the work as a study of "the distorted image of today's woman" (PW 28 Jan. 1963: 184) written in the style of "a magazine article [which] got out of hand" (Higgins, 1964: 396). Friedan's publisher, Norton, appears to have identified the college-educated social sciences audience as the book's niche market. The slipcover of the original hardback edition features bold-type quotes from public intellectuals such as Pearl S. Buck in an attempt to buttress the book's

² Sample titles of two of these 1963 extracts include: "G.I. Bill for Women? Excerpts from The Feminine Mystique." Ladies' Home Journal Jan.: 24-29; and "Fraud of Femininity: Excerpts from The Feminine Mystique." McCall's Mar.: 81-87.

³ Friedan's estimate of the book's sales appears reasonably accurate, if erring somewhat on the side of generosity. Alice Payne Hackett and James Henry Burke in 80 Years of Best Sellers: 1895-1975 (1977) calculate that by 1975 The Feminine Mystique had sold approximately 2 000 000 copies (20). Margaret Bluman, current editor of Penguin UK's women's studies list, states that although Penguin does not now directly promote Friedan's book, it continues to sell 500-600 copies annually as a backlist title (Bluman, 1999).

reputation with the force of intellectual prestige (Friedan, 1963). Yet Norton's attempt to sell the book upmarket perhaps underestimated the lure of its accessibility for domestically-isolated housewives. The sales figures in Publishers' Weekly's 1963 "Best Sellers" list indicate that sales tended to rise dramatically in the wake of Friedan's "personal appearances on radio and television" (28 Jan. 1963: 184). A 29 April 1963 publicity announcement that "the author will make personal appearances in Chicago, Detroit, St. Paul and Cleveland early in May" (226) is followed within weeks by the industry update that "sales are especially good in Chicago, Norton reports" (27 May 1963: 98). Mainstream media channels such as McCall's and the Ladies' Home Journal, coupled with radio and television promotion, ensured that Friedan's book targeted an audience largely bypassed by the academic journals. Norton's advice to booksellers in Publishers' Weekly that "over 40 000 copies" had been sold and that "nation-wide advertising will continue" (23 Sep. 1963: 90) is an early instance of a feminist bestseller receiving mainstream media attention, despite the fact that the mainstream media constitute a central target of the book's cultural critique. Viewed optimistically, this situation could be interpreted as proof of the publishing industry's openness to radical innovation; viewed more circumspectly it suggests a repressive tolerance which allows radicalism only within the rigorously circumscribed boundaries of commercial profit.

Friedan's remarks on the publication history of The Feminine Mystique evoke a media industry initially as sceptical of the book's intellectual credibility as of its commercial viability. An earlier article-length version of the book's central thesis was rejected for publication or extensively sub-edited to support entirely opposite conclusions by three mainstream women's journals, leading Friedan to withdraw the article from submission in the somewhat naïve belief that that book publishers would be more responsive to her radical agenda (1976: 17). This sanguine view of the book industry was harshly dispelled when Friedan's "then agent refused to handle the book when it was finished, and the publisher [Norton] only printed several thousand copies" (1976: 18).

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The weight of publishing industry indifference had been foreshadowed during the book's writing phase when Friedan endured the disparaging comments or outright disapproval of those in her immediate environment: the scorn of fellow researchers at the New York Public Library for devoting herself to so quasi-intellectual a topic; the conflicting demands on her time in running a household for a husband and three young children in suburban Rockland County, NY; and the moral reproaches of her housewife neighbours for stealing time for the project from the presumed higher calling of household management. Recalling graphically in It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women's Movement (1976) how she "chauffeured, and did the P.T.A. and buffet dinners, and hid, like secret drinking in the morning, the book I was writing when my suburban neighbors came for coffee" (14), Friedan evokes the air of feared disapproval which equally pervades the writing of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women authors.

COMMISSIONING FEMINISM

The point in the book production process at which a would-be feminist author comes into contact with a publishing house may be mediated in a variety of ways, though it is a relationship almost invariably characterised by discrepancy in the status of the parties. At the lowest level of authorial helplessness is the unsolicited manuscript, submitted to a commissioning editor in the hope of its gaining acceptance for publication. Significantly, none of the five major feminist bestsellers analysed here reached publication via this channel. Yet between the status of the commissioned 'star' author and the writer of the unsolicited submission is an intermediate category of authors whose work has already been produced for non-commercial (usually academic) purposes, and is subsequently taken up by the publishing industry for commercial ends. Kate Millett's landmark radical feminist text, Sexual Politics, enacted this translation from the academic sphere to the mass-market, though its translation was characterised by industry hesitancy and confusion as to how so explicitly oppositional a text might achieve a mainstream

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audience. The notoriety gained by Millett during the book's publicity campaign, and the misrepresentation which publisher Doubleday attempted in marketing the book, highlight the dangers of unchecked industry power for the dissemination of feminist ideas.

In its theoretical self-consciousness and academic prose style, Millett's Sexual Politics reflects its origins as the author's dissertation for her doctorate in comparative literature at Columbia University, New York City. With the disingenuousness of the newly famous, Millett revealed to Life in a September 1970 interview that "all it is is my goddamn Ph.D. thesis" (Wrenn, 1970: 16). Yet, despite the casualness implied by this remark, the text was in fact painstakingly assembled over a period of five years, and then written up, in white-hot anger over the author's dismissal from a teaching post at Barnard College, between February 1969 and March 1970 ("Who's", 1970: 17). Millett's isolation from the academy during the time Sexual Politics was written significantly contributed to the radicalism of the text. Her teaching contract terminated because of her unrepentant support of the 1968 Columbia student strike, Millett was able to write without the pressing need for institutional approval commonly experienced by postgraduates in teaching positions. As a result, the text emerged from its writing phase relatively unmarked by academic institutional preferences – it was, Millett remarked in a 1995 interview, "a much braver thesis than I might otherwise have done" (Mitchell, S., 1997: 237). Though the published text remains footnote-laden and sub-divided into an obvious thesis structure, Millett's original dissertation was slightly rewritten for commercial publication: Millett records in her autobiographical work Flying (1976) that US publisher Doubleday paid her an advance of \$4000 to fund the rewriting process (76). Even taking into account inflation since the early-1970s, the relative paucity of the "tiny sum" suggests that Doubleday was aiming Millett's book at only a moderate-sized, predominantly tertiary-educated audience (Mitchell, S., 1997: 237), with perhaps a

crossover market amongst laypersons interested in the then embryonic women's movement.

Publisher expectations for the title were clearly not high, as Doubleday did not include the book amongst its eleven frontlist titles in the 1970 Fall Announcements issue of the industry organ, Publishers' Weekly (31 Aug. 1970). A glance at the cumulative bestsellers of 1970 goes some way to illuminating this curious lack of prescience on the part of Doubleday: the year's top-selling non-fiction titles, such as Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex and Were Afraid to Ask by David Reuben and The Sensuous Woman by the enticingly anonymous "J", bespeak a market preoccupied with the sexual revolution as opposed to women's liberation (Hackett and Burke, 1977). The presence of the word "politics" in Millett's title was itself the cause of considerable author-publisher conflict, as Doubleday foresaw problems in marketing a self-declaredly political analysis to an audience seeking books about sex rather than sexism. In the discord which followed between author and publisher over the proposed cover design, latent conflicts between political and marketing priorities crystallised. Proposing a design with "two arms arm-wrestling – one brawny male and one fragile female" (Mitchell, S., 1997: 239), Doubleday met with Millett's implacable opposition to a book cover which reduced her subtle political analysis to a misleading visual symbol of fatally unequal physical strength. Moreover, the cover's clichéd sex-war spin on women's movement politics partook of the ubiquitous media tendency to encapsulate feminism as a prize fight between heavyweight individual combatants. As the marketing hype for Norman Mailer's execrably-written anti-feminist polemic, The Prisoner of Sex (1971), swaggered pugnaciously:

In this corner, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author, journalist, mayoral candidate, film-maker, and self-confessed PW (Prisoner of Wedlock). In the other corner, Kate Millett, Betty Friedan, Bella Abzug, Germaine Greer, and the armies of Women's Lib. (PW, 29 Mar. 1971: 8)

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Sexual Politics's vast post-publication publicity campaign, consisting of coast-to-coast lecture tours, television appearances and press conferences – recorded by Millett in Flying as a destabilising whirl – escalated only once sales of Sexual Politics had taken off. Having paid Millett a derisory sum to transform an academic dissertation, Doubleday perceived that they had – almost inadvertently – stumbled upon 'the bible of the women's movement', a text with the theoretical rigour and analytical depth to provide the polemical backbone for an emergent social trend. Though published on 31 August 1970 with minimal publicity, by mid-October 1970 the book was selling "6, 500 copies a week, for a total so far of about 50,000" in the US (PW, 12 Oct. 1970: 86). Two months after its hardback publication, Sexual Politics peaked at number 6 on the Publishers' Weekly listing of non-fiction bestsellers (2 Nov. 1970: 94). In short-term sales rankings, this represents a higher turnover for Millett's academic tome than for Friedan's book of accessible journalese seven years earlier. Given serendipitous political timing, even an intimidatingly dense text written in "mandarin mid-Atlantic" could secure a mainstream audience, a fact which a bemused (though hardly displeased) publishing industry noted, and accordingly added to its arsenal of marketing tactics (Millett, 1990: ix)

It is during the years 1970 and 1971 that the phenomenon of the feminist blockbuster in its contemporary guise emerges: the book whose cover confidently claims to change women's lives, to revolutionise social thinking, and to provide a blueprint for liberation.⁴ The superlatives which predominate in the marketing hype around feminist non-fiction in these years implicitly characterise feminism as essentially a one-book

⁴ Self-consciously echoing such publishers' cover-blurbs, Kate Millett recalls of reading Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex in 1950s America: "This book could change your life, it could make you dissatisfied. It could make you not just want to be one of the good girls that went to college, but you wanted to kick the windows in too". (Penny Forster and Imogen Sutton, eds. (1989) Daughters of de Beauvoir. London: The Women's Press. 22)

movement, although the claim that subsequently-produced books represented *the* definitive text was, of course, endlessly repeatable. The marketing oversimplification of the one-book movement aroused the ire particularly of independent 1970s feminist publishers, who perceived that mainstream presses of the period had no vested interest in nurturing a multiplicity of women's perspectives and contesting feminist interpretations (Arnold, 1976; Desmoines and Nicholson, 1976). Definitive pronouncements have a tendency to quash intellectual developments within radical movements, a rigidifying tendency about which women's liberationists, themselves frequently fugitives from the 'false consciousness' dogma of the New Left, were highly cynical. The publishing industry's publicity-motivated star system was thus directly at odds with the non-hierarchical communalism espoused by the women's movement:

Now that Women's Liberation has become a subject upon which each publishing house must bring forth its book, much as it must upon such pressing topics as contract bridge or the techniques of modern marketing, the struggle for the liberation of women is being mistaken for yet another battle of the books. Each publishing house backs its own expertise to identify the eventual bible of the women's movement, characterising it as a religious cult in which one publisher will corner the credibility market, sending the world's women rushing like so many lemmings after a book. The hapless authoresses of the books in question find themselves projected into the roles of cult leaders, gurus of helpless mewling multitudes. . . . The penalty is to find oneself reviled by one's sisters as a self-styled leader, a lady don who cannot know the perils and endurance of the front upon which the battle must be fought. ("Lib and Lit.", 1971c: 355)

Intriguingly, this quotation is taken from an article penned for the Listener in March 1971 by Germaine Greer, herself perhaps the prime example of the celebrity feminist, her fame meticulously constructed – with Greer's avid participation – by the machinery of book publicity. In the course of Greer's article "Lib and Lit.", the author proceeds to belittle Sexual Politics as "basically a literary and pedantic enterprise" (355), a far from neutral statement given that Greer's competing text, The Female Eunuch, had been released in Britain in October 1970 by MacGibbon & Kee. Moreover, in the Spring of 1971 Greer was due to embark upon a mammoth US publicity tour to promote her

work as *the* indispensable distillation of contemporary feminism, a publicity blitz with an initial advertising budget of \$25,000 (PW, 25 Jan. 1971: 205). Hence, in a manner which has continued to plague Greer throughout her subsequent public career, her acute insight on one hand and her desire for self-promotion on the other are fundamentally at odds. While she is undoubtedly correct in diagnosing the publishing industry desire for the definitive feminist book as an intellectually-inhibiting fixation on singularity, she here appears blind to the fact that, by reviewing Millett's book negatively, she is – implicitly – nominating her own publication for the title of feminist vade-mecum. Indeed, it is plausible that this is the specific reason Greer was commissioned to pen the review. Alert to the politics of the publishing machine, she yet opts to remain conveniently oblivious to her own. Her charges against Millett's US-centric perspective, her overly-academic prose, and the American author's thorough attack on patriarchal exponent Norman Mailer, carry as their implicit corollary a plug for Greer: Australian expatriate and United Kingdom resident, writer of wittily accessible prose, and high-profile feminist who will grant Playboy an interview (Greer, 1981) and debate Mailer publicly in the New York Town Hall.⁵ As ever, when hoist on the petard of her seeming self-contradiction, Greer pleads strategic necessity over ideological consistency: "I'm against the cult of personality, too, but I think we have to use whatever weapons we've got" (Greer, 1981: 335).

The accessible nature of Greer's prose is inextricably interlinked with questions of commissioning and marketing, for Greer's The Female Eunuch was commissioned by her Cambridge University contemporary, Sonny Mehta, then head of Granada's newly-launched trade paperback imprint, Paladin. While Dr Greer, her academic credentials demonstrated by a Ph.D. in Shakespearean drama, could doubtless have written in the

⁵ The publicist's dream debate between Norman Mailer, Germaine Greer and other speakers took place in the New York Town Hall in April 1971 (see "Norman Mailer." (1998) Uncensored. ABC-TV, Brisbane. 29 Jul.)

heightened academic prose of Millett, it was her journalistic experience in writing iconoclastic feature articles for satirical underground magazines such as Oz which made her the publisher's choice of author. For the nascent paperback imprint Paladin, a wittily-written title with cross-market appeal on the most pressing social question of the day was crucial for establishing its market identity, and for demonstrating to its parent house Granada that trade paperback publishing harboured lucrative possibilities. Significantly, Greer was a member of no organised women's group in Britain in the late-1960s, nor was she involved in the period's emergent feminist media. Her occasional membership of the loose advisory group which in the early-1970s assisted Virago's directors in selecting texts for publication was due more to personal friendship with fellow Australian Carmen Callil and others in the group than to ideological commitment (Callil, 1996). It was in fact Callil who, in an intriguing demonstration of the connections between feminist and trade publishing, managed the 1970 British launch publicity for Greer's The Female Eunuch, an event which she later pinpointed as the inception of a dynamic new collaboration between feminism and publishing: "The Female Eunuch was the beginning of a marketing as well as a female revolution, with Germaine one of the first to present herself as writer and media star" (Callil, 1995: 8).

Critic Maggie Humm asserts that the style of The Female Eunuch, one of "simple paraphrase [rendered] into a contemporary everyday vocabulary" was "dictated by [Greer's] commissioning editor" (1986: 32). This statement would appear to cast Greer in the mould of a passive publishing industry creation, whereas the striking feature of the 1970-71 Female Eunuch campaign is Greer's adroit and self-conscious presentation as a spokeswoman for a movement which, in its more radical wings, vigorously rejected the concept of spokeswoman itself. Hence, Greer's public metamorphosis into the icon of women's liberation was paralleled by a grass-roots activist disaffiliation from her brand of feminism – rendering Greer susceptible to attack from both proponents and opponents

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of women's liberation (Dreifus, 1971; Spongberg, 1993). Significantly, in a 1998 interview Greer parried a question about her emblematic role in 1970s feminists debates with the claim: "I was a fairly ordinary, badly dressed, pale, badly-coiffed then and badly-coiffed now person. And not particularly a feminist." ("Germaine", 1998). The issue encapsulates a troubling ambiguity at the heart of feminism's conceptualisation of the media. For Greer's The Female Eunuch, a number 1 bestseller in America in August 1971 (PW, 2 Aug. 1971: 104), created a groundswell of public support for feminist ideas which could not be channelled by any single group into concrete political action. This decentralisation of political power may represent an anarchist ideal, but it carried with it the problematic corollary that feminism's public image increasingly came to be defined by the commercial media rather than by a public of politicised women.

Like Greer, Naomi Wolf honed her writing skills within academia, first as an English literature undergraduate at Yale and later as a Rhodes Scholar at New College, Oxford. Her familiarity with communicating feminist issues in academic prose is demonstrated by her numerous references to her Oxford doctoral dissertation (as yet unsubmitted), a discussion of female hysteria in nineteenth-century literature which explicates the socially-constructed nature of medical disorders (Wolf, 1991a: 198, 220-22, 224; Mitchell, S., 1997: 193). Hence Wolf's commitment in The Beauty Myth to writing in "a language that a smart 15-year-old could understand" (Viner, 1997: 4) represents an admirably self-conscious attempt to broaden the audience for feminist writing, particularly given that the subject of the book is the cultural pressures for physical conformity on adolescent girls and young women. It is more especially remarkable given that, in the period between Greer's book and the appearance of Wolf's, feminist thought increasingly retreated into the academy, in the process clothing itself in a prose style so opaque and terminologically dense as to be unintelligible to the majority of women (refer also Wolf's subsequent book, Fire With Fire, 1994: 123-26). By

reviving the concept of the mass-selling feminist polemic, Wolf harks back to a more activist age of feminist consciousness. Yet the political ambiguities involved in harnessing the mainstream media for radical ends – politically treacherous waters earlier encountered by both Millett and Greer – have in the intervening twenty years grown in direct proportion to the mass media's accumulating power.

In the late-1980s, Wolf's synopsis for The Beauty Myth was auctioned among publishers by her New York agent, and was secured for British publication by Chatto and Windus with a £30 000 advance (Mitchell, S., 1997: 194-95) – “pretty unusual for an unknown name with no particular track record”, as Sally Brampton cuttingly remarked in the British press (1990: 17). Following a two-year publicity campaign, much of which lingered reverentially upon the author as a type of third-wave feminist messiah, the book achieved hardback release in Britain in September 1990, to a spread of mixed-to-poor reviews. The chief criticism of the book – that what it heralded as a radical breakthrough in feminist thought had in fact been previously explored by de Beauvoir, Greer and in particular by Susie Orbach in her book Fat is a Feminist Issue (1978) – engenders the suspicion that Wolf's media profile depended more upon her skills as an articulate populariser and moderniser of feminist ideas than upon her intellectual originality (Brampton, 1990: 17; Heller, 1990: 33; Smith, Joan, 1990: 22). Reviewing the book for the Independent, Zoë Heller adumbrates the extent to which pre-publication publicity can condition a book's reception, counterproductively triggering a satiated public response:

Wolf's publishers have chosen, a little rashly, to herald The Beauty Myth as 'a cultural hand-grenade for the Nineties'. Fatally over-estimating the book's radical import, they have laid their author open to irritable scoffing and charges of arrogance. (1990: 33)

The contradiction underpinning the reception of The Beauty Myth is that its author, even prior to the publication of this, her first, book was being hyped by the industry as a compelling feminist theorist. The corollary of this situation would appear

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to be that Wolf and her public persona represent the publishing industry dystopia predicted by early-1970s radical feminist theorists such as Arnold: having appropriated and neutralised feminism as an activist politics, the commercial mainstream continues to manipulate its appeal as a hollow bookselling category. Yet, conversely, one of the central targets of Wolf's analysis is the mass media itself, which she castigates for normalising impossibly underweight and dangerously passive stereotypes of femininity through the control of glossy women's magazines. That Wolf's cultural import was being hailed by publicists and marketing managers *prior* to the book's actual production, let alone its reception by reviewers and other feminist theorists, suggests that feminism has now become so detached from any specifically political analysis that the term is freely appropriable by any interested party. This is perhaps an inevitability, given that since the mid-1970s activist feminism has increasingly dissolved into the miasma of cultural politics. Paradoxically, this process is itself an example of exactly the species of political anaemia which Wolf's polemic deplores. The Beauty Myth is, therefore, a product of the system it indicts: deriding the manipulation of ostensibly 'emancipated' female images by a cynically money-minded media, the book calls for a new wave of grass-roots activism. Yet it articulates this battle-cry having bypassed almost completely any vestiges of feminist community. Greer's The Female Eunuch was criticised as a book dissociated from contemporary feminist organising; Wolf's book is promoted in an age virtually devoid of any such women's activism. Thus Wolf's corporate publishers are placed in the anomalous position of themselves calling for oppositional feminist resurgence.

THE POST-PUBLICATION PHASE

TRANSLATION

The women's liberation movement's early critiques of mainstream publishing and its power to filter public discourse tended to present one book as the magnificent exception

to the general rule, a title thwarting all attempts to compromise or dilute its radical intent: Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex (1949). Extrapolating from the author's status as an exceptional woman – able to defy the narrow expectations of her bourgeois Catholic background and her male-oriented university education through brilliant intellectual achievement – early-second-wave feminists bestowed the same renegade quality on de Beauvoir's book, assuming that it too had broken the bounds of publishing industry convention. In so doing, Anglophone feminists failed to appreciate the crucial ways in which the text they read differed markedly from that penned by de Beauvoir, chiefly on account of editorial deletions and alterations made during the course of its translation into English. Given that feminism has so often had recourse to written texts to construct a history much plagued by discontinuities and silences, the textual integrity of feminism's key documents becomes a matter of historiographic – not to mention political – significance. The resiliently canonical status accorded de Beauvoir's The Second Sex within feminism makes this investigation especially pressing. It becomes politically and intellectually essential to discover at what point textual corruptions arose, and in whose interests they were introduced.

The first English-language edition of de Beauvoir's The Second Sex was American publisher Alfred A. Knopf's 1953 volume, translated into English by Howard M. Parshley. This remains not only the sole available English translation of the work to date, and thus the source for almost all writings upon Beauvoirean philosophy by scholars in the Anglophone world, but also the master text for all subsequent translations of the work into languages other than French. The accusation of inaccurate translation first raised by Margaret Simons in her article "The Silencing of Simone de Beauvoir: Guess What's Missing from The Second Sex?" (1983)⁶ thus seriously undermines the

⁶ Simons elaborates further on Parshley's editorial alterations to the text of The Second Sex in a 1986 article: "Beauvoir and Sartre: The Philosophical Relationship." Yale French Studies 72: 165-79. Simons's main charges against the Parshley translation have since been reiterated without

interpretative conclusions feminists have drawn from the text. Simons's charges against the Parshley translation are essentially threefold. The most significant concerns Parshley's unindicated deletions of around 10% of the content of the original French edition, reducing its total page count from around 1000 pages in the French version to only 700 pages in the US translation (1983: 559). These excisions are, moreover, far from uniform, for fully one half of de Beauvoir's central "History" section in the French volume one disappears, specifically the section containing the biographies of 78 women prominent in the cause of women's rights during key periods such as the French Revolution, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century suffrage movements, and in European socialism. Alleging that "these unindicated deletions seriously undermine the integrity of Beauvoir's analysis of such important topics", Simons argues that the insidious effect of such covert editing is to represent de Beauvoir as colluding in the patriarchal dismissal of women from Western historiography. This is instead of – as is the case in the French original – demonstrating her resistance to women's historical invisibility through the provision of revisionist evidence (1986: 170).

The second and third of Simons's charges against the Parshley translation relate not so much to invisible excisions as to the mistranslation of what remains. Parshley's rendering of key Existentialist terms such as *pour-soi* and *en-soi* is imperfect and inconsistent, frequently directly contradicting the terms' connotations in French, and thus obscuring the clarity and precision of de Beauvoir's philosophical terminology (1983: 563). Further, Simons indicts Parshley for the sabotage of de Beauvoir's analytic voice through subtle mistranslations. The alteration of de Beauvoir's active future verb tenses

substantial expansion by Judith Okely in *Simone de Beauvoir: A Re-Reading* (1986: 53-54) and by Margaret Crosland in her biography, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Woman and Her Work* (1992: 371-72). Toril Moi, in a more recent work, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (1994), notes Parshley's omission of sections of de Beauvoir's French text (286), particularly her references to socialist feminism which are almost uniformly deleted (287). However, Moi declines to confront in detail the political and publishing industry implications of the book's translation.

to passive past ones operates to further allay the book's appeal to a revolutionary activism (Simons qtd in Ascher, 1981: 138). On the basis of Simons's arguments, it appears that the kind of intellectual dismissal which was attempted against de Beauvoir in France after the book's 1949 appearance has here been clandestinely achieved through translation – even before the English-language version reached its readers' hands.

Simons trains her textually well-supported attack specifically on Parshley's translational good faith, attributing to him a desire wilfully to misrepresent the original text and thus to buttress patriarchal power: "Parshley apparently found evidence of woman's oppression, and genuine struggle between the sexes irritating; he systematically deleted misogynist diatribes and feminist arguments" (1983: 562). However, examination of the evidence beyond merely the French and English texts suggests a broader distribution of responsibility for the changes, specifically calling into question the central role of publisher Alfred A. Knopf and his wife Blanche Knopf in transforming de Beauvoir's book into a more commercially attractive commodity.

The decision by Blanche and Alfred Knopf in the early-1950s to publish a translation of The Second Sex was spurred not by an eagerness to exploit a women's studies readership – nothing remotely analogous then existing – but to profit from the fashionable US undergraduate fascination with the louche bohemianism of what it imagined to be Existentialism. Aiming the text at "young ladies in places like Smith [College]" required that the bulk of de Beauvoir's unwieldy two volumes be reduced to a single English-language volume, one easily affordable by interested laypersons (Parshley qtd in Bair, 1990: 433). Further reinforcing the book's desirability as a publishing proposition was the appearance of the word "sex" in the original title. To a conservative, Kinsey-era America, inclusion of the eye-catching term added a salacious cachet to de Beauvoir's in fact exceedingly highbrow tome. Knopf publicised the book breathlessly

in January 1953 as an exposé of “what it means to be a woman in mind, in body, and in spirit” (PW, 31 Jan. 1953: 527), distributing to bookshops a folding circular with a classical female nude as part of its US\$15 000 initial advertising campaign (PW, 31 Jan., 1953: 485). The manoeuvre sponsored a decades-long tradition of marketing the text between suggestive covers featuring a ubiquitous naked female form.⁷ As Kate Millett has dryly observed, the publishing industry appears scarcely able to decode de Beauvoir’s polemics for its excess of prurience:

Early editions often had nude ladies on the cover and it almost had a sort of mischievous cachet. Apparently it was so subversive that it got mixed up with being a little sexy too. (Forster and Sutton, 1989: 20)

Knopf engaged Parshley, an eminent academic zoologist experienced in French scientific translations, to prune a text given to “run[ning] in such concentric circles” into a more manageable – and thus marketable – form (Parshley qtd in Bair, 1990: 433). This publisher-driven demand for abridgement recalls a 1947 interchange between de Beauvoir and Blanche Knopf, whom de Beauvoir termed “the abominable Knopf woman” (Beauvoir, 1991: 423). During the course of their exchanges, de Beauvoir had resisted the American’s imprecations to cut *L’Invitée* (*She Came to Stay*) “line by line, adjective by adjective” before Knopf would agree to an American publication (Beauvoir, 1991: 419).⁸ The French intellectual specifically abhorred the preoccupation of “publishers and magazine editors” with financial return above all other considerations when on her lecture tour of America in early-1947, resenting their “purely commercial way of inspecting your brain, as if it were a dancer’s legs” (Beauvoir, 1991: 423). The Knopfs clearly regarded even a one-volume book with a \$10.00 cover price as in danger

⁷ Refer, for example, to the paperback editions produced by Gallimard (Paris, 1976) and Penguin (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1972). The current Vintage (Random House) edition departs from tradition with an understated geometric cover design.

⁸ Knopf did not, as it eventuated, publish a translation of de Beauvoir’s *L’Invitée*. It was eventually published in an English-language edition by World Publishing of Cleveland, OH in 1954.

of transgressing a consumer psychological threshold, for in the 1953 advance publicity for the text, The Second Sex is consistently advertised at its lower pre-publication price of \$8.50 (PW, 31 Jan. 1953: 485). Reviewers, effortlessly diagnosing this sleight of hand as a piece of publisher chicanery, nevertheless insisted on drawing attention to the bulk and cost of the text with a properly journalistic recalcitrance. Time magazine's February 1953 review of The Second Sex bizarrely juxtaposed a photograph of de Beauvoir with the anomalously maternal caption "Weight: 2¾ lbs." ("Lady", 1953: 110).

Simons's two articles about the translational politics of Parshley's The Second Sex (1983, 1986) appear to have been written without the author having been granted access to the Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. papers at the Humanities Research Centre in Austin, Texas. This fact casts significant light on her arguments, for Simons's exculpation of de Beauvoir from responsibility for the misleading translation is less easy to maintain in the light of the evidence meticulously compiled by de Beauvoir's foremost biographer, Deirdre Bair (1990). De Beauvoir was somewhat unhelpful towards her translator in refusing to supply the titles of sources used by her in compiling the book, arguing that many of her references were, four years after the book's composition, untraceable. Yet her angry response to Parshley's suggestions for cuts to (among other parts) the "History" section reflects a proper authorial concern for textual integrity: "She was upset 'in particular about the History section,' and thought it 'extremely regrettable [sic] to cut the detailed studies which make my writing vivid and convincing'" (Bair, 1990: 434). In the hope of seeing a successful US edition of the book appear, de Beauvoir negotiated a compromise with Parshley over the issue of the amendments. She agreed to the cuts only with the express stipulation that the new edition include a statement "in your preface that what you are presenting has been cursorily adapted for the American public", thus discharging de Beauvoir "of all responsibility for this; in return for which, I'll give you *carte blanche*" (Beauvoir qtd in Bair, 1990: 435). The text as it stands is disingenuous in

the extreme, if not in fact actionable as an unauthorised amended edition. Knopf published the English version of The Second Sex with Parshley acknowledged as translator but not as editor of the edition, and it included no specific textual indication that large sections had been summarised and condensed. The sole indication of the palimpsest which the English text represents emerges in the final paragraph of the Translator's Preface:

my intention has been in general to avoid all paraphrasing not required by language differences and to provide a translation that is at once exact and – with slight exceptions – complete. At the publisher's request I have, as editor, occasionally added an explanatory word or two (especially in connection with existentialist terminology) and provided a few additional footnotes and bibliographic data which I thought might be to the reader's interest; and I have also done some cutting and condensation here and there with a view to brevity, chiefly in reducing the extent of the author's illustrative material, especially in certain of her quotations from other writers. Practically all such modifications have been made with the author's express permission, passage by passage. (Beauvoir, 1972: 11-12)

De Beauvoir's express wish that Parshley's translation discharge her "of all responsibility", given her refusal to "accept it if you present it as an exact translation when so much of what seems important to me will have been omitted", can hardly be considered as honoured by the late inclusion of the above proviso (Beauvoir qtd in Bair, 1990: 435). Evidence external to the text rather suggests that the house of Knopf hoped, by presenting their occasionally difficult author with an editorial *fait accompli*, to eclipse any disapproval she felt with a blaze of acclaim and royalties statements. De Beauvoir's regard for Parshley after the conclusion of the translation process appears to have rivalled her unflattering verdict on Blanche Knopf. In the recently published letters of de Beauvoir to her American lover, author Nelson Algren, de Beauvoir is callously dismissive of her American translator's fate:

I am glad you read The Second Sex with such perseverance. My poor translator is dead, do you know that? Dead from a heart attack. I guess he could not stand living when not translating The Second Sex any longer, life had lost all meaning for him, so he died. (1998: 492)

What resonance does The Second Sex's example of textual manipulation carry for contemporary feminists? Firstly, it highlights how well-trained an authorial eye should be turned on the process of translation, for even de Beauvoir, herself fluent in written English, congratulated Knopf representatives in 1953 on a translation which "seems excellent to me" (Beauvoir qtd in Bair, 1990: 436). She apparently only realised decades later, upon reading a draft of Simons's 1983 article, "the extent to which Mr Parshley misrepresented me" (Simons, M., 1983: 564). She wished "with all my heart that you will be able to publish a new translation of it" (564), yet Simons's new translation, if completed, may well become mired in copyright regulations, and in any case could not hope to equal the academic and institutional penetration of the corrupt Parshley text. It is moreover salutary to acknowledge that The Second Sex does not represent an isolated instance of unsympathetic translator and publisher priorities significantly altering a feminist text's original political bite: David Le Vay's 1975 translation of French feminist Monique Wittig's visionary subversion of the Western literary tradition – The Lesbian Body (1973) – entirely obscures Wittig's radical recasting of gendered language. Wittig's original text deliberately replaces the conventional universal third-person pronoun *ils* with *elles*, rebutting Romance languages' grammatical subsumption of the feminine within the masculine form. Le Vay's rendering of *elles* as "the women" rather than as "they" entirely swamps the intended alienation effect with the banality of the familiar (Wittig, 1986: *passim*). Lesbian author and publisher June Arnold, employing the rhetoric of mid-1970s separatism, deplors this as The Lesbian Body having been deliberately "mistranslated by a man" (1976: 23) – an easy accusation, but one which ascribes to personal *mal foi* issues which demand examination at the deeper level of institutional publishing politics.

By failing to position *publishing* politics as a central element of feminist textual analysis, literary critics posit a misleadingly incomplete schema of textual production.

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According to existing analyses, when the political nature of a publisher's or translator's intervention is seen significantly to alter the import of the finished text – as in the case of de Beauvoir or Wittig – the response is most commonly the simplistic accusation of personal sabotage. To reconceptualise the entire publishing process as *always* and *inevitably* partisan and political – as all business enterprises with large capital at stake must invariably be – is to add an interpretative dimension to *all* texts, not only to those in which foul play is suspected. The exception, in short, is better regarded as the rule. The publishing process represents not an industry occasionally given to hijacking authorial intention, but the essential – and essentially *political* – medium by which private conviction enters public discourse.

COVER DESIGN

If publishing and bookselling comprise realms relatively unexplored by academics and feminists, then the politics of cover design surely constitutes this realm's dark continent.⁹ Formerly considered only as a peripheral publishing concern, cover design and its effects on book sales are issues which the book retailing industry has itself only come to appreciate fully in the wake of the trade paperback revolution of the last 20 years. Book Marketing Ltd. (formerly the Book Marketing Council), Britain's provider of statistical analyses and market research for the publishing and book retailing sector, in its reports takes cognisance of the power of packaging to influence consumer purchasing trends. In one of the earliest British investigations of the subject, Impulse Buying of Books (1982), the Book Marketing Council demonstrated publishers' underdevelopment of their design

⁹ Very recently, there are perhaps signs that this crucial interface of literature and marketing is beginning to receive belated attention. Elaine Jordan explores the paperback packaging of Angela Carter's work in "Her Brilliant Career: The Marketing of Angela Carter" (1998), one of the essays collected in Judy Simons and Kate Fullbrook's Writing: A Woman's Business: Women, Writing and the Marketplace – a pioneering text in its literary-commercial fusion. Robin Roberts's spirited analysis of the gender dynamics at work in 1950s sci-fi pulp magazine covers explores related ideas in a tangential wing of the publishing industry (1993).

departments in the face of the finding that 19% of 2 908 impulse book purchasers sampled were “solely influenced by the cover of the book and the accompanying blurb” (6). But Book Marketing’s surveys are – by their very nature and financing – concerned with how to increase bookshop turnover and not with the political ramifications of cover design. Book marketing and design may not at first glance appear likely candidates for the commonly-applied adjective ‘political’, yet their power to mediate between authorial-driven content and reader reception of a given text can register a significant impact on sales. Considering, therefore, that it is financial considerations which largely determine whether texts do or do not achieve publication in the contemporary industry, any factor significantly determining a book’s financial success – and thus the likelihood of further publications in the area – should properly be regarded as an important variable in an over-arching *political* equation. The current size and commercial leverage of design and publicity departments in mainstream publishing themselves bear testimony to marketing’s centrality to the modern book industry.

The feminist bestseller phenomenon of the last 30 years has produced cover designs which have themselves metamorphosed into iconic representations of women’s movement politics. A case in point is Abacus’s manipulation of political rosettes into the classical male and female symbols for the cover of its 1972 paperback edition of Millet’s Sexual Politics (refer appendix). Millet, however – having already wrangled with Doubleday over the US cover – confesses in her autobiography to finding the British cover dishearteningly “hideous” (1976: 2). The female flesh-corset hanging from a pole on the cover of Germaine Greer’s The Female Eunuch has become so indelible a visual shorthand for the commodification of women described in the book that in February 1998, when Greer announced a forthcoming sequel – significantly titled The Whole Woman – much of the newspaper coverage still featured the original paperback cover, and satirical suggestions as to how it might be adapted for a modern sequel (Viner, 1998:

4; Sorensen, 1998: 5; "Greer", 1998: 55).¹⁰ Although it is now culturally entrenched, the famous Female Eunuch cover was in fact British artist John Holmes's second attempt at a visual condensation of Greer's pungent political thesis. The original, rejected, artwork featured a sexless torso recognisable (at least from the neck upwards) as Greer herself, her mouth fused into silence and a mound of bizarrely detached breasts piled in front of her (Callil, 1995: 8; Wallace, 1999: 161-62; refer appendix). Given that the hardback and paperback publishers of the text, MacGibbon & Kee and Paladin, planned a glamorous, personality-centred campaign with promotional pin-ups of Greer distributed in selected British broadsheets, one suspects Holmes's proposed cover design was dismissed for erring too far on the side of literalness.

The success of the revised Female Eunuch cover design was predicated upon its ability to attract the audience most likely to purchase copies: women with disposable incomes interested in feminist issues. It managed to combine a seeming sensuality with what was in fact a searing critique of conventional male views of women. Yet this seamless blend of cover design and target readership is often only achieved after initial mismatches. The original hardback slip-cover of Naomi Wolf's The Beauty Myth (1990) featured an Old Masters female of Rubensesque proportions, her hands bound before her and her eyes cast melodramatically upwards in an imploring expression. Partly on the basis of mixed reviews and partly, I suggest, on account of this classical, high-brow, Rape of Lucretia-style cover, sales were respectable but in no way comparable to the bestseller status achieved by the 1991 Vintage paperback. This repackaged edition featured Clare Park's recognisably contemporary photograph of a painfully thin model, gagged, bandaged and uncomfortably constricted in a crouching position. Coinciding with an early-1990s paperback design trend for artistically photographed female nudes

¹⁰ Transworld/Doubleday's revised publication date for The Whole Woman is 4 March 1999 (Greer, 1999: 13). Related publicity appearances and readings by Greer have already been widely advertised in the mainstream British press.

(Souter, 1995: 47), the cover effectively repeated The Female Eunuch's encapsulation of a polemical position in an arresting visual image.

Yet, as always in feminist analyses of the publishing industry, the most revealing examples occur where the commercial imperatives of the industry are demonstrably in conflict with the political stance adopted by a book's content – the precise point at which a fault-line forms between the industry's tectonic plates of politics and profit. The cover of Hamlyn's paperback edition of Susie Orbach's Fat is a Feminist Issue . . . : How to Lose Weight Permanently – Without Dieting (1979) utilises the connotations of cover design to engineer a subtle redirection of the text's genre classification away from feminism/women's studies towards the dieting/self-help market sector. Its cover depicts a naked female torso reminiscent of classical sculpture which has been cut into cross-sections of ever-decreasing size – a visual representation of precisely the school of self-minimising body hatred which Orbach attacks in her critique of the cult of thinness. Its suggestion – that within all overweight women there exists a 'true' thin self struggling to break free – stands in direct contradiction to Orbach's central thesis: that once women break their compulsive relationship with food and hunger they will regain their natural body size. For Orbach (elucidating a critique since recapitulated for a 1990s readership by Wolf), eating disorders are political entities in that they represent capitulations "to sexist pressure in contemporary society" (1979: 14). The reasons underlying such a misrepresentation of the book's perspective are cynically commercial: a Euromonitor survey published in the same year as Hamlyn's paperback records that 17% of all non-fiction books purchased by women in Britain could be categorised under the labels "food" and "cookery". Books falling under the heading of "feminism" or "women's studies" did not constitute a large enough category to be listed separately and were comprised within the remainder "other" category (Mann, 1979: 27). When it is taken into account that this survey predates the exponential sales growth of dieting and self-

help books during the 1980s, Hamlyn's design decision may be seen as a prescient, if unscrupulous, attempt to market feminism under less blatantly oppositional labels. It is conceivable that Orbach's readership may have expanded as a result of this cynical design disguise, which may be said to constitute a progressive political outcome. But considerations other than sales may here give feminists pause: firstly, in what ways does cover design affect the genre classification of feminist books, determining their display and shelving in bookshop layout, influencing reviewers, and thereby demarcating evermore self-selecting readerships? Secondly, what conclusions can be drawn about the power relationship of authors *vis-à-vis* publishers given that in-house designers are usually briefed only sketchily as to a book's content, rarely if ever reading the text themselves, and that authors have at best only a right of refusal on draft cover designs at mainstream houses? Finally, it is important to consider the ways in which readers' responses to texts are conditioned by the decisive medium of book packaging. A poorly chosen or misleading design is capable of contradicting or even subverting insurgent authorial intention.

Chatto and Windus's packaging and design of Naomi Wolf's third title, Promiscuities: A Secret History of Female Desire (1997a), indicates that such a disjunction between content and format may problematise public reception of a feminist work. In a manifestation of book marketing's increasing sophistication and cultural cachet, Chatto in April 1997 sponsored a reading by Wolf from her latest release as part of the "Platform" literary series at London's National Theatre (1997b). Intriguingly, in that the forum juxtaposed the author with a representative of the book's commercial backers – Chatto's deputy publishing editor, Alison Samuel – the event raised significant, though perhaps unanticipated, issues in relation to cover design. Both Chatto's hardback slip-cover and the B-format softcover of Promiscuities feature Terry Whiteman's suggestive photograph: a naked female torso caught in profile, spine arched suggestively

backwards, “no cellulite, nice hard nipples, a little armpit hair to add danger” as the Guardian’s Katharine Viner observed dryly (1997: 4). Questioned about the packaging of her book by an audience member, Wolf observed amusedly that no depiction of female nipples would be permitted in American mainstream book retailing, and then, more significantly, that she was not altogether satisfied with Chatto’s choice of cover image. She wished that the model depicted was “carrying another 10 to 15 pounds” and feared that the design risked contradicting the polemical position espoused in her first book, The Beauty Myth (Wolf, 1997b). Promiscuities, like Wolf’s first book, catalogues the enormous social pressures brought to bear on adolescent girls to conform to idealised body types and socially-normatised sexual expectations. Given this polemical position, Chatto’s cover for Promiscuities risks undercutting not only Wolf’s rhetoric as contained on its inside pages, but also the authorial persona constructed by Wolf in her previous works. Here the design/content discrepancy of Hamlyn’s Orbach cover (in which cover contradicts content) has multiplied, complicating reader reception of not only the book in question, but also – retrospectively – of other texts by the same author. Publisher Alison Samuel’s reassurances that much thought had gone into the Promiscuities jacket and that “all the women I showed it to found [the image] very powerful and sexy”, clearly failed to alleviate entirely the author’s qualms on the subject, providing a rare public glimpse of the conflicts and contested priorities latent in the author-editor relationship (Wolf, 1997b). Samuel is herself credited on Promiscuities’ Acknowledgements pages as an “editor[] of radiant intelligence” instrumental in “developing the vision of this book from the beginning” (vii), giving rise to the speculation that Samuel’s undoubted publishing acumen and author-handling skills may in this instance have been tempered by an eye for sales.

The cover of the 1998 Vintage UK paperback edition of Promiscuities appears set to inflame rather than defuse debate on the packaging of this particular title. Fanning

wider media debates about the prescriptive power of media depictions, the Vintage edition's cover utilises Will van Overbeek's photograph of a young teenage girl, perhaps fourteen, with a cigarette hanging seductively from the corner of her mouth. Callowly aping adult sexual behaviour, the girl's image is a fitting visual depiction of the book's key theme – the hothouse socialisation of adolescent female sexuality. But the disapproval the cover is sure to provoke amongst anti-smoking lobbyists should perhaps prompt public recognition that issues other than health policy are at stake in book design. In an increasingly consumer-driven society, feminism – itself now perhaps as much product as political philosophy – can ill afford to remain blind to the apparatus of its own commodification.

SELLING FEMINISM / SELLING OUT: "WRESTLING . . . IN MEDIALAND"¹¹

The key factor which distinguishes feminist books nurtured within the independent women's publishing sector from those launched by the mainstream is marketing: in its scale, financial clout, multimedia penetration and image-making power, the mainstream publishing sector largely dictates public opinion as to what feminism *is*. The development of contemporary feminism since Knopf's relatively modest US\$15 000 launch of de Beauvoir's The Second Sex – an "important Spring title" publicised predominantly by bookshop circulars (PW, 31 Jan. 1953: 524) – makes the creation of a feminist bestseller *without* saturation marketing virtually inconceivable. A powerful dilemma is thus created for feminists: the mass media as it is currently composed frequently patronises women and satirises feminism with overt hostility, yet in order to broadcast a radical message to the largest number of women, feminists' collaboration with the mainstream media remains an inescapable necessity. Focusing upon utopian ends, feminists have sullied their hands with less-than-ideal means. Seizing whatever

¹¹ Millett, Kate. (1976) Flying. [1974] Frogmore, Herts.: Paladin. 214.

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communicative opportunities were available in their marginalised position, early-second-wave feminists of liberal, socialist and occasionally also radical tendencies engaged in clear-eyed participation with the mainstream media. Friedan, critic of the anti-intellectualism of domestic women's magazines, nevertheless harnessed their circulation to the women's movement's cause by penning for them selected feature articles.

Germaine Greer, scathing critic of teenage girls' pulp romances (1993: 193-205ff), was and still is in other modes content to pose for lifestyle spreads and television interviews, and to discuss details of her personal history ("Germaine", 1981; "Germaine", 1998).

Naomi Wolf, thorn in the side of the cosmetics and beauty industries, nevertheless posed for the cover of one of her chief targets – the bible of young female consumerism, Cosmopolitan. Without a vibrant network of large-scale, independent feminist media, no feminist non-fiction title can hope to achieve top 10 bestseller sales except by participating in what Maureen Freely scathing dubs the circus of "commercial feminism" (1994: 9).

For de Beauvoir, Friedan, Millett and Greer, publication with commercial publishers was necessitated by the then absence of alternative feminist presses. To castigate these authors for a perceived failing of sisterly solidarity would be to overlook the historical fact that, from the demise of the suffrage movement until the 1970s, no such independent women's publishing sector existed. These authors' titles were themselves important catalysts for the establishment of alternative women's publishing – both because of the inflammatory nature of the ideas they expressed, and because the critiques they articulated armed women with sufficient intellectual tools to question publishers' packaging of the books themselves. The book that "could change your life" (as publishers' cover stickers enthusiastically claimed) could also empower readers to query the motives behind such a claim.

For feminist non-fiction authors of the post-1970 era, however, the decision to publish with a mainstream imprint is qualitatively different, as it now constitutes a decision *against* a feminist print alternative. Natasha Walter, author of the much-hyped 1998 title The New Feminism, stipulates that her decision to publish under the Little, Brown colophon rather than between the familiarly branded covers of its subsidiary imprint Virago, was prompted by the desire to escape a ghettoised niche market:

I didn't decide *against* Virago, I decided *for* Little, Brown because I wanted the book to hit a mainstream audience – and with its title, I felt I already had the Virago readership. (Griffey, 1998: 5)¹²

Such reasoning attempts a difficult reconciliation of capitalist process with oppositional politics, displaying a determined optimism that feminist subversiveness can elude commercial containment. But as Millett notes in her revealing account of feminist stardom and its brittle superficiality in Flying, any such position is fraught with political ambiguity and personal uncertainty: “For a good while I imagined I was using a diseased system to attack exploitation itself in advocating radical ideas. A tricky proposition” (1976: 92).

The debate between practical politics and ideological purity is a crucible for all oppositional movements attempting to proselytise and expand in capitalist, media-monopolised societies. Yet for the women's liberation movement of the late-1960s and early-1970s, the usual dilemmas were overlaid with a further level of ideological complexity: how can feminism, an ideology asserting the collective identity of women, collude with the Western media's insistence on organising news coverage around individuals? It is a conversation at cross-purposes, an attempt constantly to wrestle with

¹² Walter's reasoning appears to have undergone a radical revision in the period between making this statement and early-1999. The paperback edition of The New Feminism (1999) has recently been released under the Virago imprint.

“the media’s insane reduction of all issues to personalities” (Millett, 1976: 214).

Attempting to straddle this contradiction, early-1970s women’s groups often opted for the half-way measure of the collective statement, issued to the press by an unnamed spokeswoman. The aim was to satiate the eagerness of women in the suburbs to learn of movement events, but to frustrate the media’s relentlessly individualist focus. Publishers with a feminist author to promote are, however, rarely so politically scrupulous or so willing to draw attention to the mechanisms by which the public receives and processes information. This chapter proceeds, therefore, to detail the marketing campaigns around three high-profile feminist titles of the last 30 years – Sexual Politics, The Female Eunuch, and The Beauty Myth – to investigate how individual feminists attempted to counterbalance media co-operation with espousal of an oppositional critique – and the internal stresses and contradictions which may result from such a project.

KATE MILLETT: “HAS ANYONE EVER GONE MAD FROM MEDIA BEFORE?”¹⁴

Sexual Politics, perhaps more so than most books, began as a highly individualistic exercise. The dissertation component of Millett’s Ph.D. from Columbia University, Sexual Politics was not only researched in the usual claustrophobic isolation of postgraduate study, but was written in a period of intense concentration: between February 1969 and March 1970, the entire period of composition, Millett claimed to have had “2½ days off” during the most frenetic eight months – throughout which time she wrote for “14, 16, 18 hours a day” (“Who’s”, 1970: 17). By the time of its August 1970 publication, Millett had been involved in women’s political groups for some years, having in 1967 published a report on the curricula of women’s colleges, Token Learning, for the New York branch of NOW. Yet because of Sexual Politics’ academic gestation and original purpose, Millett understandably resisted movement demands that the text – denominated the women’s movement’s bible upon publication – be left unsigned and that

¹⁴ Millett, Kate. (1976) Flying. [1974] Frogmore, Herts.: Paladin. 83.

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Millett should not refer to it as 'her' work or retain royalties earned from its sale (Millett, 1976: 77, 252). It was an impossible position: unable to take credit for consciousness-raising for which her book was a catalyst, Millett was nevertheless obliged to accept personal responsibility for its shortcomings, be they political or textual. Reviewers, true to the individualist ethos of the literary community, were united in attributing such faults as they found in Sexual Politics specifically to Millett's theorising. Mary Ellmann, author of the important early-second-wave critical work Thinking About Women (1968), is surprisingly unsympathetic to Millett's project in the third part of Sexual Politics, in which Millett reads the works of individual male authors as "instances of sexual politics" (1972: 3). Dubbing Sexual Politics "a dull but significant book" (1971: 590), Ellmann adds her voice to those of other critics who queried Millett's conflation of author with fictional narrator (Kaplan, 1986: 24), and who balked at Millett's conception of literature as a sociological tool ("A New Vindication", 1971: 410). Acclaimed by the likes of Time as the movement's theoretical guru ("Who's", 1970: 14), Millett was rather its lightning conductor – targeted because of her conspicuousness by hostile outsiders just as she was castigated for the crime of her star status from within.

The first section of Flying, Millett's account of developments between August 1970 (when Sexual Politics appeared in hardback) and late-1971 (when the wave of media interest in her began to abate somewhat) is entitled "Vertigo". It is a powerful stream-of-consciousness-style account of the psychological invasion Millett experienced in the "vulgar insanity" of the media's frenzy to find a women's movement spokesperson (5):

It is all a mistake. The nightmare months of folly. Microphones shoved into my mouth . . . 'What is the future of the woman's movement?' How in the hell do I know – I don't run it. Every day in winter more ignorant, weaker. Chicanery of press conferences, interviews, lectures at universities. All arranged. Don't spoil the arrangements. Tired and I don't know any answers. The whole thing is sordid, embarrassing, a fraud. The same questions always. Boring. Repetition of old stuff, no

new work. Have I lost faith? If I am bored am I a traitor? They ought to shoot me. Made into a leader. We're not supposed to have leaders. I will be executed in some underground paper, my character assassinated subterraneously. (12-13)

The early highpoint of this isolating fame was the now famous 31 August 1970 cover of Time, in which "Kate Millet of Women's Lib" appeared (without authorisation) in a painting derived from a photograph – a form of personal promotion which Millett insists she had explicitly refused, instructing Time reporters to use a photograph of crowds of women marching on the streets of New York City in that week's Women's Strike for Equality (Mitchell, S., 1997: 237). Her gestures towards collectivity ignored, Millett was further manipulated by Time in December of the same year when she acknowledged her bisexuality at a movement forum held at Columbia University. The statement was picked up and run as a scintillating exposé, "bound to discredit her as a spokeswoman for her cause", as Time eagerly pre-empted ("Women's Lib.", 1970: 41). "Out[ed] in Timese", as Millett later bleakly summed up the event (1976: 18), the author and her media image became emblematic of yet another acrimonious debate dividing the movement: the question of whether lesbians should agitate in their own political interests, or whether gay women's liberation must remain closeted within feminism until initial battles for mainstream acceptance of the women's movement had been won. In this manner, Sexual Politics and its marketing ignited a debate latent within feminism about degrees of oppression, specifically whether divergence from the white, middle-class, (relatively) media-friendly image of NOW would taint the feminist campaign with what Friedan, first president of NOW, memorably dubbed the "lavender menace" (Echols, 1989: 212, 214-15). Interestingly, in the way of fractured political movements, the intentionally derogatory tag was itself subsequently adopted as a rallying cry by lesbian activists.

The impact of these debates on sales of Millett's work suggests a disheartening slavishness on the part of the US book-buying public to the homophobic judgements of Time and its media cohorts: in the week after Time's 31 August cover, Sexual Politics was first flagged by Publishers' Weekly as a candidate for future bestsellerdom (7 Sep. 1970: 94); it peaked at number 6 on the non-fiction list by 2 November 1970 (94); yet by December and the week of the 'lesbian exposé', Millett's book had slipped permanently out of the top 10 non-fiction listing.

The marketing campaign for Sexual Politics and the media storm it generated might properly be regarded as the first recognisable instance of celebrity feminism. De Beauvoir and Friedan had achieved significant public profiles in 1949 and 1963 respectively, but the lack of synchronicity between the initial appearance of their books and a widespread public women's movement tempered the media's portrayal of both: de Beauvoir was depicted chiefly as a mandarin of the Existential movement ("Lady", 1953: 110); Friedan was a housewife and took pains to couch her radicalism in the unthreatening language of US liberal humanism (Friedan, 1963: *passim*). Millett, on the other hand, symbolised several aspects of an already (by 1970) prevalent feminist stereotype. The December 1970 article outing Millet is illustrated with an Esquire cartoon of a bra-waving, pendulous-breasted, bespectacled, scowling feminist, a crude stereotype inviting association with the earlier depiction of Millett in Time as free-living, plump and bookish ("Women's Lib", 1970: 41; "Who's", 1970: 14-19). Millett thus represented an ideal candidate for the vertiginous experience of the tall poppy syndrome: instant media-generated celebrity and acclaim followed by a swift descent into personal attack and public opprobrium. As a media creation, Millett's integrity was capable of being destroyed upon the media's whim. Her newsworthiness was all.

The fickleness of mainstream media interest in feminism should rightly give critics pause. Firstly, because of its devastating personal impact on individual highly-articulate and intellectually-productive feminists, as evidenced by Flying's account of Millett's media-induced near breakdown. More broadly, the feminist star system may be politically counterproductive, in that it reduces the breadth and complexity of a political movement to a single identity – a precarious point unable to support the weight of ideological baggage piled upon it by media speculation. Thirdly, the inherent selectivity of media feminism should alert its consumers to the arbitrary manner in which the media sets the parameters of public gender debate. In heralding the oppositional as radically innovative, the media disingenuously disavows its own filtering function as the gatekeeper of public discourse. The elevation of a thinker such as Millett to media prominence, followed swiftly by her relegation to public notoriety, are events orchestrated by the media, and are important to it not so much in their result (be it eventual celebrity or infamy) but as *process*. By hailing and then denouncing an individual feminist, the mainstream media have a reliably two-pronged story, coverage which in media parlance has 'legs'. Accordingly, as maintained by Millett, the process is not a mere *commentary* on contemporary developments within feminism, but the *instigator* of those events: "The truth of the media is that first you're exploited and manipulated until you become this big balloon, which later they puncture. And puncturing me was supposed to puncture feminism" (Mitchell, S., 1997: 238).

The wider debate about why a declaration of bisexuality should necessitate banishment from the media pantheon and the discrediting of a movement is glossed over in the fact of the publicity itself. Any political movement concerned with the formulation of knowledge can only enter such a realm of media power with reservations so deep-seated as to risk negating the tactic of mainstream media engagement.

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GERMAINE GREER: "THE BRAND-NAME FEMINIST"¹⁴

The marketing of a political movement such as feminism cannot be understood solely by reference to promotional campaigns for individual titles, for the nature of publicity is such that it operates cumulatively – the success of one feminist bestseller providing impetus for the launch of another. The extended promotional tour of the USA undertaken by Germaine Greer in the Spring of 1971 to launch the American edition of The Female Eunuch can thus only be comprehensively understood as a response to the previous year's media interest in Millett. The publicity campaign engineered by US publisher McGraw-Hill was at the time the most extensive feminist book promotion ever undertaken, with public lectures, interviews, book readings, television appearances on the Dick Cavett and Johnny Carson talk shows, a Life magazine cover (7 May 1971), public debates with Norman Mailer and a film of the tour all reinforcing interest in Greer herself as much as in her book. Greer was in many ways an ideal candidate for feminist celebrity. Published in Britain by MacGibbon & Kee in October 1970, The Female Eunuch received generally enthusiastic reviews in the British media (James, 1970; Tomalin, 1970; "Feminising", 1970). The sales potential of Greer herself was first demonstrated in events such as a January 1971 call-in programme on BBC Radio 4, in which Greer fielded questions from occasionally hostile members of the public with fluent logic and witty aplomb, the programme's controller congratulating her on air at the session's close for "a virtuoso performance" (Greer, 1971b: 82). Hence, even before glowing reviews of The Female Eunuch appeared in the mainstream US press – the New York Times titled its review "The Best Feminist Book so Far" – the essential lineaments of Greer's media profile had already been drawn: she was the amusing, flirtatious, bawdy face of the women's liberation movement – in the words of a fawning 1971 Life magazine cover, a "Saucy Feminist That Even Men Like!" (Bonfante, 1971).

¹⁴ "Germaine Greer: Feminist Guru, or Tarnished Old Icon." (1995) Observer 26 Mar.: 24.

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The implicit corollary of such coverage – that Greer represented the attractive face of feminism in contrast to an uncompromising Millett – was made explicit early in the book's marketing campaign. Christopher Lehmann-Haupt's assertion in his New York Times review that The Female Eunuch "is everything Kate Millett's book is not" (1971: 45) established a suitably Manichaean conception of feminism, one which McGraw-Hill's 15 March 1971 cover advertising in Publishers' Weekly was eager to reinforce with the headline "So far you've only heard half the story: Germaine Greer". In addition, the contempt for the unliberated woman which recurs in The Female Eunuch (as, for example, in Greer's lofty dismissal of the tedious faculty wives to which her academic career had exposed her) suggested to the mainstream media that Millett's unsettling notion of patriarchy might be replaced by the less discommodious concept of women's complicity in perpetuating their second-class status. This lack of sympathy for women trapped within the mentality of the "female eunuch", in addition to Greer's non-membership of any organised women's network, won her fewer adherents in either the US or the British women's movements. But this fact barely dented her mainstream media canonisation as the epitome of a contemporary social trend – the emancipated woman. The impact of her popularity on book sales was not lost on McGraw-Hill, which dubbed the film of Greer's US tour (self-deprecatingly titled Germaine Greer versus the USA) "the best 60-minute book commercial ever made" (Greer, 1975: 332). With fitting respect for McGraw-Hill's initial US\$25 000 advertising outlay (PW, 25 Jan. 1971: 205), the American public bought the book at a peak rate of 89 000 copies per week, with the result that for two weeks in August 1971 The Female Eunuch was the USA's number 1 bestselling non-fiction title (PW, 2-9 Aug. 1971: 104; 82).

The match between Greer's saleable personality and the media need of a feminist superstar to fill the vacuum created by their character assassination of Millett was too convenient not to provoke criticism from second-wave feminists. Claudia Dreifus in her

1971 review of The Female Eunuch for The Nation recapitulated rather than originated a familiar critique of Greer in dubbing her the facile “big femme lib superstar”, a mere puppet of “the high priests of publishing” (728):

Miss Greer was everything those messy American feminists were not: pretty, predictable, aggressively heterosexual, media-wise, clever, foreign and exotic. . . . Her philosophy, as outlined in The Female Eunuch, could be expected to appeal to men: women’s liberation means that women will be sexually liberated; feminism equals free love. Here was a libbie a man could like. (728)

What is striking about the first half of Dreifus’ criticism is its similarity to Greer’s own earlier lukewarm review of Millett’s Sexual Politics in the Listener (25 March 1971). Greer, who had formerly diagnosed cynical publishing competition for “the eventual bible of the women’s movement”, has in a mere three months moved from the role of expositor to that of the subject of feminist media critique. It is salutary in analysing Greer’s media blitz and the problematic ramifications such publicity may have for feminism to highlight two specific concerns: firstly, the tendency of marketing campaigns to dilute or even contradict a book’s content; and, secondly, the trivialising and depoliticising influence of the media spotlight.

The major premise underpinning The Female Eunuch is that the biological differences between the sexes are minimal and, this being the case, the vast sexual discrepancies discernible in contemporary society are attributable almost exclusively to socialisation towards highly-constructed gender roles. These, as the creation of human society, are capable of being recast in ways more conducive to female intellectual and social fulfilment. In outlining this incremental distortion of the female sex away from spontaneity, emotional reciprocity and individual ambition towards the artifice, impotence and passivity of “the female eunuch”, Greer does not hesitate to indicate where socio-political responsibility lies – with the system of male control she terms patriarchy. Because Greer’s thought is sufficiently nuanced to distinguish between the

role of individual men and the operations of this overarching political superstructure (radical poet William Blake, to cite only one example, is quoted approving throughout the text), an argument evolves whereby Greer can be seen to praise individual men while castigating the social system from which they profit. Feminist philosophy from Mary Wollstonecraft onwards has conscientiously insisted upon this individual/patriarchy distinction, but Greer's vocal heterosexuality and attractive appearance made her marketable as the "feminist that even men like" in a way less practicable with other second-wave polemicists.

The media spectacle provided by Greer was thus one of guilt-free voyeurism: here was an articulate and spirited woman speaking plainly upon the most controversial social issue of the day, but without (in her media persona) necessarily attributing blame for oppressive patriarchal behaviour to individual men. Titillation rather than accusation allowed Greer's brand of feminism access even to that previously sacrosanct *Kaaba* of American machismo – Hugh Hefner's Playboy magazine – which stated approvingly:

Men can read the same book and likewise admire – even desire – its author, while at the same time not feel compelled to burden themselves with guilt for the crimes against women discussed therein. (Greer, 1981: 328)

In the years since Greer's publicity tour, feminist thought has evolved to the extent that simplistic anti-male rhetoric is now regarded as perhaps the least credible or compelling variety of feminist discourse. Yet it is fair to argue that any movement in its initial consciousness-raising phase ought, for rhetorical and political expedience, clearly to denominate its enemies. What price then Greer's deliberate slippage from her position in The Female Eunuch to marketing sloganeering along the lines that sexual liberation for women in itself heralds their social liberation. Conveyed simplistically in media soundbites, Greer's cheerful promotion of the joys of (heterosexual) promiscuity veered dangerously close to the trenchantly sexist 'libertarianism' of the New Left. "The

difficulty”, as Claudia Dreifus observed testily, “is that many feminists have been to that movie before” (1971: 728).

For all its endless self-communion, the sole topic in which the mainstream media is emphatically disinterested is itself – if defined as the means and processes by which it selects and moulds presentation of the ‘newsworthy’. The second salient element in the media trivialisation of Greer’s sexual politics critique is its problematic omission of Greer’s own scathing media analysis. In The Female Eunuch, Greer develops the argument that the media, by projecting intellectually unchallenging and physically unattainable images of women, distracts them from the collective *political* nature of their oppression, creating a smokescreen of all-consuming – though essentially trivial – personal concerns (1993: 192-212 *ff.*). As substance for this position, one which serves as a foundation for that later proposed by Wolf in The Beauty Myth, Greer analyses the cult of heterosexual romantic love which is the central preoccupation of teenage girls’ magazines, the photostories of which Greer deconstructs much as Friedan had earlier critiqued the “Happy Housewife Heroine” magazine narratives of 1950s America (1965: 30-60). In the personality-centred marketing of the feminist bestseller, however, critiques of socialisation centrally indicting media imagery are sacrificed in favour of the cult of the remarkable individual:

Who is Germaine Greer? The most loveable creature to come out of Australia since the koala bear? A feminist leader who admittedly loves men? A brilliant writer, “extraordinarily entertaining”? Great Britain’s Woman of the Year? The author of a perceptive, outrageous, devastating book on women? Germaine is all of the above. (qtd in Spongberg, 1993: 409)

In the reduction of a social movement to the appealingly packaged media celebrity ‘Germaine’ – no matter how eagerly complicit the writer may have been in this process – there is an overweening intellectual diminution. Hence The Female Eunuch’s cumulative world-wide sales of over 1 000 000, its translation into 12 languages (Viner,

1998: 4), and its canonical inscription as a feminist classic have been achieved via collaboration with a media industry pursuing goals perhaps only tangentially related to those broadly understood as feminist. A certain degree of commodification may be essential to 'sell' feminism via the corporate-owned media, but only the most optimistic of feminists would claim that the means used to achieve this result may not substantially alter the ends at which feminism originally aimed. Greer herself has shown no indication of retiring from a now 30-year media reign: publisher Transworld has already begun to saturate media outlets in build-up to the March 1999 release of Greer's much-anticipated Female Eunuch sequel, The Whole Woman. Greer's comments in recent years on the ambiguous status of female poets do, however, serve as an interesting counterpoint commentary on her own public career. Speaking of the figure of the poetic muse, Greer asserts that "most of the women [poets] now are at the mercy of the people merchandising them; and they're actually being prostituted in a way". Hence the poet – and conceivably even the bestselling feminist author – are "at the mercy of the male literary establishment, who will exploit her in any way they find convenient" (Greer, 1995).

NAOMI WOLF: "THERE IS NO RIGHT WAY SHE CAN LOOK"¹⁵

The marketing of the feminist blockbuster reaches its current apotheosis in the persona of American author and iconic figure of third-wave feminism: Naomi Wolf. Of all the feminist writers who might be considered to stand at the vanguard of public debate around gender, Wolf is the media-appointed spokeswoman-in-chief, a position she occupies on the basis of her thoroughly marketable books and public persona. The underlying tenet of the marketing puffery for Wolf's first book, The Beauty Myth, was

¹⁵ Wolf, Naomi. (1991a) The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women. London: Vintage. 275.

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that in Wolf feminism had found a living rebuttal of the hardened stereotype of the ugly, overweight, strident feminist. Wolf's youthfulness (at the time of The Beauty Myth campaign she was 27), physical attractiveness and record of academic success appeared to give the lie to the resilient myth of feminist undesirability. Yet Wolf's approach to the media has been and remains fundamentally compromised: highly critical of the media's representation of women, she yet – in the marketing of her books – becomes complicit in its standard tactics. The big-budget media campaigns orchestrated by Wolf's British hardback publisher, Chatto and Windus, have isolated Wolf in an impossibly self-contradictory rhetorical position: criticising the highly-artificial media construction of femininity, Wolf must nevertheless adhere strongly to it, if only to prove her non-membership of that still less desirable caste of media untouchable – the 1970s-style feminist.

The contradiction between media cynicism and media savvy which dogs Wolf's public career prompts analysis of three problematic issues: her relationship to the cult of the feminist superstar; the charge of unoriginality to which her marketing campaigns render her vulnerable; and the dilution of Wolf's political analysis through cross-genre marketing of her works, specifically their packaging as women's self-help manuals. The first of these issues – Wolf's position as cultural spokesperson for contemporary womanhood – both replays the collective versus individual debates of the early-1970s women's liberation movement, while at the same time fundamentally transforming them. Wolf, a spokeswoman for feminism in the 1990s, speaks without the background of a broad-scale radical social movement. Indeed, her first work was compiled out of a deep unease with the *absence* of such a movement, Wolf claiming "I wrote [The Beauty Myth] to prove the need for a feminist resurgence" (1991b: 19). Hence it is in some sense inevitable that Wolf, child of the 1980s cult of individualism and self-styled instigator of a revitalised feminist consciousness, should herself be the focus of her marketing

campaigns. But, like earlier feminist spokeswomen such as Greer, Millett, and Gloria Steinem (with whose career Wolf's shares interesting parallels), Wolf renders herself vulnerable to arguments that her personal experience and outlook cannot encompass the diversity of women's perspectives. She is, it is argued, generalising on the basis of her own life experience in order to promote her career – operating self-servingly, the allegation has it, under the guise of gender politics. In The Beauty Myth and in her second publication, Fire With Fire: The New Female Power And How It Will Change the 21st Century (1993)¹⁶, Wolf takes up a median position between the social activist's rhetorical extremes of isolated individualism, on one hand, and the submergence of the self in the collective, on the other. Her speaking position is that of the social instigator, a writer channelling already discernible dissent and giving voice to the silently disaffected. She is careful to argue in The Beauty Myth's conclusion for the creation of a “peer-driven feminist third wave” (1991a: 281), of which the book itself represents both herald and product: a 1990s women's movement “would need to analyze the antifeminist propaganda young women have inherited, and give them tools, including arguments like this one, with which to see through it” (281). The speaking position here is one of masterful adaptability: it ensures that Wolf is sufficiently radical and innovatory to warrant the enormous publicity she receives, while at the same time being wholly representative, merely the theoretical formulator of Western women's inchoate disgruntlements and insecurities.

Such protean instability is, I would suggest, the essence of Wolf's marketability and the prime cause of her publishing success. It is nowhere more apparent than in

¹⁶ The Fawcett Columbine US paperback edition of Fire With Fire (1994) is particularly revealing in its modulation of Wolf's image and positionality for maximum sales impact. The cover of this edition is dominated by a colour photograph of the author herself, and the book's subtitle has been changed to The New Female Power and How to Use It. The author's photographic prominence, the subtitle and the use of block typography all work to package Fire With Fire as an upmarket feminist self-help manual – one providing 'political' solutions for troubled individual psyches.

Wolf's own media-wise exploitation and defence of her personal appearance. In writing The Beauty Myth, Wolf need only to have cast the most cursory glance over the careers of Greer, Millett and, to a lesser extent, de Beauvoir to realise that her appearance would be a central factor in the book's reception – a media preoccupation in relation to feminism multiplied hundred-fold by the fact that Wolf's book was about the very issue of women's speech being evaluated according to the speaker's appearance. Intriguingly, concerns of the kind usually left to a marketing campaign director here spill over into the content of the book itself – an illustration of the fact that book marketing is now so vital a component of the publishing equation that it pervades pre-publication as well as post-publication production phases. Astutely forecasting the 1990s media's correlation of beauty with feminist worth, Wolf encapsulates the debate which has since both plagued and buoyed her career:

For a woman to speak about the beauty myth (as about women's issues in general) means that *there is no right way she can look*. There is no unmarked, or neutral, stance allowed women at those times: They [sic] are either called too "ugly" or too "pretty" to be believed. (1991a: 275)

Wolf's prescient, pre-emptive strike indicates a tactical clear-sightedness about media priorities, as three of the four initial British reviews of The Beauty Myth made reference in some way to its author's appearance (Picardie, 1990: 39; Smith, J., 1990: 22; Davenport-Hines, 1990: 1097). Given such a media environment, Wolf's handling of the repeated author tours, endless personal promotions and glitzy publicity shots constitutes either a brilliantly parodic subversion of mainstream media methodologies or a hoodwinked capitulation to their power. In this ambiguous positionality, Wolf is representative of a familiar post-modern quandary: at what point does a stance of self-serving ironic detachment cease to have any oppositional value and begin in fact to buttress the ideological status quo? I would argue that Wolf, veteran of three British publicity tours, has by the late-1990s reached the point where salesmanship has so blended with media-denominated 'radicalism' for the two to be virtually

indistinguishable – a dark comment on the mainstream media's near-insuperable power to appropriate and neutralise dissent. How is feminism to operate in an ideological schema where media support may be as politically debilitating as media silence? This analysis cannot hope to offer final judgement on so complex an issue, but I suggest that feminism, in order to remain at all credible as a contemporary political theory, must mount a more rigorous analysis of its *own* construction through the lens of the 1990s' dominant ideological force – the mainstream media. Suzanne Moore, a British feminist commentator who has elsewhere touched upon the need to instigate such debate (1992: 16), perceives the issue in microcosm in Wolf's posing – back-lit, taped, and vaseline-lensed – for the questionable feminist affirmation of a Cosmopolitan cover:

It is wonderful that she is so attractive and photogenic but isn't it just a little strange that a woman whose success was predicated on deconstructing The Beauty Myth should then chose to have herself pictured using all the tactics of the trade that she denounced? (1993: 10)

The two remaining issues around Wolf's iconic feminist status – the question of her work's originality, and its marketing as therapeutic self-help – are best dealt with in conjunction, for the marketing exigencies of the latter illuminate debate around the former. Given Wolf's current prominence, what is striking about the first reviews of The Beauty Myth in Britain in September-October 1990 is their generally lukewarm tone, and the frequency with which they dispute the book's claims to originality. In a representative review, Zoë Heller, writing in the Independent, argues that "Wolf's discussion of the feminine beauty cult clearly isn't breaking 'an uneasy silence' or confronting a 'final taboo' " as "a rich tradition of feminist analysis [including] Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer and Susie Orbach" has already opened this argumentative territory to political analysis (1990: 33). Feminist author Joan Smith equally queries Chatto's claim that The Beauty Myth "breaks the silence of centuries", given that "the imposition on women of an ideal of beauty which is not their own is a subject which has

exercised the women's movement for many years" (1990: 22). Admittedly, Wolf in the Acknowledgements section of The Beauty Myth marks her indebtedness to "the theorists of femininity of the second wave, without whose struggles with these issues I could not have begun my own" (292). But in Chatto's two-year pre-publication publicity campaign for the book, the mantra of radical innovation had been so often repeated that it, rather than the book's actual content, came to condition the dominant public response to the book – a characteristically 1990s example of a book's media hype eclipsing its actual political contribution. Heller again remarks that "it seems harsh to damn a book on the basis of its publicity blurb" (1990: 33) yet, surfeited with hype, this is what British reviewers almost to a woman did (Smith, J., 1990; Brampton, 1990; Picardie, 1990).

Chatto's confusion of quality with ubiquity in constructing its promotional campaign may have backfired somewhat in initial reviews of The Beauty Myth, but its decision to promote the book less under the bookselling category of feminist theory than as a women's self-help manual heralds a significant marketing development for feminist titles in general. The 1970s consciousness-raising slogan that 'the personal is political' had insisted upon the centrality of personal experience to any genuinely radical political consciousness, but the end at which the slogan aimed was, nonetheless, the broader social landscape of public, activist politics. In line with the near-total disappearance of activist politics (aside, perhaps, among environmental movements and some non-governmental organisations) during the 1980s, feminist bestsellers were restyled not as blueprints for social revolution, but as guidebooks for personal reorientation. The women's liberation movement's erstwhile role-model, Gloria Steinem, encapsulates this retreat from broad-canvas agitation to personal reinvention in her most recent title, Revolution from Within: A Book of Self-Esteem (1992). The potential for consciousness-raising to degenerate into narcissistic self-examination was one recognised early in the history of the women's movement (Freeman, J., 1970: 24-25). However, this

latest development threatens to hasten a slide towards political apathy because of the immense commercial investment at stake. Texts about dieting and female body-image comprise a major subsection of the booming self-help publishing market. Because of this encompassing commercial reality, Wolf's The Beauty Myth (like Orbach's Fat is a Feminist Issue before it) was easily marketable as a corrective for *personal* misapprehensions rather than for *societally-structured* oppressions. In its discussion of the author's teenage battle with anorexia, her enculturation into northern California's cult of the body beautiful, and her mother's experience of fad dieting (201-208), Wolf's The Beauty Myth arguably attempts only to ground socio-political analysis in personal experience. Yet in the cover blurbs on the Chatto and Windus and Vintage paperback editions, evidence for the argument has become the argument itself. The confessional replaces the political as the book's dominant mode: The Beauty Myth "has the power to change lives"; it "shows women how they can, finally, be free".

From this generic drift two central problems emerge: firstly, given that self-help literature occupies one of the lowest prestige niches of a publishing house's list, it is reasonable to expect that the marketing of political feminist tracts as home therapy will reduce feminist non-fiction's cultural capital and result in the commissioning of fewer rigorously analytical feminist texts. Secondly, how can 1990s feminism recast issues of women's self-esteem as worthy of inclusion on the public political agenda without falling into the intellectually simplistic trap of classifying all questions of social experience as inherently personal – a transparently false assertion which would deny all economic and social determinism by prioritising individual agency? The question is complicated by women's historical entrapment within the realm of the personal and domestic, firstly in the nineteenth-century, post-Industrial-Revolution ideology of separate spheres, and more recently in the post-war glorification of domesticity, the suburban platitudes of which Friedan so successfully demolished in order to provide women with access to a

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public realm. Legislative parity now broadly having been achieved for Western women, the question becomes one of how to fashion a sophisticated feminist analysis alive to issues of *cultural* coercion. In her attempt to “define our self-esteem as political” (1991a: 281), Wolf gestures towards such a transformation. Yet the deceptive ease with which the very book mounting this argument is itself marketable as female self-help indicates how fraught with risks of containment such a manoeuvre may prove.

CONCLUSION

What are feminists to make of the mainstream publishing industry's latest strategy to corner the market in feminist books – the feminist sequel? The announcement in February 1998 that Germaine Greer has accepted a £500 000 advance from Doubleday to pen a sequel to The Female Eunuch (Viner, 1998) prompts not only the scurrilous query as to what exactly a self-proclaimedly celibate 60-year-old might know about young women's sexuality in the 1990s (the promised focus of The Whole Woman), but moreover prompts questions as to why Greer, and not a younger feminist, was asked to address the issue. The obvious answer – the commercial reliability of Greer's name – masks more searching inquiries. Are older and established feminist writers, with the willing collusion of multinational publishers, ossifying feminist thought by monopolising public debate? In the advance comments of Doubleday publishing director Marianne Velmans, it is the essentially confining image of the feminist guru which prevails: “It is the book we've all been waiting for, not only to revive the debate, but to reinvent the issues for a new generation” (Viner, 1998: 4). Greer, who herself in 1971 castigated publishers for falsely elevating “hapless authoresses” to “the roles of cult leaders”, has here come full circle; what has changed is that feminism is now perceived as a two-book, not just a one-book, movement.

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The economic apparatus within which contemporary feminism operates determines that the majority of feminist bestsellers emanate from commercially-driven, mainstream houses and serve to perpetuate the financial interests of their parent companies. To rephrase de Beauvoir's famous maxim, the feminist text is not born, but rather becomes, a bestseller. At every stage in the production of the mainstream feminist text, the institutional power of the multinational publishing apparatus is a determining presence: in its power to commission or reject a book proposal it crucially filters access to public discourse; in its translation and editing of feminist texts it can subordinate a title's political analysis to the exigencies of profit and market whim; and in the design, packaging and promotion of feminist authors – as much as of their texts – the industry mediates public perceptions about the nature of feminism and its relevance to contemporary society. Feminist critics would thus be insufficiently vigilant to assume that mainstream publishers' influence over feminist thought begins and ends with the corporate colophon stamped on a book's spine. The publisher's logo is only the most explicit manifestation of a system of overarching institutional and cultural power.

Given that mainstream houses have themselves published many of the most influential and radical feminist critiques of the preceding thirty years, a resisting reader could yet be forgiven for asking why it is necessary, or even advisable, for feminist critics to remain circumspect in their treatment of corporate publishers. Inherently problematic is the tendency within the industry for feminism to be defined not by peer review but by publisher press release. Publishers increasingly hail a new release as a significant contribution to feminist thought even before its content has been surveyed and critiqued by the feminist writerly community. Given the dissolution of anything approaching a unified political women's movement, the danger is that feminism will come to represent not a politico-cultural philosophy but a conveniently appropriable merchandising hook. A wary Sally Brampton, diagnosing this redefinition of feminism

as a convenient niche market, suggests its concomitant risks of political containment: “Comparisons have been made between The Beauty Myth and those seminal feminist tracts The Second Sex and The Female Eunuch. Unfortunately they have been made by the publishers themselves” (1990: 17).

The claims made by Chatto and Windus to the effect that Naomi Wolf represented “the Beauvoir, the Friedan, the raving, ravishing Greer, of her generation” point, moreover, to the mainstream publishing industry’s tendency towards recapitulation over innovation in its packaging of feminist thought (Turner, J., 1990: 29). Because companies stand to profit from the continued prominence of established second-wave feminist authors whose titles appear on their backlists, publishers are frequently predisposed to support a new book from a familiar name rather than to search out new, and previously unknown, talent. In Transworld/Doubleday’s breathless pre-publication puffery for Greer’s The Whole Woman, the potential constriction of the feminist canon is felt at its keenest. For while the elevation of certain feminist texts – The Female Eunuch among them – delineates a body of influential feminist writing and important political development, the process of canonisation is itself predicated upon a complementary process of denial and exclusion. For every title that is elevated to the feminist pantheon, multiple others are consigned to oblivion or declared to be unutterably beyond the political pale. The sales jargon of the bestseller relies, implicitly, upon singularity – a book represents the number 1 bestseller, *the* definitive analysis, the crucial text that alone ‘changes lives’. As a result of this relentlessly selective process, the vital diversity of feminist theorising is evermore concentrated into a handful of promotable titles. Just as the early-second-wave women’s movement was justifiably uneasy with the feminist ‘star system’, contemporary critics are right to be chary of the celebrity media feminist. The promotion of an elect of feminist mandarins has the potential to stifle on-going debate and revisionist accounts from amongst the movement’s mavericks.

Finally, the mainstream publishing industry's decisive role in setting the parameters of feminist debate is rendered doubly problematic by the current disinclination of feminism rigorously to explore its own media construction. This is not to claim that feminist critics have ignored developments in media studies. Indeed, the eagerness of feminists to explore the influence of popular culture and the political implications of its depictions has comprised one of the major energising strands within both women's studies and media studies over the preceding three decades. But feminist media critics have been predisposed to analyse disempowering representations of women or to deconstruct negative stereotypes of feminists, rather than to interrogate the media construction of supposed feminist success stories. Thus the landmark texts of the second-wave women's movement continue to be regarded as in some sense *beyond* media processes rather than as products themselves crucially mediated by the mainstream communications industries. Perhaps this skittishness is understandable – no radical movement is exactly heartened to discover that its rhetorical landmarks are tempered by the dominant paradigm. But until feminist thought reconceptualises itself as in part a product – as are all political movements – of media mediation, it will remain in its current state of angry disbelief that its ground should be so co-opted by an opportunistic mainstream publishing industry.

The two concluding chapters of this thesis have aimed to destabilise standard divisions of feminist print activity into opposing categories of radical independents and the corporate mainstream. The weaknesses of both approaches – the financial instability and low output of the radical imprints, and the political opportunism and profit slavery of the multinational firms – demand reconceptualisation of feminist publishing practice if the industry is to survive into the twenty-first century. This survey maintains that the dichotomised core/mainstream conceptualisation of feminist publishing has proven redundant, and should be jettisoned in favour of a less rigidified, more interpenetrative,

schema. By putting pressure on the boundary between a 'core' feminism and a hostile mainstream 'exterior' from alternate argumentative directions, I hope to have highlighted its ultimate arbitrariness. The experience of feminist houses over the last 25 years is in essence the story of their interaction with and accommodation to larger media environments, just as the rise of the feminist bestseller marks the corporate publishing world's growing awareness of feminism's mainstream infiltration. To attempt to analyse the workings of one factor in the equation without paying heed to developments in the other is fundamentally to misconstrue the complex interdependence of the modern media sector.

The challenge which faces a feminist publishing industry on the cusp of a new century is how the benefits of both production systems may be fused into a new working relationship – one sufficiently cognisant of media industry dynamics and profit-generation to harness these skills for a feminist agenda. It is, admittedly, no simple undertaking. The politics/profit dialectic is one ultimately incapable of complete resolution. But by overcoming the self-defeating conceptualisation of ideological commitment and profit-generation as necessarily in antithesis, feminist publishing stands to forge a new, dynamically hybrid model – that of commercial media savvy deployed to effect political change.

AFTERWORD

FEMINIST PUBLISHING: A TWENTIETH-CENTURY PHENOMENON?

Perhaps more than any other development in publishing in our century, women's publishing has attempted to bring about radical and wide-ranging change. Not only new writers, but new subjects have been introduced. Old, existing disciplines have been critiqued; the making of canons has been questioned, the definitions of what constitutes appropriate or acceptable subject matter for books have been expanded and stretched, as have given boundaries. And, most important, the whole process of the creation and production of knowledge has been looked at afresh, turned upside down, often rethought and remade. And all this in barely a quarter century.

– Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon, Making a Difference: Feminist Publishing in the South (1995: 1)

The phenomenon of feminist publishing sites itself at the complicated interstices between mass-communications and cultural politics. It is therefore unsurprising, in a realm so thoroughly steeped in political nuance, that even the models adopted by critics to conceptualise feminist publishing are resonant with political implication. Butalia and Menon's truncation of feminist publishing's history to a spectacularly brief period of development between 1970 and 1995 is problematic in several of its fundamental assumptions. Firstly, such an approach obscures contemporary feminist publishing's origins in earlier twentieth-century women in print movements, namely the Cuala Press (refer Chapter 2) and the pre-war women's suffrage press movement (refer Chapter 4). Yet, beyond this merely interpretative debate over which chronological timeframe best captures the impact of feminist publishing, Butalia and Menon's statement is moreover problematic on the grounds of the developmental model which it implies for feminist publishing. The linear conceptualisation of women's print history across the twentieth century as a series of ever-increasing peaks followed by apathetic troughs suggests, firstly, a history characterised by rupture and discontinuity. Secondly, there is a

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seductively easy slippage between linear chronology and unduly optimistic notions of historical progress – reinforcing the questionable assumption that later twentieth-century women's imprints constitute advances on their Edwardian predecessors. At a fundamental level this conceptualisation operates to entrench the familiar model of feminism's alternate progress and retreat. It is this oft-encountered pattern of fluctuation which itself deserves sustained critical examination.

A striking feature of twentieth-century British women's publishing as surveyed in this thesis is the dislocation of the first wave from the second wave of women's print activism. Tremendous expertise, theoretical sophistication and distribution networks are cultivated amongst women, only to become fractured and obscured within decades, resulting in the situation whereby each successive generation of feminist publishers is forced to reinvent the wheel – to construct anew rationales for feminist intervention into print, to unearth 'forgotten' women's classics, and to formulate new structures of practical industry support. In such a manner, Elizabeth Corbet Yeats appears to have had little awareness of debates over female composers and presswomen at Emily Faithfull's Victoria Press in London of the 1860s. Similarly, it has been only through the enthusiasm of female commissioning editors that such feminist analyses of the Cuala Press and the Woman's Press as do exist have seen academic light of day. What irony may be read, moreover, in the fact that a writer such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, published in Virago's 'lost women writers' Modern Classic series, was initially published in Britain by Virago's own predecessor – the Woman's Press? Here publisher, as much as author, has suffered from posthumous marginalisation and obscurity. The recurrence of the process by which feminist theorists must rediscover the writings and analyses of their forebears reflects not the judgements of an impartial posterity, but a determinedly *political* process whereby oppositional writing is denied outlets to newer audiences by the decision-making gatekeepers of the publishing industry. As Dale

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Spender – herself familiar with non-fiction feminist publishing through her joint-establishment of Britain’s Pandora Press – implies, women risk capitulating to historical marginalisation and silencing by passively accepting the periodic disappearance of feminist knowledges:

Being able to generate, validate and control our own knowledge about ourselves and society is then of crucial importance to women, for we have been ‘victims’ insofar as we have been dependant on males for the public knowledge of ourselves. . . . While men control information with an eye to their own interest, the knowledge that they provide about women is all that is publicly available, and we are forced to draw upon it to make sense of the world, even though it may do little or nothing to reflect or enhance our lives. (Spender, D., 1983: 369)

In order to demonstrate its distance from the peaks-and-troughs model of feminist print history, this thesis deliberately eschews standard chronological order in its survey of twentieth-century British feminist presses. Rather than emphasising the silence and dislocation of one women’s publishing movement from the next, this analysis opts instead to emphasise links of continuity and inspiration between publishing’s first- and second-wave efflorescences. The critique enacted in these pages is, therefore, played out against the chronological scaffolding of the twentieth century, but it ranges freely across that framework, adopting the tactics of crosscutting and juxtaposing different historical periods to call into question the assumptions inherent in received linear narratives. Basic to such a manoeuvre is questioning of the assumption that feminist print activity should be construed according to a ‘self-evident’ and normalised model of peak-and-tough fluctuation. Granted, feminist public activism over the twentieth century does appear to correspond to a pattern of rise and fall: intense pre-war agitation (the first-wave suffrage movement), was followed by a mid-century period of slowed activity and reaction, which was in turn followed by a late-1960s resurgence of interest (the second wave). Feminism has since modified its priorities and tactical approaches, but remained socially prominent well into the closing years of the century (the third wave). Yet if feminist publishing is reconsidered as not merely a *reflection* of wider women’s activism, but as an *instigator*

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of political and cultural change, the first-, second-, and third-wave construct is immediately problematised. Arguably, it is the periodic exclusion of feminist analyses from the privileged realm of public discourse which is in part *causative* of women's disaffiliation from feminism. The introduction of a feminist publishing perspective into the disciplines of women's studies, book history and cultural studies thus prompts vigorous re-examination of received analytical paradigms. Reconceptualised as *cause* and not *symptom* of women's vacillating political consciousness, feminist publishing emerges as a vital tool for understanding twentieth-century social and cultural history – one with potentially revisionary effects.

To argue for the reappraisal of feminist publishing's status within academic discourse is to presuppose the industry's continued existence within the less rhetorically defined, more commercially ruthless, world of the book trade. What policies can feminist publishers adopt to ensure their survival into the twentieth-first century, so that the vast cultural changes wrought by the women in print movement are not once again misascribed, devalued or obscured? A key strategic manoeuvre would be to end the rhetorical sniping between radical independents and the corporate women's presses over which publishing model embodies a greater ideological 'purity' (Arnold, 1976; Desmoines and Nicholson, 1976; cf. Linder, 1986; Nwapa, 1993). These debates, by no means solely confined to the years of radical feminism's primacy during the early- to mid-1970s¹, effectively siphon off publishing and political energy from the urgent task of ensuring press survival into an essentially futile exercise in constructing hierarchies of impeccable political credentials.

¹ See, for example, Patricia Duncker's remarks about the Methuen women writers list in her chapter, "A Note on the Politics of Publishing". Sisters and Strangers: An Introduction to Contemporary Feminist Fiction. (1992) Oxford: Blackwell. 40.

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Moreover, feminist publishers would be advised to learn tactical and financial lessons from the political changes of the past century, and to concentrate on diversifying their print activities as a buffer against market fluctuations. Once freed from the ghetto of self-defeating debate as to what constitutes the 'correct' form of political publishing, the women's presses will be better able to penetrate markets across the book-buying spectrum. During periods of relative economic buoyancy and political progressiveness, the industry is likely to witness a surge of innovative and avant-garde writing from the independent presses. In periods of publishing industry recession, on the other hand, the corporate-affiliated houses or feminist imprints of multinationals are better positioned to continue publishing women's analyses from within the relatively insulated sector of the larger corporations. There will, inevitably, be some publishing casualties: corporate publishing, as detailed in this study's analysis of *The Women's Press* (Chapter 3) and mainstream bestsellers (Chapter 6), is not without its political pitfalls. Yet if the goal of women's publishing is considered to be not one of ideological scrupulosity but of *longevity*, the feminist publishing sector will be better placed to challenge future attempts to devalue or exclude hard-won women's perspectives.

Women's publishing houses in the late-1990s are not solely preoccupied with mounting rearguard action against political co-optation and movement demoralisation. With the broad-scale social penetration of cybertechnologies over the course of the decade, feminist publishers face stimulating new challenges for broadening the mainstream appeal of feminist ideas, especially as critics engage in increasingly urgent debates over the political ramifications of the new electronic media. Recent feminist analyses demonstrate an eagerness to engage with new technologies such as the Internet, albeit with reservations as to the gender hierarchies currently encoded in these media (Haraway, 1991, 1997; Spender, D., 1995; Wakeford, 1997). Yet these same analyses, in their laudable desire to see women actively embrace cyberculture as both practitioners

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and theorists, tend to belittle print as a second-best communicative medium to which women risk being relegated. At this point, circumspect feminist critics are right to give pause and to query this indecent rush into the arms of a cyborg whose intentions towards feminism are, as yet, unclear (Haraway, 1991).

Technophobic feminist engagements with cyberculture frequently disregard the political and cultural achievements of the feminist book publishing sector over the past century. Furthermore, the assumption implicit in such theorising – that computer-based communications supersede and render redundant print publication (Spender, D., 1995: 59-66) – is not borne out by the history of twentieth-century media development. The evidence is compelling to suggest that pre-existing and new media tend to achieve a state of mutually enhancing co-existence, as opposed to mutual exclusivity. This is demonstrable even within the recent history of feminist publishing: tie-in editions to coincide with the release of films such as The Handmaid's Tale, Enchanted April and Orlando and – most spectacularly – The Color Purple have sold well for feminist houses; and the 1979 BBC-TV adaptation of Testament of Youth propelled Vera Brittain's backlist title into the category of a consistent strong-seller for Virago. In a demonstration of feminist publishing's latest tactic for exploiting the potential of wired technologies, there has in recent years been a proliferation of feminist press homepages on the World Wide Web.² The trend counterpoints a contemporaneous fashion for titles whose computer-literacy and cybernetically-informed stylistics appeal to an affluent, under-35 readership: Vancouver-based feminist imprint Press Gang Publishers recently frontlisted Persimmon Blackbridge's *Zeitgeist* meditation, Prozac Highway: A Novel (1998) – “a hilarious

² Examples of well-designed and informative feminist publishers' websites include those of The Women's Press (<http://www.the-women's-press.com>), The Feminist Press at The City University of New York (<http://web.gsuc.cuny.edu/feministpress>, and more recently <http://www.feministpress.org>), Naiad Press (<http://www.naiadpress.com>), and Attic Press (<http://www.iol.ie/~atticirl>). The Cybergrl “Femina” listing of World Wide Web sites “for, by and about women” currently provides HTML links to eighteen international feminist press homepages (<http://femina.cybergrrl.com>).

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cyberlit journey through Internet romance, pharmaceutical remedies for life and aging rebelliously [sic]" (Press Gang, 1998: 5).³

In aiming for self-sustaining diversity, feminist presses must concentrate not only on intra-industry expansion across the spectrum of print publishing, but also on multimedia penetration, remaining alert to developments in parallel electronic media and innovative in their tactics for attracting Internet-friendly audiences to print material. The resilient reader preference for consuming fiction in bound volumes rather than in on-screen formats signals a promising point of leverage for the women's presses ("Replacing Paper", 1998: 151). The optimistic embrace of cybercommunications' potential for feminism is – if viewed with necessary critical circumspection – warranted. But for feminism to abandon its proven success in print formats to rush headlong into the cybernetic attractions of the Internet, virtual reality and CD-ROMs is to risk relinquishing an achieved women's print heritage in exchange for uncertain future rewards. The heralding of technological media as the most important forums for feminist communication is fraught with under-examined risk, especially as the Internet itself derives from the military-industrial complex and is controlled by multinational software corporations little troubled by the niceties of gender politics. Feminists now risk themselves initiating another of the periodic deletions of women's intellectual heritage by prematurely jettisoning a rich female publishing legacy. The new technological media do, unquestionably, reconfigure feminist conceptualisations of such crucial topics as power, communication, gender and embodiment, but they signal the complication – not

³ Other recent titles from feminist publishers, from left-wing/radical publishers and from the women's studies lists of mainstream houses include Manda Scott's Hen's Teeth (The Women's Press, 1996), a lesbian detective novel with a strong IT-subplot; Caitlin Sullivan and Kate Bornstein's Nearly Roadkill: An Infobahn Erotic Adventure (Serpent's Tail, 1996); and Jennifer Terry and Melodie Calvert's anthology of critical writing, Processed Lives: Gender and Technology in Everyday Life (Routledge, 1997). This cross-section amounts to only a sample of the vast amount of feminist material published on the subject.

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the invalidation – of existing feminist media theorising. The pervasive problem of how to reconcile an oppositional political critique with capitalism's profit imperative is aggravated rather than resolved by the wider front on which feminist media studies must now act.

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