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Sexuality and Politics in Naomi Mitchison's
We have been Warned (1935)

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Abstract

In her novel *We have been Warned* (1935), Naomi Mitchison shows a very forward-looking perspective on the topics of abortion, birth control, multiple-partner relationships, and rape. In order to demonstrate this, I will analyse the general social, literary, and political context of early twentieth-century Britain, as well as Mitchison's life and novel, to later connect and compare them with the fragments of the novel that deal with the topics mentioned above, and that include the most outstanding elements. Thus, I will prove that Mitchison, through her novel, conveyed a message of open sexuality and female liberation that was far more progressive than her contemporary 1930s society and our twenty-first century one; and, in addition, I will expose the need to rediscover revolutionary yet forgotten female British writers such as Mitchison.

Keywords: Naomi Mitchison, *We have been Warned*, Abortion, Birth Control, Rape, Multiple-Partner Relationships.

Naomi Mitchison presenta en su novela *We have been Warned* (1935) una perspectiva muy avanzada a su tiempo respecto al aborto, los métodos anticonceptivos, las relaciones abiertas y las violaciones. Para demostrarlo, analizaré el contexto sociopolítico y literario de las primeras décadas del siglo XX en el Reino Unido, así como la vida y obra de Naomi Mitchison, para después relacionarlo y compararlo con los fragmentos de la novela que hablan sobre los temas ya mencionados, y que incluyen los elementos más destacables del libro. Así, probaré que Mitchison, a través de su novela, transmitió un mensaje de sexualidad abierta y liberación femenina que era mucho más progresivo que la sociedad de la década de 1930 y la actual del siglo XXI; asimismo, expondré la necesidad de redescubrir a autoras británicas y revolucionarias, pero olvidadas, como Naomi Mitchison.

Palabras clave: Naomi Mitchison, *We have been Warned*, Aborto, Métodos Anticonceptivos, Violación, Relaciones Abiertas.

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Introduction

In the early 1930s, and after a decade of forging her popularity as a historic novelist, Scottish author Naomi Mitchison had to confront various publishing houses in order to put out what would be her next novel, *We have been Warned*; because of the controversial topics it dealt with, these houses refused to publish it, or agreed on doing so only if they could censor numerous fragments. In the end, the book was published in 1935 by Constable & Co. with certain changes, but maintaining the essence and opinions firstly written by Mitchison. Thus, the general readership could see the author's treatment of abortion, birth-control methods, open relationships, and rape in *We have been Warned*; a treatment that was revolutionary and forward-looking for both Mitchison's contemporary society of the 1930s, as well as for our current society to some extent.

This B.A. Thesis will firstly analyse the general social, political, and literary context of Britain in the early twentieth century, in order to understand the period's general perspectives on the topics mentioned above, as well as the literary movement to which Mitchison belonged. Secondly, in order to better understand the figure of Naomi Mitchison and what her main inspirations when writing were, this B.A. Thesis will present the most relevant facts about her life, and will also make an overview of *We have been Warned*, with a special focus on why it was controversial. Finally, it will select the fragments of the novel that specifically deal with abortion, birth-control methods, open relationships, and rape; contrast them with the context mentioned in Chapter 1; and analyse the elements that could seem more revolutionary and/or controversial, which would consequently prove Mitchison to be ahead of her time in terms of sexuality and politics.

The figure of Naomi Mitchison and her revolutionary ideologies has already been commented by academics such as Rob Hardy in "Naomi Mitchison, Peaceable Transgressor" (2015) or by Kenneth Wiggins Porter in "Naomi Mitchison: The Development of a Revolutionary Novelist" (1939), but whilst they focused on Mitchison's personal life and her many remarkable life achievements, I decided to focus on her most polemical and least successful work, *We have been Warned* (1935). Due to

the unusual topics it engages with, this novel seemed the best option to analyse, in order to then demonstrate Mitchison's outstanding views.

This B.A. Thesis will be divided in four main chapters. The first one, "Early Twentieth-Century British Context: Female Voices in the Social and Literary Spheres," is subdivided into two sections and will deal with the British socio-political and literary contexts of early twentieth-century Britain, although the literary section will especially deal with Scottish literature, since Mitchison is one of the renowned authors of this nation. The second chapter, "Naomi Mitchison and *We have been Warned* (1935)," will present a summary of Naomi Mitchison's life and her novel, including the most relevant facts and elements. The third and fourth chapters, "Abortion and Birth Control in *We have been Warned* (1935)" and "Multiple-Partner Relationships and Rape in *We have been Warned* (1935)," will focus on the analysis of the novel *per se*; dealing with abortion and birth control; and open relationships and rape. To finish with, there will be a chapter for the conclusions extracted from this B.A. Thesis, as well as a section for the works I have used as references and inspiration for this paper.

1

Early Twentieth-Century British Context: Female Voices in the Social and Literary Spheres

Between 1900 and 1950, the United Kingdom suffered the consequences of an era in which some of the key events of history took place: the succession of two World Wars, the triumph of Socialism in Russia, or the appearance of Modernism and *Avant-garde* movements are just a few examples of these turbulent decades. For many—if not all—twentieth-century authors of the United Kingdom, these events would influence their upbringing and their writings, and Scottish writer Naomi Mitchison was no exception.

Social and Political Context

In the early twentieth-century United Kingdom, there was a marked contrast between what many citizens wanted and were supportive of and the legislation and powers that ruled the country, whose greatest exponent were the Acts of Parliament. A well-known example of this contrast was the suffrage movement, through which many British women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries publicly fought for the acceptance of female suffrage and constituted organisations in order to make this change happen. These women are the main reason why Britain is seen as the place where we can find the first evidences of a female suffrage movement, although it was not the only country where it took place. The effort of these British female campaigners was firstly rewarded in 1918, when Parliament passed the Representation of the People Act and women were granted electoral rights similar to those of their male contemporaries. Nonetheless, the Act stated that only the women who “[had] attained the age of thirty years” and who were the owners of “land or premises [...] of a yearly value of no less than five pounds or of a dwelling house” could vote, which consequentially excluded millions of working-class women. Universal suffrage would not be a reality in the United Kingdom until 1928, when the Representation of The People Act was passed “[f]or the purpose of providing that the parliamentary franchise shall be the same for men and women,” as indicated in the first

lines of said text. In order to do so, the new Act repealed the two previous restrictions, thus granting any women “full of age” their right to vote. This represented a remarkable evolution regarding the rights and recognition of women, as well as a drastic change from the previous centuries where female voters were not even contemplated.

As stated before, more than fifty years before these Acts were passed British women had already created organisations and done demonstrations in order to obtain their right to vote. Scotland’s capital was a crucial place for the development of this suffrage movement, since “in 1867 one of the first three suffrage societies [...] in Britain” was formed, the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage (Leneman 29). Throughout her article, the author emphasises the numerous meetings organised by women in the late nineteenth century in Scotland in order to discuss their lack of rights and to try and change this injustice. These meetings “were invariably packed—in some cases people had to be turned away—and resolutions were passed in favour of women's enfranchisement” (30). They were useful for multiple reasons: mentalities were changed, many women became conscious of their situation, and the tours that would be later carried out by these societies around Scotland “enabled suffragists to address open-air meetings in even the smallest villages, putting their arguments to audiences who would otherwise never have heard the women's side of the story” (33). However, the suffrage petitions did not usually have a tangible impact in changing the laws and Acts of the United Kingdom, and the resulting feeling was one of defeat. As years went on, there were more and more conflicts between different women associations, and protests became more aggressive, to the point of carrying out violent acts in the streets: “from 1913 until the outbreak of war in August 1914, attacks on property by suffragettes took place at regular intervals. Scotland was far from immune” (Leneman 40). All these events slowed down the victory of the suffrage cause and the beginning of the First World War forced women to stop their campaigning. After the war, a partial victory was achieved with the 1918 Representation of the People Act, but British working-class women would have to wait ten more years to be granted their right to vote.

This contrast between the law and the general opinion of some social and political groups in the United Kingdom was also present with regards to abortion and birth control in the early twentieth century: on the one hand, abortion was still a punishable crime according to the Offences Against the Person Act, in force since 1861 in England and Wales. However, the introduction of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act of 1929 implied a

small yet remarkable shift in the general attitude towards this practice: the Act contemplated abortion as allowed from thereon in those cases where the mother's life was endangered, and also stated that "the jury are of opinion that the person charged is not guilty of murder, manslaughter or infanticide." This terminological and legal change represented a slight change of mentality towards abortion, almost to the point of not demonising it. It is interesting that, although abortion was also illegal in Scotland, the aforementioned Act did not extend to this nation. The main reasons for this were the contrast between the English and Scottish legal systems, their "differences in the social and political context" and "the closer relationship between the labour movement and religious organisations in Scotland" (Elliott 201). As a whole, the practice remained virtually illegal for many women, whether they came from England or Scotland, but a slow progress towards legalisation had then begun, which would culminate in the 1960s. In the early twentieth century, on the other hand, birth control methods were more socially accepted than abortion, and consequently "the first clinic dedicated to the provision of birth control in Scotland was [...] founded in 1926" where specialists saw contraception "as a way of helping individual women protect their health, reflecting the concern over maternal mortality and morbidity present in much of the contemporary commentary on health in Scotland" (Elliott 202).

In these centres, the usual methods recommended to patients by clinicians consisted of

various forms of the cap along with douching and the use of lactic acid as a spermicide. These measures did not require the participation of the male partner, reflecting the manner in which the clinics framed birth control as women's issue. However, these methods were not necessarily best suited to the living conditions of working-class women. (Elliot 202)

Working-class women were the main target of these clinics, since their economic situation forced them to use rudimentary devices to abort, but the people at birth control clinics "were particularly keen not to be associated with the provision of abortion" (215) due to the facts stated above. Nevertheless, illicit abortions were still being carried out, many with terrible results. Consequently, some groups advocated for the legalisation of abortion, such as The Abortion Law Reform Association, "formed in 1936 out of concern for maternal mortality due to dangerous abortions" (Gleeson 27). However, it was not

until 1967 that this practice was legalised in Britain; a very progressive decision for those times, but not progressive enough for the purposes of this paper. Moreover, this delay was connected to the beginning of the Second World War, which put a stop to the campaigns—as had happened with the suffrage and the First World War—and it should be highlighted that The 1967 Abortion Act was “not the outcome of a government committee, inquiry or Royal Commission,” but “informed by two prominent lobbies of the time—the Abortion Law Reform Association (ALRA) and the British Medical Association (BMA)” (Gleeson 23). This Act represented an exceptional case where the public opinion and the support of working-class women and feminist groups were decisive.

Concluding this overview of the socio-political context of the early twentieth-century Britain, I will briefly comment on the topics of rape and multiple-partner relationships, since these themes are object of interest of this paper and were also included in *We have been Warned* (1935), and constituted one of the reasons why Mitchison’s work was seen as problematic. In the case of rape, and in contrast to what has been shown already, there was no incompatibility between the general perspective on the topic and how it was regarded in laws and courts: rape has been considered a serious, major crime in both Scotland and England for more than five centuries, and perpetrators have been consequently judged as criminals. Nonetheless, this did not stop rapists from committing the crime, and rape victims—as well as women in general, throughout their lives—usually have to suffer the negative effects of ‘rape culture,’ a fairly new term that nonetheless refers to misogynistic attitudes that have existed in societies from the very beginning. An example of this would be the common tendency to justify male abusive behaviour, either by presenting it as the conduct men are expected to show because of their nature, or by systematically blaming women. These misogynistic attitudes derived from rape culture are difficult to detect and erase, and they are not regarded as crimes in many cases, which usually results in women suffering the negative consequences already mentioned.

Moving on to the treatment of multiple-partner relationships in British legislation, the results obtained differ from those shown with rape. To begin with, the idea of ‘multiple-partner’ relationships —also denominated ‘polyamorous’ in the last decades— is usually mistaken for either ‘bigamy/polygamy’ or ‘adultery,’ despite the fact that they are different concepts. Moreover, this type of romantic and sexual relationships was and is still very controversial, and even illegal in many nations. In the case of the United

Kingdom, the idea of citizens engaging in a multiple-partner relationship is *per se* not contemplated by the law; hence the lack of clear legislation regarding the topic. However, the general perspective of non-monogamous relationships has always been one of criticism and refusal in Western countries, mainly due to religious and moral values, and the United Kingdom—despite not having a clear ban on this type of relationships—is no exception. This can be seen in the treatment of bigamy, a similar conception that is, in fact, a punishable crime in the United Kingdom up to our days. In England and Wales, this dates back to the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861, where bigamy was defined as the practice where a person, “[w]hosoever, being married, shall marry any other person during the life of the former husband or wife, whether the second marriage shall have taken place in England or Ireland or elsewhere.” In Scotland, it was a common law offence until the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act of 2014 made it a statutory offence.

Scottish Literary Context

After the success of Scottish authors in the early 1800s, such as R.L. Stevenson and his adventure novels, or Walter Scott and his historical series *Waverley*, there were two consecutive literary movements that influenced the general view towards Scotland, its identity, and its literature. The first one was the Kailyard movement, a style “increasingly frowned upon in the last decade or so of the nineteenth century” due to “the propensity for [some] Scots to write couthy (that is, comfortably smug) tales of the Scottish countryside” (Carruthers 117). The term ‘Kailyard’ was coined in 1895 by J. H. Millar as a pejorative term for the works of various Scottish writers, including *Peter Pan*’s author J.M. Barrie. This movement was harshly criticised because of the lack of a realistic representation of Scotland, and it caused “one of the most potent reactions in early twentieth-century Scottish literature” (Carruthers 119): in 1901, George Douglas Brown published *The House with the Green Shutters*, a novel that “takes to the satiric extreme the idea of the diminutive perspective of the kailyard mentality” (119) and presents “a somewhat grim picture of Scottish country life, quite clearly in an attempted antidote to the supposedly cosy, parish depiction of the kailyard at its worst” (Carruthers 120). However, the effect created by this text was truly evident a few years after its publication:

Douglas Brown had portrayed “a vision of a very real Scotland, a nation massively denying its actual historical nature, including its industrial and also imperial dynamics, and the novel was to form part of the foundational vision of the Scottish Literary Renaissance of the 1920’s and 1930’s” (121).

This ‘Scottish Literary Renaissance’ refers to the second main movement of the first half of twentieth-century Scotland: a hallmark in the country’s literature, where new forms and genres were used under “a spirit of artistic and literary awakening in a kindred nation but also a political dynamic setting itself against British imperialism and attempting to redefine its own variety without dependence on the imperial ideal” (Brown and Riach 1). The representative figure and precursor of the Scottish Renaissance was Christopher Murray Grieve, commonly known as Hugh MacDiarmid. In the early years of his literary career, he “sought a progressive hyper-modernism” and his first work *Annals of the Five Senses* (1923) was “his first bid to connect Scottish literature to European modernism” (Lyll 174). He was also one of the first Scottish Renaissance authors who revalued and used the Scots dialect, and his poem and masterpiece “A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle” (1926) is considered by Lyall as MacDiarmid’s attempt at providing the national epic that a national movement needs, such as the Scottish one in the early twentieth century (4). All in all, MacDiarmid should be understood as not only the precursor of one of the most important artistic movements in Scotland, but as a representation of some of the main motivations of Scottish writers of the period, Mitchison included: a rediscovery of personal and national identity and how to represent it through literature, the connection to European Modernism and *Avant-Garde* movements... As well as these features present in MacDiarmid, the Scottish Renaissance was mainly characterised by a “love of, concern for and play with languages,” and “the transgressing of boundaries, borders and genres” (Brown and Riach 3), with the consequent voicing of those who had been silenced before, women writers included.

Whilst it is true that some women had already entered the Scottish literary canon in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—e.g. Joanna Baillie—they were clearly outnumbered by men, and it was not until the nineteenth century that a Scottish woman, Margaret Oliphant, managed “to make a long and full living as a professional writer” for the first time (Carruthers 115). Oliphant (1828-1897) was very prolific and critically acclaimed, and although her writings mainly focused on supernatural topics, she was aware of the female struggle and wrote about it “[at] a time in which both her class and

gender might have worked against her” (Norquay 7). This is seen, for example, in her novel *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866), where the protagonist’s patriarchal society is criticised and described as ‘hypocritical.’

Oliphant was one of the key figures who set the path for the Scottish women writers that would later come, but the appearance of the Scottish Renaissance was the turning point that drastically changed the content and reception of female writings in the early twentieth-century Scotland. Indeed, the spotlight was still on the male writers, and as Carruthers points out, “[i]t is not without some irony that the raised male voices in the debates during the literary renaissance [...] over how to produce a more literary Scotland have, until fairly recently, obscured the contribution of women” (125). However, it is during this movement that many Scottish women gain recognition thanks to two main reasons. Firstly, because they wrote about the aforementioned topics that characterised the Scottish Renaissance: the idea of identity, the revalorisation of Scots... And, secondly, because they shared their experience as a twentieth-century woman, also exploring their sexuality, bodies, and even their sexual orientation in some cases. For this B.A. Thesis, I will now focus on this second aspect, presenting the most remarkable female figures of the Scottish Renaissance that shared Mitchison’s context and motivations, and probably also influenced her. Certainly, all these women deserve to be analysed and praised for their works at the same level as their male contemporaries, but the length of this B.A. Thesis does not facilitate this task.

The first of these women is North-eastern poet Marion Angus (1865–1946), whose writing career properly began when she was in her late fifties, something quite remarkable since the rest of the Scottish Renaissance authors were generally in their twenties and thirties. In terms of the topics she dealt with, Angus followed Margaret Oliphant’s path regarding her supernatural narratives, thus acting “as a conduit between traditional representations in the vein of the Scottish ballads and literary Modernist explorations” (Macdonald 98). It should be highlighted how “*Waater O’ Dye*” (1927), one of her best and most famous poems, has “recently been interpreted as a groundbreaking expression of lesbian desire” (Macdonald 98). Whilst this interpretation may have not been the dominant one during the early decades of the twentieth century, it is worth mentioning how Angus engaged with the topic of lesbianism/bisexuality in an era where it was not morally accepted.

Moving on to novelists, the female writer that would probably sound more familiar to Scottish citizens nowadays is Nan Shepherd, since her face and name appear in the five-pound notes produced by the Royal Bank of Scotland. Although anecdotal, this fact is an evidence of how influential Shepherd was as a Scottish author, whose writing method mainly consisted in using “the matrices of rural life, small town and city to map out questions of subjectivity” (Norquay 9). Her best-known novel, *The Quarry Wood* (1928), “tells the story of a young girl from a farming background and her struggle to go to Aberdeen University” (McCulloch 2012, 111), but also reflects on and values the use of the Scots language. It is worth mentioning that Lewis Grassie Gibbon, one of Shepherd’s contemporaries, wrote his best-known novel *Sunset Song* (1932) only a few years after Shepherd published hers, and both texts are often compared due to the similarities between the novels’ main topics and plot. However, whilst *Sunset Song* has been “widely taught by choice in Scottish schools and remains a popular classic” and was “voted ‘Scotland’s favourite novel’ in newspaper polls” (Brown and Riach 13), Shepherd’s novel has not achieved the same level of transcendence. Whether this contrast was caused by the quality of these works, or by the gender of both authors and the correspondent gender stereotypes and devoicing of female writers, is a very interesting debate that, unfortunately, this B.A. Thesis will not engage with.

Although Edwin Muir was “arguably the greatest Scottish poet in English in the first half of the twentieth century” (Carruthers 125), his wife Willa was also a central figure of the Scottish Renaissance movement in terms of both literature and female representation. A very intellectual woman who graduated from university with high honours, Willa was “highly regarded as the translator, with her husband Edwin, of the novels of Franz Kafka, Hermann Broch and other German-speaking writers” (McCulloch 2012, 104). However, Edwin was often recognised as the main translator of these texts, despite the fact that there is “[a] comment in [Willa’s] journal of August 1953, at a period when she had been very unwell, [which] exposes her inward frustration at her lack of acknowledgement in relation to her translation work” (McCulloch 2016). McCulloch goes on by citing this journal entry, where Willa clearly states that she was a better translator than her husband, but that this was not publicly recognised because of the patriarchal society she lived in and because she did not feel comfortable enough to specify that Edwin only helped her. Although less prolific than her female colleagues and novelists, Willa also wrote some fiction apart from translating, and following the

recurring topics and literary methods of the Scottish Renaissance, in 1931 she wrote *Imagined Corners*, a “technically ambitious novel where stifling, small-town life is analysed through multiple female perspectives” (Carruthers 125). It is also remarkable how the Hogarth Press published Willa Muir’s first text—“Women: An Inquiry”—in 1925, an essay that dealt with, among other topics, the development of female identity through art.

Violet Jacob, Catherine Carswell, or even Naomi Mitchison herself are just a few of the many names that could be added to this list of women writers who helped the Scottish Literary Renaissance develop. Whilst their style, careers, or genres could differ from one another, the exploration and perspective of women was a recurring topic in all of them, and it was expressed in many ways: for example, Shepherd presents the rite of passage of a Scottish young woman, whilst Angus examines women’s gender identity and lesbian desire. It is among this Scottish literary and female revolution that Mitchison develops her works, adding her own forward-looking personality and perspectives, but probably guided too by the example and path set by the previous and contemporary female writers presented in this chapter.

2

Naomi Mitchison and *We have been Warned* (1935)

In order to understand how Mitchison's personal experience is portrayed in her text, and how it is connected to the controversial topics she deals with and to her contemporary context, in this chapter I will analyse her life and her novel *We have been Warned*—named '*WHBW*' in this paper from now on. It must be mentioned that, despite the lack of direct in-text citations, for the next few paragraphs I used the texts of Calvin, Hardy, Porter, and the obituary published in *The Times*.

Born Naomi Margaret Haldane, Mitchison (1897-1999) was part of a very influential, ruling-class Scottish family. Although Mitchison was born in Edinburgh, she grew up in Oxford, where she was both educated at home and at the Oxford Preparatory School and the Society of Oxford Home Students—partially because her father was a fellow at New College. It was evident already at a young age that Naomi was a very prominent student, but even Mitchison herself was aware of the different opportunities she and her male colleagues received and how this conditioned her life. One of her biggest interests was genetics, as well as her brother's, and this resulted in “a co-authored paper on reduplication in mice—one of the earliest English works on Mendelian genetics” (Hardy 40) published in 1915, when she was eighteen. Decades after, James Watson—one of the scientists that discovered the DNA structure—would let Mitchison review *The Double Helix* (1968), a book of his that narrates the process of this discovery. Naomi was also interested in literature and writing, and also in 1915, *Oxford Poetry* published one of her poems along with others from undergraduate students, including J.R.R. Tolkien. Both authors kept in touch, and Mitchison was one of the few people Tolkien let proofread *The Lord of the Rings*. The beginning of the Great War forced Naomi to leave her studies and work as a nurse in 1915, and the next year she married Gilbert Richard Mitchison, although both agreed some years later to have an open relationship. He was a Labour politician who would later become a life peer, and his career influenced Naomi, who always supported him

After getting married, Mitchison properly began to write and progressively became a well-known author, but she also combined her career with different experiences

that influenced her writings: her Socialist and feminist activism, her support of Scottish nationalism, travels to different countries such as the USSR or Botswana, and her role as a mother. Together, Naomi and Gilbert had seven children, but only five survived. This generated a strong sense of guilt in Mitchison, who thought that she had not given her children enough attention. Her brother blamed her too, and this, along with their constant political fights—he was a Communist and she supported the Labour Party—damaged their relationship. As well as a Socialist, Naomi was a Scottish nationalist and vocal supporter of birth control, abortion, and virtually anything that contributed to the emancipation of women and the working class. This could seem to contradict with her bourgeoisie origins, but Mitchison “always identified with the outsider” (Hardy 41), even in her early years of education. In fact, ‘contradiction’ is what best summarises her life, for she was “[a]n aristocratic socialist, a Scottish nationalist with an Oxford accent, an advocate for birth control who bore seven children, a scientific realist who was fascinated with magic and mythology” (51). This, as well as her vast experience, made her a complex figure with a broad perspective, something reflected in her works. In the case of *WHBW* it is also remarkable how much of her life she poured onto the novel.

Focusing now on Mitchison’s literary career, she began to professionally write and publish her work in her early twenties and continued to do so until her death in 1999 when she was 101. By then, she had published more than seventy texts that varied from novels and essays to a few poems and plays, although the last two were not very popular. During the 1920s and 1930s, she gained recognition as a writer of historical novels; and the most remarkable titles were her first novel *The Conquered* (1923), set in Ancient Greece and Rome, and the highly praised *The Corn King and the Spring Queen* (1931), in which the people of a fictional kingdom get in contact again with the Ancient Rome population. However, this reputation was partly lost when she published *WHBW* (1935) due to the controversy it created. During the 1940s and 50s, Mitchison experimented with various genres, and among the many works of these years, I would like to highlight *The Bull Calves* (1947), which dealt with the Jacobite rebellion and the conflicts between Scotland and England; and *Travel Light* (1952), the fantasy story of a young girl raised by a dragon. From the 1960s until her death, Mitchison focused on writing five autobiographical books and critically acclaimed science-fiction stories, such as *Memoirs of a Spacewoman* (1962) and *Solution Three* (1975). Throughout her life, she also kept on proofreading her colleagues’ texts, editing collections of books, and writing polemical

essays. The epitome of this was “Comments on Birth Control” (1930), also influenced by the fact that Mitchison had helped in the creation of the first birth control clinic in the United Kingdom in 1924.

Although the essay was polemical, it is clear that *WHBW* was Mitchison’s most problematic work due to the topics it engaged with. Mitchison first asked his usual publisher, Jonathan Cape, to publish the novel in 1933; however, he wanted to censor it, to which Mitchison objected. She moved on to Victor Gollancz, since they were friends and “he had already published her controversial edited collection of leftist essays for children” (Bluemel 50), but he refused to publish her novel. According to Bluemel, Gollancz sent Naomi a letter in which he stated that he could not publish it because some “bits of [the book] will horrify an overwhelming proportion even of people who would otherwise be sympathetic, and that publication of the book would cause a real outcry” (50). After this, “Mitchison took her book to John Lane, who turned it down, and then Constable, who agreed to publish it ‘as it was’, put it into page proof and ‘then started querying’” (50). In the end, the book was published but partially censored, despite Mitchison’s opposition, also because at the time there was a Conservative government that imposed fines and censorship trials on many books that did not follow the dominant moral values. When the book was finally published and read in 1935, it “was a disaster for Mitchison and her literary reputation” (Murray v). But what is *WHBW* about, and why was it so controversial?

The novel is set in the early 1930s and tells the story of Dione Galton, a Scottish woman who belongs to a wealthy family from the Highlands. Dione has four children and is married to Tom, an Oxford lecturer and Labour politician who is campaigning to obtain a Parliamentary seat in Sallington, Birmingham. She has a brother, Alex, and a sister, Phoebe, who is also married but has had an extra-marital affair with her true love. Regarding the story, it can be divided in three main parts according to the key events: in the first part, Dione helps her husband with the campaign, gets in contact with the working-class people at Sallington, and discovers that her acquaintance Donald MacLean has joined the Communist party and lives in the streets. In the town, there was already a tense atmosphere caused by the political campaign, the feeling of despair among the working class, and the manipulated news of *The Sallington News*, a Conservative newspaper owned by bourgeoisie Daniel Coke-Brown. This tension increases with the demonstrations of the International Workers’ Day, and the story in this part climaxes

when Donald decides to kill Coke-Brown. As days pass, the Communist party is blamed for the attack, although Donald did it on his own; he begins to regret the assassination and tells Dione the truth. She was going to visit the Soviet Union with her brother in the following weeks, but they decide that Donald must replace him and thus flee Britain. The substitution is successful, and the second part of the novel begins, where Dione and Donald visit the USSR.

During their visit, Donald confesses his love towards Dione, and she is unsure whether she should force herself to love him ‘in order to be a good comrade’ or not. This again creates a tense situation, but Donald ends up falling in love with a Russian working-class woman, and stays in the country forever. Meanwhile, Tom arrives in Moscow and joins Dione, they both praise and criticise the Socialist elements of the country, and they meet some Russian acquaintances, including Oksana, the brilliant daughter of a mathematician. She shows them the city and engages in political debates with the couple, and Tom falls in love with her. Dione and Tom agree on having an open relationship, and after Dione goes back to Oxford, Tom stays some weeks with Oksana. Here begins the third and last section of the novel, where Tom finally returns to England too and takes up his political campaign and lectures, but is deeply affected by his feelings towards Oksana. Dione too has tried to cope with the negative feelings derived from this multiple-partner relationship, which is worsened by Tom’s return and depressed attitude, although he tried to mask it in order not to worry his wife. They gradually fix the situation, and Dione focuses on helping some birth control centres and proletarian families. In the process, she meets Idris, a Welsh comrade; they spend some days together, but he ends up raping her. She tries to recover in the following weeks but does not tell anyone apart from a female acquaintance. Later, Dione discovers she is pregnant, despite having always used protection, and discusses with Tom whether she should have an abortion. In the beginning, Tom encourages her to do so, but Dione is not so sure about it, and after days of indecision from Dione’s part, they decide to have the baby. Finally, the book ends with a vision of the two possible results of the political campaign: a peaceable Labour victory, or a disastrous future caused by the Conservative win.

More than eighty years have passed since the novel was published, and even though the book would probably not cause as much of a controversy as it did in the 1930s, its narrative quality is still debatable nowadays. *WHBW* was reprinted in 2012 with an introduction by Isobel Murray, an emeritus professor of Modern Scottish Literature at the

University of Aberdeen; she presented the novel as “very unsatisfactory for far too many reasons” (v), and agreed with literary historian Jenni Calder that “it is not a good novel, but it is an extremely interesting one” (v). According to Murray, the main problems were an excessive number of topics and characters, the inconsistency of the themes and events included, and the little distance Mitchison set between her life experiences and the fiction written (v-vii). Indeed, it is easy to see the connections between Dione and Naomi, and even her sister Phoebe in terms of her creative personality and love affairs. Although I partially agree with these opinions, in the following sections and in this B.A. Thesis as a whole I have tried to set them aside and instead focus on the most striking elements of the novel, how they are constructed, and how all this represents a very ground-breaking approach to some political and sexual affairs of her period.

3

Abortion and Birth Control Methods in *We have been Warned* (1935)

Despite all the criticism *WHBW* received, Mitchison completely defended her work and was proud of it from the day it was published in 1935. However, many decades after, when historian Jenny Calder asked her about the book in 1993—Calder was writing Mitchison’s memoirs—she seemed to change her mind. According to Murray, Mitchison told Calder that it was a bad book and that “she disliked the characters and was embarrassed about it” (xii), mainly because she had abundantly transmitted her own personal life into the novel. Setting aside the debate on whether this decision had negative consequences in terms of novel-writing for Mitchison, I would like to highlight this strong union of fiction and personal reality in Naomi, a public figure and respected writer, due to two main reasons. Firstly, because Mitchison dared to not only engage with controversial topics—perfectly knowing the consequent backlash she would receive—but also talked about them from her own personal experience, aware that the general public would know about her private life and harshly criticise her because it did not fit into the moral standards of her times and gender. Secondly, by including these controversial scenes in her book, Mitchison was showing a new perspective on themes such as Communism or abortion, with arguments based on life experiences, which were factual—at least to some extent—and which could thus serve her and her readers to counterargue the anti-abortion or anti-USSR propaganda spread by Conservative individuals. This is best seen in the abortion scene in the novel, which I will comment later on.

Although the topics of abortion and birth control methods appear on numerous occasions, the first proper reference to them in *WHBW* is made by Tom during a meeting with one of his students. They were discussing the girl’s recent engagement, and when Tom asked if she really wanted to have children that early, she answered that

“Well, perhaps not at first. I—I—we—” She looked down, blushing, fidgeting at the corners of her essay. Tom wondered whether he dared, as an Oxford tutor, say what he wanted to say. However, he did: “My sister, among her many activities,

runs a birth-control clinic in London. I believe you'd get the best possible advice there." (153)

The student's stutter and Tom's hesitation are clear indicators of the conflicting perspective on abortion at the time: on the one hand, some progress was already noticeable—e.g. the birth control clinic—and many citizens were supportive of contraceptive methods; in fact, in the case of Tom, his doubts come from his position of authority as a tutor, but not from moral values against abortion or birth control. He is aware of the morality fostered and supported by institutions such as Oxford University, but decides to prioritise his ideology, which was not very common for someone in a position like his. On the other hand, both characters talk with caution and discretion about these topics; in the case of the girl, it is due to the fact that women who prioritised their careers and lives over motherhood were not very common and well-regarded at the time. By adding this short fragment, Mitchison is not only voicing the reality of many women, but also supporting female emancipation through Tom's recommendations of not having children yet, as well as using effective methods to prevent pregnancy. However, Tom only talks about preventive methods, but the word or concept of abortion *per se* is not present in the conversation. Whether this was intended by Mitchison or censored by editors before publishing the book does not make a difference, since in both cases it is clear how much of a taboo the topic was, and how daring Mitchison was by publishing the novel with fragments such as those discussed in this B.A. Thesis. Moreover, this scene was not very relevant for the novel as a whole, which indicates that Mitchison probably included this fragment in order to suggest that, firstly, many women resorted to various methods in order not to get pregnant, and secondly, that by doing so they simultaneously emancipated themselves and focused on their professional and/or personal growth. It was not the first time this had been commented, but it is remarkable how Mitchison presented it as a reality despite some not wanting to see that the process of female emancipation was progressively developing.

The second and probably most interesting fragment regarding abortion appears during Dione's travel to the Soviet Union, where she has the opportunity to visit an abortion and birth-control clinic, and the procedures carried out in it. In the scene now presented, Dione and her companions are taken to a hospital room where a woman is laid on a table, ready for the abortion to be carried out. Although one visitor mentioned that no anaesthetics were used, the procedure

was all done with extreme competence and rapidity. At first it did not seem to hurt much; then blood began to flow and the woman on the table shut her eyes and went white. Now blood and tissue poured out of her; the surgeon took another instrument and for a minute or so there was the peculiarly unpleasant sound of metal scrapping against human flesh. Once the woman at the table gave a little gasping cry; no one heeded her. [...] It was all satisfactorily over. [...] It had taken less than five minutes. [...] A porter came in [...] and shifted her over, helping her to cover herself; he seemed to do everything far more gently and tenderly than any English hospital nurse. (Mitchison 259)

Probably, the element that strikes the reader the most in this fragment is not only the description itself, but the contrast presented in these lines. On the one hand, this description is quite crude—again, it is unclear whether it was even more raw before the book was censored, but it is remarkable nonetheless—and the note on how the patient was not anaesthetised can create a feeling of empathy and sorrow for her and how much pain she must have suffered in those five minutes. All this could support the anti-abortion perspective, or at least create a sense of fear in many women. On the other hand, the procedure is carried out in a legal, effective, and safe way; and there are two very interesting commentaries. Firstly, the note on the Soviet porter, which translates to a quite short yet harsh critique on English hospitals and the treatment given by its nurses. Secondly, and as mentioned before, this event that Mitchison herself witnessed in real life morphs into both a support on the Soviet health system, at least regarding contraception, and a critique on the laws and morality of Dione's society: after witnessing the scene, she thinks that “[t]hat's what the fuss is all about, that's reality” (259), thus remarking how ridiculous the British ban on abortion seemed now that it was put into perspective and compared to reality, i.e. the Soviet method.

In addition to this, the birth-control clinic is described by the narrator as “the alternative, when it worked” (259), highlighting the fact that unwanted pregnancies could not be solved only by preventive methods; how these were not completely effective; and how, despite these evidences, the British government still preferred birth-control methods over the legalisation of abortion. All in all, it is evident why this fragment could create controversy: in these few lines, Mitchison is not only normalising abortions, but also supporting the Soviet Union, which was not tolerable in Britain and Western Europe in

the 1930s. However, in the following pages Dione seems to be going through an internal conflict: whilst she remains a supporter of abortion and Socialist politics, she is confronted with the rawness of a procedure she had never witnessed before. It is clear that these thoughts are not only caused by a sensitive personality that fears blood or explicit images, but also by traditional conceptions regarding abortion, which will be now examined.

In the last part of the novel, Dione reveals that she is pregnant and unsure of whether having an abortion or not. In the beginning, she felt guilty, since Tom and her had agreed on not having any more children, and seemed to accept the idea of having an abortion as a way of redeeming herself, despite knowing that the process was either very expensive or dangerous if practiced in England. However, the memories from Russia come back to Dione, and the more she thinks about it, the more she rejects the idea, to the point of saying she feels 'like a murderer'. In an attempt of rationalising the issue, Tom then tries to persuade Dione by telling her “‘Is it any worse than birth control really? [...] It’s just a collection of cells growing in you that oughtn’t to be there—like a cancer’” (490). However, Dione finally decides to have the child, and when she asks Tom if he will hate the baby, he answers “‘No, it’ll be a baby then, not just—a mistake.’” (501). In this part we can see two different factions, Tom and Dione, and how they respectively represent a more idealised pro-abortion posture and one that, although not anti-abortion, reproduces some of the arguments reinforced by such people. Tom acts detached from the subject, constantly appealing to reason and not feelings, and even making some surprising statements for both Mitchison’s and our contemporary times. Indeed, Naomi was quite daring using this logic of comparing birth control and abortion methods, since they were not regarded as similar procedures by any chance in her times, and especially by comparing an embryo with a cancer. I will not debate if the term is suitable enough, but I would like to highlight how Tom again uses science and a more empirical approach in order to erase the sentimental bond that Dione has created and debunk her preconceptions and arguments, to the point of clearly explaining that this pregnancy is a mistake, and that the foetus would be treated as such until it was born. There is no doubt that his statements—and, ultimately, Mitchison’s decision on including them—are not only revolutionary, but unacceptable for many. Moreover, it is curious how this foetus-cancer-mistake correlation is one of the most striking parts of the novel, and yet it was not censored, as far as we know.

On the other hand, we have the character of Dione, who has developed throughout the novel in two ways regarding abortion. Regarding the more public sphere, from beginning to end she supports both birth control and abortion methods, despite her personal experience with the Russian clinic and her own pregnancy. This is quite remarkable, since those are evidently shocking experiences for her, but that do not change her opinion in terms of female rights and health. However, and regarding the more private sphere, it is curious how the character of Dione is a strong supporter of abortion methods in the beginning of the novel, but progressively shifts into an individual who, as mentioned above, reproduces some of the typical anti-abortion arguments when facing a situation of unwanted pregnancy herself. Rather than discrediting her character, this internal conflict reinforces the three-dimensionality of Dione, an organic character with fears and thoughts that sometimes are far from the Socialist ideology she supports. She perfectly exemplifies the dichotomy many women had to inevitably suffer: in order to liberate themselves from their patriarchal society, women had—and still have—to deconstruct themselves and erase the wrong preconceptions that were fostered by this society; a society that contemplated abortions as something terrible, and consequently used arguments such as the one stated already in order to make women feel guilty, sinful, or even criminal. One could easily think that a person with Dione's transgressive mentality regarding abortion would not generally believe in such things, but her internal conflict demonstrates how this deconstruction is never complete neither perfect. In the novel it is unclear whether these fears are caused by the predominant ideology of her times or because of the rawness she saw in Russia, since she names both events when expressing her doubts regarding the abortion, but it is probable that those are only two of the various reasons why Dione, as a round character with thoughts and feelings, decided to keep on with the gestation.

4

Multiple-Partner Relationships and Rape in *We have been Warned* (1935)

As it has been mentioned numerous times throughout this B.A. Thesis, *WHBW* created an important controversy because of the taboo topics it included, such as multiple-partner relationships or rape. However, and as I will present in this chapter, the main issue brought about by these topics was not, arguably, their sheer presence, but the way Mitchison addressed them, normalising them and portraying quite organic and coherent characters. Moreover, and in contrast to the British context already shown, the concept of sexuality in the early USSR was generally more open and revolutionary. This was fostered, among other elements, by Communist writers such as F. Engels and his treatise *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884); or Alexandra Kollontai's numerous works on Communism, free love, female emancipation... It is unknown whether Mitchison was influenced by these texts in particular, but she was clearly aware of the unique mentality of the Soviet Union at her time, and it was arguably one of the reasons why she chose the USSR as the setting where Tom's extramarital relationship would take place.

Regarding multiple-partner relationships, Mitchison again portrays Dione as a conflicting character whose development is oscillating: she first enthusiastically consents on the relationship, both because she and her husband had had casual affairs in the past and because she is aware of how happy Oksana makes Tom. Nonetheless, her intrusive thoughts progressively appear and make Dione show reticence towards Tom and Oksana's relationship, due to her own jealousy and insecurities. However, instead of succumbing to this, Dione rationalises her thoughts: "why should [Dione], a rational woman, be annoyed because Oksana was a woman too? Hadn't she herself admired Oksana, both for her body and her mind, long before Tom had?" (314). From that moment onwards, the intrusive thoughts still reappear, but Dione tries to cast them away and not to feel jealous. Through the depiction of Dione's feelings and thoughts, Mitchison simultaneously normalises multiple-partner relationships and counterargues the sexist discourses that put women against each other, consequently denouncing the dynamics in

romantic relationships and the vision of women fostered by her 1930s society—and, to some extent, our twenty-first century society too. The author carries out this normalisation by portraying characters who acknowledge the fact that multiple-partner relationships are harshly criticised—and, as seen in Chapter 1, even denounced and punished by law—but characters who also, at the same time, put their happiness and desires ahead of this public negative opinion towards non-traditional forms of relationships. In addition, since Mitchison focuses on the characters' thoughts and emotional development, the reader gets a new and barely known perspective on multiple-partner relationships: there is no immorality or real harm in accepting and having these types of open relationships as long as they are based on mutual consent and caring, and the problems that may result from these relationships—e.g. jealousy or insecurities, as seen in Dione—are something common in both regular and multiple-partner relationships. The result of this normalisation is a clear challenge to the conservative perspectives fostered in society during Mitchison's times, and by taking this into account, it is no surprise that *WHBW* was harshly criticised and censored multiple times. Moreover, we should highlight the irony in these words by Dione: “it was all so silly, when all three of them felt so warmly about one another. Perhaps these things would have an easier convention in a hundred years” (380), as these values are still present in nowadays society, and open relationships are still not accepted by many.

When trying to counterargue the aforementioned sexist discourses that put women against each other, Mitchison is much more direct and explicit, and this could be due to the fact that numerous movements of female emancipation—e.g. the suffragist and pro-abortion movements—began to challenge the misogynistic values of the early twentieth century, whilst the support of non-traditional relationships was not as vocal and relevant, and these relationships still are a controversial topic up to our days. Nonetheless, Mitchison uses Dione's character development to transmit an important message: Dione's jealousy is the result of having grown up in a misogynist society that induces women to worship their male partner and distrust any other females as being just temptresses who will ruin their current relationships. By analysing the root of these preconceptions, Dione is able to understand that Oksana is not the enemy, or her rival in a contest where the final prize is living by the side of a man; Dione sees Oksana as a woman whose intelligence should be respected and praised, not only her beauty. These ideas are worth mentioning not only because of their forward-looking perspective, but also because, whilst the female

movements previously mentioned focused on partial victories, such as the right to vote, Mitchison is analysing, criticising, and debunking the root of her patriarchal society and its negative consequences for women, and how they should be challenged, thus progressively destroying this patriarchal society to the core. Mitchison reinforces the idea of sorority, at the same times that she demonstrates why women are not enemies but allies in this process of empowerment. It is clear that Mitchison was not the only female author who defended these ideas in the 1930s, and that there are other women writers who tackled these problems under an even more revolutionary and forward-looking perspective. However, it is very remarkable how Mitchison, who had acquired some fame as the writer of historical novels that included subtle feminist ideas but mainly focused on the historical aspect, drastically changed the style of her writing in *WHBW*. Critics define it as a historical novel that deals with the interwar period, but in reality, Mitchison used the format to present a contemporary setting for those 1930s readers where she, under the form of a fictional and invented story, included her turbulent personal life, defended feminist and Socialist values, and depicted a perspective on numerous topics that the general public had not heard of before; this was the case of the abortion scene already mentioned in Chapter 3, a raw and polemical description barely seen in British literature before.

Moving on to the topic of rape, it should be highlighted that there is no explicit scene of Dione's rape in *WHBW*, just an abrupt stop graphically marked by suspension points. It is unclear whether this was another example of the harsh censorship the novel underwent, or Mitchison's original idea, but the sudden ellipsis seems to better relate to the idea of censorship. Nonetheless, it cannot be completely assured; in its place, Mitchison portrayed Dione's emotional and psychological evolution after the rape, with the use of a special narrative device: *WHBW* presents an omniscient third person narrator that usually focalises through the character of Dione, and although this focalisation is something typical in Modernism, and this is the literary trend that influenced the Scottish Renaissance authors the most, it is remarkable how this focalisation is more evident than ever in this scene, and that there is no graphic or explicit sign of when this narrator shifts from focalising through Dione to describing events from an external perspective. It is likely that Mitchison chose to do so in this specific fragment in order to convey her message in a more direct way, as well as to create a more private and intimate environment where there is no narrator that acts as a mediator. An example of this are

these sentences Dione says to herself after Idris has raped her: ““God, how beastly, god, god. And all quite real. It has happened. Happened to me. Happened... for ever” (413). Although short, her words are categorical, full of sentiment, and transmit an evident sense of hopelessness. The final effect of all these elements is that the reader is able to strongly empathise with Dione and understand how traumatic rape can be in both physical and psychological terms, which counteracts the misogynistic prejudices against rape victims mentioned in Chapter 1, and voices a theme that was, and still is, seen as a taboo topic in literature.

In the aftermath of the rape, however, Mitchison displays a narrative that belongs more to the Realist movement than to the Modernist one: Dione began by feeling disgusted and frustrated after being raped, but she progressively reflected on the conditions in which Idris and his working-class fellows lived, and thought that there was ““no wonder why Idris Pritchard was like he had shown himself to be”” (415). Moreover, and in contrast to the previous section, the narrator shifts to an external one, and the final effect of this combination is a deterministic approach to misogyny in working-class people. Through Dione, Mitchison represents Idris not as an individual willingly acting in an abusive way, but the product of her contemporary capitalist society that oppresses the working-class people and makes them frustrated, impotent and, consequently, violent; in order to cope with this rage, some men resort to rape and sexual abuse, where they can turn the tables and exert oppression and violence towards an individual who is thought to be inferior to them, i.e. working-class women. In fact, Agnes points out how Idris had done something similar with a working-class girl, and how, because of her social condition, people had not believed her side of the story, she had lost her job and he had received no punishment. However, this is not the case for Dione. She is a middle-class woman, and she is aware that she could take ““advantage of [her] economic position”” (421), but she decides not to do so. In the end, Dione understands Idris as a victim of the system, but she still acknowledges that he has committed a crime in which she is the victim, and in order to feel better, she wants to make him feel the way she does: hopeless, frustrated, and abused; not through her economic privilege, but through physical violence, which is what he has used against her.

Whilst the more ‘sociological’ part of the deterministic analysis—e.g. exploring the psychological effects of capitalist values on working-class people—can be considered

accurate, the effect of this somehow Realist fragment is one of confusion, for it seems that Dione, by trying to understand Idris's motivations, almost justifies an act of rape. It is unclear why Mitchison decided to present Dione under this light, but after knowing Mitchison's ideology and Dione's character development, I would like to argue that this contradiction was intentional, and that Mitchison included it in order to demonstrate how rape victims too can justify an act of rape, as a consequence of the rape culture discussed in the first chapter. Firstly, because Dione explicitly states that the rape was partly her fault and that Idris's actions were justified by his working-class condition, and still thinks so after discussing it with Agnes, who can judge the situation from the outside and who tries to make Dione see why she is wrong: no matter what condition and context, rape is a crime and it cannot be justified. Secondly, because if we compare Dione's ideas regarding sexuality in the novel's previous chapters and in this one, we can see a remarkable incoherence of character unseen before in *WHBW*. Indeed, Dione has been presented as a conflicting and shifting character in the novel and this paper, but her attitude regarding rape is not linked to her three-dimensionality, but to a more simplistic and deterministic analysis that does not correspond to her pro-female mentality. Moreover, by 1935 Mitchison was a renowned author with a highly praised style, and this type of character incoherence was not something typical in her, no matter how dubious the narrative quality of *WHBW* was according to Calder. Due to all these reasons, it is easy to think that Dione's contradiction was intentional, and that Mitchison included it in order to make the reader meditate about the mental state of rape victims, and how the general opinion and the sexist misconceptions fostered by society—both hers and ours—can highly affect the perspective of reality these victims have.

Conclusions

In the early 1930s, in a social context where British women had been granted their right to vote less than five years before, Naomi Mitchison decided that her novel *We have been Warned* had to be published and read, well knowing that it would be intensely criticised and censored, in order to spread a revolutionary message about sexuality and politics that would challenge her *status quo*. Mitchison, fostered by a Scottish literary movement where women voiced their opinions on gender issues, presented a novel that, much as her private life, differed from the traditional values of British society during the early twentieth century. She defended the use of birth-control methods in order to help women emancipate from their role as mothers and she presented abortion—and, indirectly, the Soviet health system—as a successful and necessary practice that should be legalised in Britain at a time where the law was very restrictive towards the topic. She debunked the traditional structure of romantic relationships and families fostered by capitalism; supported multiple-partner relationships based on mutual consent and caring as a possible and socially acceptable alternative; and normalised these new types of relationships through the characters of her novel. She dared to vocally speak about rape and its consequences, analyse the effects that her contemporary capitalist society had on working-class men and women and their interaction, and portray a rape victim that reproduced the sexist stereotypes fostered by society regarding sexual abuse survivors, thus indirectly criticising them.

We have been Warned (1935) was not a successful novel due to social and literary reasons, and the figure of Naomi Mitchison is nowadays quite unimportant even in her home country, but this should not be the case. This B.A. Thesis has tried to rediscover Mitchison's personal story and literary value in terms of sexuality and politics, acknowledging the revolutionary and radical feature of the elements she included for a British writer of the early twentieth century; moreover, this B.A. Thesis has tried to make the reader reflect, by seeing the themes of birth control, rape, abortion, and multiple partner relationships through an external perspective, on how relevant these topics presented in *We have been Warned* are, and how, despite the almost one-hundred-year difference between the creation of the novel and this B.A. Thesis, some of the socio-political context Mitchison tried to challenge is still present, maybe not on the surface

level, but definitely in its misogynistic, conservative, and capitalist roots. Alabama anti-abortion bills passed in May 2019 are just an anecdotal example of how this one-hundred-year difference is not as drastic as it seems, and in order to understand the female struggle against misogyny in all of its forms, further research on forgotten literary figures such as Naomi Mitchison is highly encouraged.

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