Ecriture spirituelle : the mysticism of Evelyn Underhill, May Sinclair and Dorothy Richardson.
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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the influence of mysticism upon selected women writers in the early decades of this century, and the subsequent emphasis upon women’s creativity in modern (feminist) theological thought. Popular mysticism at the turn of the century provided an impetus for modernist women writers; I show that the treatment of mysticism in women's fiction anticipates later feminist critical thought. I conclude by looking at the role played by fiction writing in modern feminist theology, explaining how this discipline works towards strengthening the relationship between creativity and religious mysticism by exploring women's fiction, which was, at the beginning of the century, itself inspired by aspects of religious mysticism.

I begin my argument with an analysis of the role played by specific developments in nineteenth-century religious thought and early twentieth-century studies of mysticism, showing how strands of affective, empirical, and autobiographical discourses were developed in such a way as to enable women writing at the beginning of the century to draw on the mystical tradition in their fiction. I show how Evelyn Underhill produced a mystical discourse which encompassed both novelistic and religious writing. I proceed to show how May Sinclair and, more progressively, Dorothy Richardson, then developed their own versions of mysticism through their fiction writing. I show how each of these writers further advances the concepts of mysticism and gender in the direction of later critical and theological feminist thought.

I then discuss the importance of mysticism for feminist critical thought, in particular for Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva, showing that the unconscious and poetic drives of écriture feminine are anticipated in the “mystical” writing of the women writers whose work I have examined. In conclusion, I show how the importance of creativity and gender in mysticism is highlighted by modern feminist theology. This project can be traced back to the appropriation and development of mysticism by women writers earlier in the century.
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METHOD OF CITATION

Unless otherwise stated, works are cited with reference to date of publication of the edition consulted, followed by the page number. Where the title, author or editor is unclear from the context, these are indicated before the date.
INTRODUCTION

The association of women and mysticism this century is not always perceived as a positive one. In *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (1995), the feminist philosopher of religion, Grace Jantzen, suggests that the experience of mysticism gradually became defined as an ineffable, private emotional encounter in order to remove it from the sphere of political management of society and religion. She writes of a direct increase of association between mysticism and women, who were permitted to have spiritual experiences, but powerless to speak with authority about their insights. Jantzen's view of this association of women with mysticism is therefore somewhat negative; she warns of mysticism's ability to silence and disempower. But as women mystics, particularly in the medieval period, have spoken and written of their (often vivid and imaginative) experiences with authority, this thesis explores how ideas about mysticism have been addressed by women writers this century. In particular, I investigate whether the women writers treated in this thesis developed the definition of such spiritual experience in a more affirmative and expressive way than Jantzen suggests.

Rather than assuming that mysticism is an unchanging spiritual experience within a strictly religious context, this thesis explores how women writers discovered a creative expression of their inner spirituality through the inspiration of contemporary ideas about mysticism, and how they helped to move these ideas on. I introduce my argument, therefore, by examining constructions of mysticism at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the idea of mysticism was defined and developed both in terms of experiential philosophy and of psychology. In particular, the attention paid to the emotional effects of a "mystical experience" became associated, by William James, with the importance of what he termed the "subliminal realm" of the mind, a realm which would subsequently be defined as the unconscious by Freud, but which James saw as a valid channel for imagination and spirituality. As well as drawing attention to the "subliminal realm" and its role in spiritual experience, James first suggested the idea of the "stream of consciousness", a term which became important for much modernist literature, but which James did not link directly with
the expression of mysticism. Not all psychological studies of mysticism were as open-minded as James'; I also look at texts which were hostile and eclectic in turn. And James himself was not immune to contemporary prejudice regarding gender. But the period's general interest in the imaginative workings of the mind, flowing from the unconscious into consciousness, and the struggle to express this imaginative process, has led me to the study of its literature in order to explore how such ideas about mysticism were used, by women writers, within a creative context.

Evelyn Underhill provides a link between the areas of religious thought and women's fiction writing. Underhill in fact started her writing life as a novelist, exploring those themes of spirituality which she was later, more famously, to address in texts such as Mysticism, in which James' ideas are acknowledged. Importantly, Mysticism was certainly read by two women writers - May Sinclair and Dorothy Richardson - who, while fascinated by mysticism, were equally concerned to develop the novelistic form in order to allow the expression of individual consciousness. They were also interested in the subject of gender to a greater degree than was Underhill. By examining the work first of May Sinclair, whose mysticism is chiefly concerned with loss, then of Dorothy Richardson, who was to develop the mystical concepts of vision and illumination, I trace the progression of mysticism's influence in women's writing, an influence which Underhill had to a large extent initiated.

Underhill, Sinclair and Richardson were not the only women writers to explore mysticism alongside stylistic innovation and an awareness of gender issues. There was, for example, Virginia Woolf, whose aunt, Caroline Stephen, was a respected Quaker. But rather than continue to explore all the women writing in this period, a task too large for this thesis, I move on to show how ideas about mysticism, gender and writing have developed in later thinkers. In examining the ideas of the feminist critics Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva, I show that mysticism, and the ways of articulating what James termed an "ineffable" experience, are even more strongly linked with gender and innovative creative writing in their work, whether "novelistic" in a strict sense or not.

I have not analysed the work of Underhill, Sinclair, and Richardson solely in terms of psychoanalytically acute feminist criticism, although I introduce such

Such work is generally available: Jean Radford's examination of Pilgrimage, for example.

Dorothy Richardson, Sussex: Harvester, 1990.
critical ideas where appropriate, and have shown that these writers point towards the critical concepts of later feminist writers and thinkers. My emphasis is on the particular space for creativity which mysticism, and which psychoanalysis has indicated, but paid less attention to than the aetiology and symptoms of madness and hysterical disorders. Rather than continue to pursue this psychoanalytical preoccupation, I have looked at the work of the later feminist critics as experimental mystical writers in their own right, and I suggest that it is mysticism, rather than hysteria or other forms of "madness", which has provided the creative space for gendered exploration of imagination and writing. Just as psychoanalytic criticism seeks to explore those "moments of vision" which madness has been said to facilitate in writers such as Woolf\(^2\), I have set out to show that the insights of mysticism, classed as neither mental illness nor rigorous rationality, have played an essential part in the development of women's fiction-writing, criticism and religious thought this century, allowing, additionally, the closer relationship of these three disciplines.

In concluding this thesis therefore, I examine the way in which mysticism has provided a place for "visionary" gendered discourse in contemporary theology, and return to the area of religious thought, where I had begun my research. I examine ways in which there is now an increased awareness of the imagination in feminist theology and, specifically, in mysticism within a feminist theological context. The developments of mysticism's creative space have facilitated this awareness in theology, just as they have in the fiction and criticism through which I have traced its influence. Although the question of what constitutes mysticism and who counts as a mystic may remain open (plurality being one of the emphases of feminist critical thought), the conclusion of this thesis affirms that the space of spiritual creativity developed by mysticism has been one of the major forces to have shaped women's writing and critical thought (both literary and religious) this century.

CHAPTER ONE
THE HAUNTED MIND: MYSTICISM IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

In mystical literature words are frequently confused with things, and symbols with realities; so that much of this literature seems to the reader to refer to some self-consistent and exclusive dream-world, and not to the achievement of universal truth.¹

¹ In order to understand how mysticism became so important in women's imaginative representation of spirituality, it is necessary to ask how the popularity and potential of early twentieth-century mysticism came about. I shall therefore look briefly at some pre-twentieth-century religious thinkers whose work pointed towards a need to articulate the inner experience of mysticism. One predominant strand of religious thought which led to this situation was that of Kant, the champion of experiential logic, who suggested over a hundred years previously that our internal conceptions of God governed not only our morality, but our religious feelings in general:

The postulates of the practical reason are demands springing from man's inner nature. ... The ideas, that is, of God, freedom and immortality have 'objects', though not of course such as can be given to perception. (Reardon, 1966: 11)

However, Kant was far from endorsing an emotional appreciation of God. In his Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century, B.M.G. Reardon pinpoints Kant as the main founder of rationalist empiricism. As Jantzen specifies in her later study, "according to Kant, all knowledge comes to us by experience" (1995: 308), but by experience of a strictly rational and unemotional nature. Morality could be derived, logically, therefrom, and was all we could expect to know of God: "Kant did believe that the concept of God serves as a regulative idea for human morality". However, affective appreciation is explicable, but invalid:

¹ Underhill, Essentials of Mysticism, 1920: 1
Supposed experience of God is ... nothing but a projection of our own thoughts and feelings on a spurious metaphysical plane. It is a "self-deception prejudicial to religion" to suppose that we are capable of any "feeling of the immediate presence of the Supreme Being"; we simply do not have the mental equipment for such experience. (1995: 162)

As Jantzen points out, Kant believed that the sensing of a religious presence is nothing but a projection of one's own questing drives; he does not suggest that such "supposed experience", however imaginatively described, was of any religious value. How then did rationalistically-trained philosophers such as James come to pay so much attention to the emotional effects of a supposed mystical encounter?

2 The answer, as Jantzen suggests, is with the weight of importance attached to a feeling of emotional dependence on the Deity, advocated initially by the religious philosopher Schleiermacher:

He sought to give an account of religion from within, appealing to feeling and intuition rather than to any external source, such as scripture or tradition... his account of religion and his explicit use of the vocabulary of inward experience set the stage for the modern understanding of what mysticism is and how it should be studied. (1995: 311)

Reardon concurs with this analysis, highlighting Schleiermacher's ahistorical conception of the phenomenon of religious experience, as well as his justification of the importance accorded to individual experience:

Religion, [Schleiermacher] contended, is a consciousness of divinity which may and does express itself in differing guises but which is independent alike of rational argument and historical tradition.(1966: 40)

The major work in which Schleiermacher first proposed these ideas was the Speeches on Religion to its Cultured Despisers about a century before the work of Inge, James, and Underhill. Reardon remarks upon "much traditional theologising" being "cast aside" for the turning of the attention instead towards "intuitive contemplation". The faculties of logic and proof apparently now at bay, passivity, noetic surety, and ineffability, qualities later defined by James as essentially mystical, come to the fore:
The strongly mystical character of Schleiermacher's thinking is apparent, and at times the passivity of his attitude- the stress, clear also in his ethical teaching, on the elimination of the self or its absorption into a larger reality- seems more oriental than Christian. (1966: 41)

In addition, Schleiermacher describes the religious experience as an ineffable but convincing personal encounter, to be differentiated from religious doctrine; in his early writings, he was liable to the charge of pantheism, with a wide-ranging conception of deity as everywhere and readily accessible to individual revelation:

In the first addition of the Addresses Schleiermacher's conception of deity showed a pantheistic tendency which in later editions, as still more noticeably in The Christian Faith, he modifies in a theistic direction. In 1799 he expressed the view that "piety" rather than any formal idea of God is what matters. (1966: 41)

As we shall see, this is a similar spiritual journey to that made by Underhill in the twentieth century. However, as a male theologian (unlike Underhill), Schleiermacher had untroubled access to the dichotomy between mind and body aligned in traditional fashion to the difference between male (spiritual and intellectual) and female ("fleshly" and closer to the earth):

[by becoming like Christ] only thus will he find deliverance from that domination of "sense"- his "fleshly" lower nature- which is the condition of sin. (1966: 42)

This was a long-established prejudice hard to shed. However, there are some fine pieces of Schleiermacher's writing which do have a direct link to and influence upon spiritually oriented writers such as Underhill and Richardson, who, like Schleiermacher, rather than be absorbed immediately into the formal works of ecclesiastical liturgy, sought rather:

the immediate consciousness of the universal existence of all finite things, in and through the Infinite, and of all temporal things in and through the Eternal. Religion is to seek this and find it in all that lives and moves, in all growth and change, in all doing and suffering. (On Religion, 1966: 43-44)

These comments on time and temporality have their echo in Inge and more experimental writers. However, Schleiermacher's assumption that women are
excluded from intellectual activity is in no doubt; it is a necessary parallel to his dichotomy between the desirable life of the spirit and the wilful fleshliness of living in the body, to be spurned as much as is feasibly possible. *Piety* is possible for women, Schleiermacher argues, but only because it is a separate thing from the workings of the masculine intellect, which capacity [i.e. educational opportunity] women would not have:

> Regard the case of women. You ascribe to them religion, not only as an adornment, but you demand of them the finest feeling for distinguishing the things that excel. [however]...only by keeping outside the range both of science and of practice can it [Piety in women] maintain its proper sphere and character. (ibid, 1966: 45)

Schleiermacher is, in the final analysis, on the side of an emotional definition of religious feeling, which he terms as "piety" - a feeling of profound and absolute dependence on a Deity - and which Reardon and other readers of Schleiermacher's thought have associated with the phenomenon of mysticism, in the sense that it could be seen as the pre-verbalised foundation of all subsequent religious dogmatizing:

> the doctrines in all their forms have their ultimate ground so exclusively in the emotions of the religious self-consciousness, that where these do not exist the doctrines do not arise. (1966: 43)

Jantzen stresses that we can not emphasise Schleiermacher's Romantic influence too much when we come to study important turn-of-the-century texts such as James'; for these thinkers "found the essence of mysticism in feeling, and saw it as an experience of union as contrasted with a process of rationality" (Jantzen, 1995: 316-17).

According to Schleiermacher, all that discouraged women from speaking with authority about their mystical experience was the supposed lack of intellect - in actual fact the lack of education - which hindered them. Schleiermacher's relative lack of historical categorising, and his emphasis on the pre-verbalised, and the pre-dogmatised aspects of religion, did eventually open a positive path on which women could travel and encounter mystical creativity. This became more possible when the importance of vision and imagination for expression of this non-dogmatic phenomena of "piety" or intuitive spirituality became evident and accessible, in a way that it had not done since the medieval period, when women visionaries had been able
to claim mystical authority prompted directly by the voice of God. The importance of an intuitive knowledge of divinity which preceeded religious doctrine, and even language itself, was the start of a whole new way of looking at the mind which had repercussions not only for religious mysticism, but for psychology and for writing practices, as notions of an unconscious or subliminal aspect of the mind, prior to or independent of the intellect, began to be recognised by thinkers and theorists.

Further impetus for this direction was provided by the philosopher Vladimir Solovyov (1839-1901). His Lectures on Godmanhood (1878), given five years after the birth of Dorothy Richardson, encompassed the idea of the transformation of the ground of one's being into an as-it-were divinised creature, a deified human. Richardson was aware of Solovyov, mentioning him in some of her correspondence and his influential thinking is traceable in the drive of her Pilgrimage. Deeply interested in both mysticism and German Idealist philosophy, in his day he was something of a perennial philosopher:

[Solovyov's] great aim, which admitted even gnostic elements, was to create an organic synthesis of all aspects of the human understanding upon the directing and energising principle of this same personified divine Wisdom (Sophis)[sic: generally Sophia]. He may be described therefore as a Christian philosopher in the sense of one who constructs a general philosophy of life on the basis of the Christian creed; but the spirit which informs his work is predominantly mystical and theosophical. (Reardon 1966: 218)

Solovyov's concentration on the shadowy personage of the holy spirit under the ancient and feminine title of wisdom, Sophia, presages feminist theological emphases in general, and the tenor of his thought is far from dogmatically exclusive. In addition, Solovyov was intensely interested in Christian mysticism from both the Western and Eastern traditions, foreshadowing Underhill's and Sinclair's attempts to build bridges in this area. His balance of the two traditions anticipated the embodiment of mystical principles in a fruitful, active, spirituality, disregarding Quietism and its lack of "Western" progress:

see Jantzen 1995: 157-192

For example, she writes in March 1947 to Cowper Powys about Solovyov's awareness of orthodoxy together with the need for ceaseless development and interpret
The divine element of Christianity, preserved by the East, can now reach its perfection in mankind... this has not only a historical, but also a mystical, meaning. (Lectures on Godmanhood, 1966: 234-235)

Solovyov was, however, inevitably permeated by the gender prejudices of the time: it was still assumed that man was the active principle of spiritual growth; the "church", where he lived (spiritually) and was nurtured was a passive, female, maternal body to be fertilised by vitalising masculine thought:

[But] If the overshadowing that descended upon the human Mother with the active power of God, produced the incarnation of Divinity; then the fertilisation of the Divine Mother (the Church) by the active human beginning must produce a free deification of humanity. (ibid.)

Even such an innovative and broad-minded spiritual pioneer as Solovyov established a mixed message for modernist women writers struggling with definitions for their thought and creativity. However, he undeniably opened further areas of opportunity and speculation in the area of mysticism. Solovyov's notion of the individual "ground of being", suggesting a note of divine immanence which had been present in earlier mystics such as Eckhart (with an intellectual emphasis) and Julian of Norwich (with an emphasis on integration and the will) helped to prepare the way for the visionary and personal creative writing of the early twentieth century. But such writers needed a religious precedent for the exercising of their individual voices.

Attention should briefly be paid to two philosophical and religious figures of the nineteenth century, very different from each other, but who each had influence upon and/or repercussions for modernist women writers with regard to their creative examinations of mysticisms. In particular they both used, honoured and enlarged the autobiographical approach to spiritual development, telling their own stories in their most memorable works, and taking to different degrees and conclusions what would become known in psychoanalysis as the "talking cure" of the individual voice and the personification of elements within the spirit of the autobiographical writer.

The first is John Henry Newman, the co-founder and philosophical expounder of the Oxford Movement, who eventually converted to the Roman Catholic Church.

see Jantzen, 1995: 145-6
(in 1845) towards whose ideas he had drawn inescapably and inevitably (he would say) closer. His *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864) appeared towards the end of his life, when he had all but completed his religious journey and was attempting to justify his authoritative position in the Catholic Church. His spiritual journey took a different turn from that of Evelyn Underhill almost a century later. Underhill had problems with the condemnation of modernism (predominantly religious liberalism rather than literary modernism) within the Catholic Church at the time she was seriously considering entering; in addition her husband-to-be was distinctly displeased with the prospect. Neither of these reasons could have been even a potential threat to Newman. He was firm about the necessity of submission to Church authority: "man's energy of intellect must be smitten hard and thrown back by infallible authority, if religion is to be saved at all" (1966: 271). Yet this was, to some extent, the conclusion at which Underhill herself arrived; or, at least, she acknowledged the need for some kind of discipline and direction in those whose mystical inclinations might otherwise lead them into solipsistic and self-injurious traps. And there is a definite connection between Newman and those such as Underhill in their personification of the inner voice, the voice of conscience, which overrules, it would seem, both external instruction and purely personal inclination:

> And at bottom, always, is the testimony of conscience, "that solemn Monitor, personal, peremptory, unargumentative, irreparable, minatory, definitive," whose witness to God's existence is direct and independent of revelation or dogma. (Reardon, 1966: 271)

This tendency to personify the sense of spiritual morality is one which influences later fiction writers, including Underhill. The merging of spirituality and morality is firmer in Newman than it was in Schleiermacher, who saw "piety" as separate from but still interdependent with morality and intellect. The importance of the individual voice has also become more prominent, though still, implicitly, confined to the authoritative masculine individual.

Turning to Emerson, the American freethinking poet and essayist, we encounter a flamboyant character. Emerson's is much more, and much more obviously, the belief that humankind can become divine through its own effort
or spiritual enlightenment. If this is achieved, God will fuse with the soul, or rather be revealed within it, as a kind of Jungian collective unconscious, or divinity:

The essence of Emerson's religious position is his belief in the divinity of man. This the individual will realise through self-reliance, by which alone he will be able to possess his soul. Mere conventionalism must be thrown off, originality, in thought and experience, cultivated... God himself Emerson conceives pantheistically as - to employ his own expression - the "Oversoul", rather than as personal deity; at any rate the idea is left without precise content. (1966: 376)

However, we should not disregard the fact that, in their differing ways, both thinkers stressed the necessity for the activity of moral deliberation and its ensuing good works, and of that peculiar "voice" within spiritual or religious writing, which Newman concedes as conscience, Emerson more as the spirit of God- a link to the elevation of the "Divine Wisdom" urged by Solovyov. The strength of Emerson, argues Reardon:

lay in his unwavering assurance, puritan in spirit, of the primacy of morals in human life, and in the individual life rather than the collective. ("God enters by a private door into every individual"). The qualities to be generated and fostered are discipline, thoroughness and concentration of effort. (ibid)

As we shall see, Dorothy Richardson was extremely interested and influenced by Emerson. Miriam Henderson, Pilgrimage's autobiographical heroine, carries around her volume of Emerson as she does no other book; it is her devotional manual for a considerable part of Richardson's epic. Emerson's message of an independent route to discovering an immanent God is of particular appeal - and not just to Richardson. Richardson would have been, however, especially struck by Emerson's notions on the nature of time, and how the individual human soul will have a different - perhaps multiple - method of perceiving and reordering, and recording, time: "Time and space are but inverse measures of the force of the soul" (1966: 379).

The (re)introduction of the idea of mysticism as a personal experience, profoundly emotional, unrelatable in straightforward language, and transcending the definable barriers of time and space, has, by now, been established by a number of influential thinkers. Originality tempered by discipline (self-reliance, as Emerson
would say) is reinforced by both the Romantic and Rational strands of religious thought. In their respective methods, Newman and Emerson propose strict syncretic regulation of the psyche, together with spirituality by logical deduction in the first instance, collective symbolism and instinctive access to the spiritual on the other: systems which are familiar to twentieth-century thought which has absorbed Freudian and Jungian ideas. However, there are several further nineteenth-century religious writers to whom attention should be paid, at least one of whom further problematises mysticism's opportunities for women writers by specifically treating mysticism with an erotic and gendered analogy.

5 Within Christian religious mysticism, there has been an abiding tendency to equate the relationship of man to God with that of woman to man. We have seen glimmers of this in the nineteenth-century religious philosophers; it was indeed a common spiritual trope, and an analogy especially advocated as a literary expression of mysticism, by the religious writer and poet Coventry Patmore. Patmore firmly established this idea in the Victorian literary conscience by his notorious "Angel in the House".

Coventry Patmore was the most unusual and outspoken writer on the mystical relationship between the soul and God in the late nineteenth century, especially after his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1864. Of course, his eroticisation of the relationship between humankind and God accords with both the Biblical romantic language of the Song of Songs, which had a strong influence on medieval mysticism, and with the medieval revivalist strand of the Pre-Raphaelite movement contemporary with Patmore. Before his conversion he had produced the notorious (for later feminists) "Angel in the House" (1854), while he himself was striving, with his wife, to become an image of the ideal Victorian couple. This domestic epic upheld a feminine ideal of purity and submissiveness, where the angel would provide spiritual and domestic care for her entrepreneurial husband, finding her only sense of vocation in motherhood. Patmore's popularity as a poet declined after his conversion:

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5 as traced, for example, in Copplestone's multi-volumed History of Philosophy
6 In 'Professions for Women', Virginia Woolf cites the importance of "the Angel in the House" as an impediment to early 20th century women's attempts to write professionally. The Death of the Moth, London: Hogarth, 1942, pp. 149.
at this time he began to write odes marked by an erotic mysticism, in *The Unknown Eros* (1877), for instance. It is in the fragmented plans for the destroyed *Sponsa Dei* and the extant *The Rod, The Root and The Flower* (1895) that Patmore most explicitly spells out his conception of the soul's femininity when experiencing a quasi-erotic communion with God, transmuting his ideal of the marital relationship to the religious sphere, and using the former as imperfect pattern of the latter:

No writer, sacred or profane, ever uses the words "he" or "him" of the soul. It is always "she" or "her"; so universal is the intuitive knowledge that the soul, with regard to God who is her life, is feminine. (1895:xxi)

In Patmore's scheme, "woman" becomes increasingly associated with body, visibility, a lower nature to be transfigured by "masculine" divinity:

As it is between Man and Woman, so it is between Christ and Man, who is His "Glory", and between God and Christ, who is God's "Glory"...it has become permissible to look a little behind the veils which have hitherto concealed these truths from the many, though they have always shone clearly to God's Elect, to whom "Thy Maker is thy Husband" is no hyperbole or figure of speech. (1895:lxxi)

Admittedly, there is a strand of Patmore's religious writing which stresses the interconnectedness of the two genders: "The external man and woman are each the projected simulacrum of the latent half of the other, and they do but love themselves in thus loving their opposed likenesses" (Spurgeon, 1913: 48). There is the suggestion, here, that the "male" and "female" qualities may be detached from their biological signification. The "latent" halves foreshadow Jungian - and pre-Jungian - concepts of the anima and animus. However, in Patmore's writing, the link between "flesh" and "woman" always remains strong, and in contrast with the spiritual nature of God, who does the ravishing, and the glorifying.

In her *Mysticism in English Literature*, C.E. Spurgeon confirms that much of Patmore's thought was concretely related to his feelings for his first wife, Emily. Even then, before his conversion to Catholicism, he was already writing religious-oriented verse using the symbolism of human love:

Female and male God made the man;
His image is the whole, not half.
And in our love we dimly scan
The love which is between himself. (1895: i)

Patmore's memoirs reveal the direction of his thoughts: "The relationship of the soul to Christ as His betrothed wife is the key to the feeling with which prayer and love should be offered to Him...She [his wife] showed me what that relationship involves of heavenly submission and spotless passionate loyalty". Spurgeon concludes that "God he conceived of as the great masculine positive force, the soul as the feminine or receptive force, and the meaning of these two, the "mystic rapture" of the Marriage of Divinity and Humanity, as the source of all life and joy" (1913: 49).

Obscure in their mysticism and unacceptable in their erotic explicitness as Patmore knew his writings to be at the time, they nevertheless made more explicit the general tenor of mystical terminology (the sixteenth-century St. John of the Cross, for example, always described the soul as being female to God), and furthermore were of the same tenor of some of the discussions of the mystical relationship with God in the next century, particularly with regard to those who had a hostile view of women's mysticism. Certainly Patmore's influence is not to be underestimated. Underhill recommended Patmore's The Rod, the Root and the Flower to her correspondent Margaret Robinson, who requested a suitable reading list for her spiritual guidance, and quoted it as a preface to her Mysticism. What is suspicious about Patmore's writing, in terms of gender, is that mysticism is by implication severely disempowered in any sphere outside the domestic simply by such a firm comparison of the mystic disposition with that of the "Angel in the House". Jantzen is right in suggesting that by introducing an emphasis of emotion and femininity into the concept of mysticism, the nineteenth-century religious thinkers may have allowed mysticism to be more accessible to women, but at the same time they have imbued it with a depoliticised element of passivity, domesticity and submission. This was not necessarily the dominant construct of mysticism in previous centuries, where it had been more relevant to the political and social structure of a masculine and hierarchical society. But it must be remembered that Patmore is a man, puts himself forward as a "feminine" mystic, and writes highly charged creative pieces about his spiritual encounters. He does not suggest that women would be in an even better position to do...
this, but it would appear that this implicit suggestion was not lost on women of later
generations.

By the early decades of the twentieth century, there were at least three types of
mainstream, male-author surveys of what was seen as the specific phenomenon of
mysticism. These in their turn are important contextual streams of thought from
which the writing of literate and intelligently educated women has grown, sometimes
organically developing from empiricist ideas which yet allow for emotional
definition, sometimes still in accordance with, yet gradually developing and
redefining, psychological and psychoanalytical stereotypes which women writers have
had, chronically, at and before this period, to contend with.

6 Mysticism was much in vogue during the first decades of the twentieth
century. Building on the resurgence of Catholicism (Ultramontanism) in the latter part
of the nineteenth century, this period saw developments in both religious speculation
and psychological inquiry. These fields met in the many discussions and analyses of
mysticism.

In March 1913, in the “Dean Inge wrote that "books on mysticism are
now pouring from the press...some sold by the thousand". The Quakers - "this once
despised sect" - with their emphasis on contemplation, silence, and the individual's
experience of God, saw a considerable increase in adherents, especially from the
ranks of Anglicans and Nonconformists. Many foresaw the dawning of a new age,
that which George Tyrrell had prophesied shortly before his death, saying that "the
Christianity of the future will be mysticism and charity". Maeterlinck too, had
prophesied it, writing that "a book grows old in proportion to its anti-mysticism". The
recent successful visit of Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian mystical poet, also served
to underline the belief that "mysticism in its essence is absolutely autonomous...(it)
crosses all barriers" (Armstrong, 1975: 157-75). At a time when psychoanalysis and
linguistics were undergoing revolutionary developments, the study of mysticism took
many paths, incorporating and contributing to these and other "modernist" trends.
Women, often the subject of mystical studies, wrote theoretical and historical texts
for themselves; some like Evelyn Underhill, took mystical ideas into fiction writing,
and struggled with the opportunities and oppressions of mysticism for their gender.
Although there were esoteric and occult elements to the popular mysticism inspiring women writers at the turn of the century, as we shall see, it is undeniable that the major mystical influence was that of Christianity, however ambiguous and problematic its inheritance was for women. In 1899, Dean Inge's *Christian Mysticism* set forth the traditional religious prospect as it had then evolved. Inge wrote several works, the most influential of which were *Christian Mysticism* (1899), *Mysticism in Religion and Personal Idealism and Mysticism* (1907). Inge's *Christian Mysticism* was a particularly influential text for those British writers interested in the Western religious-philosophical tradition, and especially Evelyn Underhill, who had much respect for Dean Inge, who had a reputation for being forthright and academically acute. But even with Inge, the term "mysticism" was problematic. Inge could certainly not deny that definitions of the concept were many and varied, admitting, in his opening lecture, that:

> No word in our language- not even "Socialism"- has been employed more loosely than "Mysticism". Sometimes it is used as an equivalent for symbolism or allegorism, sometimes for theosophy or occult science; and sometimes it merely suggests the mental state of a dreamer, or vague and fantastic opinions about God and the world. In Roman Catholic writers, "mystical phenomena" mean supernatural suspensions of physical law. Even those writers who have made a special study of the subject show by their definitions of the word how uncertain is its connotation. (1899: 3)

At the end of his volume, the subject is obviously still not settled; Inge's first appendix lists a variety of statements on mysticism, warning that: "The following definitions are given only as specimens. The list might be made much longer" (1899: 335). Indeed it might have been, as interest surrounding the term grew and opportunities opened for creative exploration of the subject. Inge indicated by these statements that the subject of mysticism was indeed open-ended. But he would have been unlikely to entertain concepts that strayed too far from the patriarchal norm he espoused, and contributions to his appendix of definitions remained within the male intellectual tradition of which he was a part.

Nevertheless, Inge picks up on some of the religious ideas of the past century which were to get a significant purchase in later psychoanalytical and fiction writing.
as we shall see. The most significant of these is a development of the idea of Schleiermacher and the Romantics that mysticism accesses an emotional stratum of consciousness which is beyond the bounds of rational logic. Inge, however, in the following quotation, says that mysticism involves the attempt to express this experience of further consciousness:

[Mystical experience is] an extension of the frontier of consciousness; or in religious language, the voice of God speaking to us. Mysticism arises when we try to bring this higher consciousness into relation with the other contents of our minds. Religious Mysticism may be defined as the attempt ... to realise, in thought and feeling, the immanence of the temporal in the eternal, and of the eternal in the temporal. (1899: 5)

Inge's attitude has a greater connective and verbalising drive than Schleiermacher's, who did not associate the feeling of dependent piety with the need for expression in language stretched beyond its normal boundaries. And for Inge, mysticism is obviously more than an emotional state: it is a region of consciousness which is not normally accessible to language. His reference to temporality, reminiscent of Emerson's phrase (see page 16 above), adds a metaphysical overtone to his concept of mysticism. Mysticism is now seen as a supernatural consciousness with the potential to transcend time and space; this consciousness is somehow located in the inner life of the individual.

Inge likens this consciousness to an immanent divine spark within, which must be sought out and allowed to transform the soul:

The Divine spark already shines within us, but it has to be searched for in the innermost depths of our personality, and its light diffused over our whole being. (1899: 7)

This is the quasi-alchemical idea of a "ground of being" which is illuminated by mysticism; we have seen it before in Solovyov's thought, and shall do so again. However, far from stressing an uncanny element of mystery, Inge's emphasis lies in his delineation of self-disciplined psychological processes. There is a vigour in Inge's agenda which leads him to a mysticism of activity and progress, rather than of passivity and reverie: "Mysticism enjoins a dying life, not a living death" (1899: 11). He acknowledges that both interaction with the world and ostensible retreat have
their mystical advocates, although Inge's vigour inclines one to believe that interaction will always be his preference:

The question which divides [the mystics] is this- In the higher stages of the spiritual life, shall we learn most of the nature of God by close, sympathetic, reverent observation of the world around us, including our fellowmen, or by sinking into the depths of our inner consciousness, and aspiring after direct and constant communion with God? (1899: 26)

However, rhythms and cycles of the body and the psyche are recognised by Inge as an intrinsic part of the mystical life:

The truth is there are two movements - a systole and diastole of the spiritual life - an expansion and a concentration. The tendency has generally been to emphasise one at the expense of the other; but they must work together, for each is helpless without the other. (1899: 28)

There is therefore an interdependence at the heart of Inge's vision which is essentially dynamic. We shall come across this quality again.

Although he sees mysticism as a discipline, where various psychological stages can be attained, Inge explains that the mystic experiences rapture or vision, beyond his or her own powers of volition, at the height of the spiritual journey. When dealing with the subject of mystical vision or ecstasy, Inge describes the state by what he considers it is akin to, but from which it slightly differs, i.e., dreams, hallucinations, and artistic inspiration:

Ecstasy or vision begins when thought ceases, to our consciousness, to proceed from ourselves. It differs from dreaming, because the subject is awake. It differs from hallucination, because there is no organic disturbance: it is, or claims to be, a temporary enhancement, not a partial disintegration, of the mental faculties. Lastly, it differs from poetical inspiration, because the imagination is passive. (1899: 14)

Inge feels that visionary moments themselves happen to a soul, a notion of passivity which is developed by James. Ostensibly differentiating the mystic vision from the psychological states of consciousness he compares it with, we are more nonetheless inclined to place Inge's definition of mysticism within a general category of psychology or aesthetics. His definition of ecstatic vision could, for example, be
aligned with the concept of the "creative leap" of artistic talent, which is achieved only through the groundwork of preliminary discipline. But he has more to say on the matter of speaking of such experiences, which stretch the nature of religious and imaginary language.

Importantly, Inge believes that the insights received by the visionary are of a nature that, again, language is incapable, in its traditional role, of describing adequately. He opens the way to further experimentation in language and ultimately to the inscribing of a spirituality which would require a new use of language, or even a new language:

In such cases [divinely instigated visions] the highest intuitions or revelations, which the soul can in its best moments just receive, but cannot yet grasp or account for, make a language for themselves, as it were, and claim the sanction of external authority, until the mind is elevated so far as to feel the authority not less Divine, but no longer external. (1899: 18)

Inge's humility as regards the capability of formal language to express spiritual peak experiences, or indeed any spiritual experiences, takes the pressure off the dogmatism of metaphor. Inge declares both his belief that symbols have the power to express experiences from this spiritual frontier of the mind, and as tending to petrify and need a renewal of form in order to continue their communicative power.

This insight of Inge's paves the way for those trying to write without the shackles of doctrinal and metaphorical absolutism. However, Inge himself has doubts about the ability of language to convey the mystical experience. Again, this is a concept - of the ineffability of the mystical experience - which becomes established as a tenet of mysticism by James' slightly later work:

Language can only furnish us with poor, misleading, and wholly inadequate images of spiritual facts: it supplies us with abstractions and metaphors, which do not really represent what we know or believe about God and human personality. (1899: 20)

But representing what we know of God and the human personality is what Inge longs to do; language and knowledge are to evolve in this direction. Inge possesses a holistic drive too, as he describes his mystic ambition as the spiritual illumination of the "whole body".
The fact is that the tendency to separate and half personify the different faculties - intellect, will, feeling - is a mischievous one. Our object should be so to unify our personality, that our eye may be single, and our whole body full of light. (1899: 21)

The idea is a particularly prophetic one. The gradual working through the representational style of a multiplicity of voices ("intellect, will, feeling") towards an integrated visionary and "open" eye is, as we shall see, an important aspect of the progression of women's "mystical" fiction writing. Inge in this passage anticipates the process of women's writing about mysticism which is to come.

Inge is wary of a total dissolution of the personality in God. Instead, he suggests the creative spirituality of the individual voice at this height of spiritual experience, in a way which upholds the continuation of expression of individual experience: a suggestion from which subsequent writers were, whether consciously or not, to draw encouragement:

some of the best mystics went astray on this point. They teach a real substitution of the Divine for human nature, thus depersonalising man, and running into great danger of a perilous arrogance...Personality is not only the strictest unity of which we have any experience; it is the fact which creates the postulate of unity on which all philosophy is based. (1899: 30)

This positive approach to the retention of the individual for the purposes of relating experiences, in what experimental and creative language permits, points in the direction of later feminist theologies. Although Christian Mysticism is, in its structure, a scholarly general survey of its subject, Inge was interested in the individual's history, seeing the details of an individual's development as analogous to the history of spirituality as a whole:

It is a favourite doctrine of the mystics that man, in his individual life, recapitulates the spiritual history of the race, in much the same way in which embryologists tell us that the unborn infant recapitulates the whole process of physical evolution... the progress of modern science has greatly strengthened the analogies on which [this doctrine] rests. (1899:35)

In fact Inge is anticipating Freud's later theory of the history of the individual psyche echoing the development of progressive civilisations (in. for example, Totem and
Taboo, 1912-13). Inge's prediction of the rise of mysticism was based on the belief that certain individuals had already attained the spirituality that society was destined for:

If I am not mistaken, our children and grandchildren will need and prize it more than we do. The darkest hour is just before the dawn. (1899: 19)

Inge is also positive when he contemplates the sublimative element of loss and mortification which is considered necessary to the mystic process, another strand to develop during the new century. Mortification, Inge suggests:

is a process of infinite expansion- of realising new correspondences, new sympathies and affinities with the not-ourselves, which affinities condition, and in conditioning constitute, our true life as persons. The paradox is offensive only to formal logic. (1899: 31)

Dean Inge, therefore, at the very turn of the twentieth century, stays within the doctrinal Christian position, yet has marked out many of the openings for developing psychological interests and the potential linguistic creativity required to explore mysticism as it was then perceived. "'The law of the Spirit' ... has delivered me from the law of sin and death. This is indeed the escape that we desire" (1899: 19). Inge's words were perhaps more prophetic than he would care to know.

Baron von Hugel, the German-born Catholic theologian who settled in England, was another highly influential voice. His writings were read by many, including Evelyn Underhill. Von Hugel's major study of mysticism was published in two volumes: The Mystical Element in Religion, as studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and her Friends (1908). The work ranges from a detailed biography of Catherine's life to a more general examination of the precepts of mysticism, dealing with:

the relation between Morality, Mysticism, Philosophy and Religion, that as to the Limits of Human Knowledge, ... the special character and worth of the mystics' claim to Trans-subjective Cognition; ... the Nature of Evil and the Goodness and Badness of Human Nature; and ... Personality- the character of and the relations between- the human spirit and the Divine Spirit. (1908: 259)
For von Hugel, mysticism requires a vast psychological and philosophical enquiry. As to his discussion of the relations between God and the Soul, he is aware of the difficulties with regard to the position of God—was this a presence separate from, or a spirit immanent in, the human soul and the world around? The differences endemic to transcendence and immanence became more important as the century progressed, and psychological interest in consciousness clashed with restrictive religious anti-modernism. Von Hugel, sympathetic to religious modernism himself, traces the history of the debate through the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, to the important non-Christian Platonist, Plotinus, much condemned for his apparent advocacy of the abandonment of earthly ambition or relationship: "The flight of the alone to the Alone"—a phrase, incidentally, which was to be much admired and used by Underhill, although she, like von Hugel, was wary of its solipsistic overtones. Von Hugel goes on to look at Eckhart, Ruysbroek, and concludes with Saint Teresa's mediating view that "To look upon Our Lord as being in the innermost parts of the soul...is a much more profitable method, than that of looking upon him as external to us" (1908: 346). Thus he seeks to trace both a historical tradition for "immanentist" thought, and to establish a rational balancing of immanence and transcendentalism. But again, like Inge, the consciousness of the individual is held to contain more knowledge and essence than has hitherto been much spoken of.

Although von Hugel's survey is historical, his method is especially interesting as it is used in conjunction with a single biographical study of a female mystic who, though typical of the female mystics in some ways, displays particular and peculiar individuality in others (Catherine, despite her asceticism and anorexia, was quite an authority in her day, and at no point was under the rule of a religious order). Although he was primarily interested in the complexities of mystical theology, and in offering spiritual guidance to those consulting him, von Hugel's approach, through one woman's story, did highlight and complement the autobiographical method of exploring spirituality which was becoming of such importance: his case history was part theology, part psychological analysis, part imaginative evocation.

As for Catherine's communication of her mystical experiences, von Hugel suggests that the "rhythmical periods" of her language were as important as the explanations she offered. "So constant is this law." Underhill writes in Mysticism, "in
some subjects that Baron von Hugel adopted the presence or absence of rhythm as a test whereby to distinguish the genuine utterances of St. Catherine of Genoa from those wrongly attributed to her by successive editors of her legend" (1993: 80). It was obviously an aspect of von Hugel's thought which interested her. The difficulty in describing the revelations of an uncharted area of consciousness was thus somewhat ameliorated by von Hugel's interest in this subtext of language which explored mysticism.

Although his views were not easily eirenic, von Hugel speaks of the synthesising nature of mysticism which likes to see the wholeness and unity of things, and desires to speak of the "deep ideal" of God:

> the exclusive mystic's contemplative habit is, at bottom, a synthetic one... we should realise the deep truth under the very exaggerations of this onesidedly Analytic and Ascetical view... God is the deepest ideal, the ultimate driving force and the true congenital element and environment of man, such as man cannot but secretly wish to will deliberately, and which at his best, man truly wills to hold and desire. (1908: 346)

This is the line of thought - unifying differences under a common spiritual principle-which is most obviously continued in Underhill's work. Von Hugel was always keen, however, as was Inge, to get Underhill and those like her more inclined towards the side of historical and traditional analysis. These two male writers, firmly ensconced in the traditions and mechanisms of their respective Churches, were generally content with the status quo of academically enshrined concepts of mysticism within a clerical framework, although interested, to a moderate degree, in the new linguistic expressions which the describing of ineffable mystical experience required. Those such as Underhill, initially distanced from church authority by problems of doctrine and gender, often felt more uncomfortable with, yet still to a certain extent supported by, the traditional and historical approach. But, by the turn of the century, it was not just theologians who were interested in the aetiology of mysticism and the uncharted realms of consciousness which it increasingly seemed to suggest were present within the individual.
The most important of all the religious surveys accomplished at the turn of the century was that of the philosopher and psychologist William James, who, in the 1902 Gifford Lectures, delivered what was to be published as The Varieties of Religious Experience, an examination of contemporary spirituality, with reference to classic texts of mystic expression, as well as other autobiographical, literary and testimonial sources. From the start James takes pains to establish his experiential, empiricist criteria: "immediate luminousness, in short, philosophical reasonableness, and moral helpfulness are the only available criteria" (1902: 10). James' tendency is, in a more explicit manner than Inge, to espouse a non-essentialist definition of the subject, and to dismantle the notion of a monolithic core or essence of mysticism:

> As there seems to be no one elementary religious emotion, but only a common storehouse upon which religious objects may draw, so there might conceivably also prove to be no one specific and essential kind of religious object, and no one specific and essential kind of religious act. (1902: 11)

In fact, the more James looks at mystical experiences, the more he becomes convinced that there is reason to believe that there are not only many different levels of life: "many interpenetrating spheres of reality" (1902: 120), but that mysticism itself comprises a variety of perspectives, all of which lead to the vision of a wider world:

> It must always remain an open question whether mystical states may not possibly be ...superior points of view, windows through which the mind looks out upon a more extensive and inclusive world. The difference of the views seen from the different mystical windows need not prevent us from entertaining this supposition. (1902: 418)

Having established that his interest in the subject is pluralist and pragmatic, James concentrates on further elucidating the region of consciousness which Inge has already identified as the area where mysticism is experienced. James applies psychological analysis to the mixture of rational and romantic thought about religion which he has inherited from the nineteenth century. As we have seen, Kant argued that it is theoretically impossible for human beings ever to have a knowledge of the divine, let alone direct experience of God, because of the way human knowledge is constructed. James clearly accepted this, as far as the conscious mind was concerned.
But James also agreed with Schleiermacher's argument that the true centre of religion lies in immediate consciousness of the Deity, which preceded doctrinal classification—"the ineffable core from which these expressions (doctrines, rituals and moral codes) are subsequently generated" (Jantzen 1993: 85). Yet though he relies on this "feeling" of religion - "I do believe that feeling is the deeper source of religion," (1902: 422) - James is not content merely to classify mysticism as an emotion. Rather, interested in its psychological implications, he welcomes, and to a considerable extent anticipates the development of, new theories of the "unconscious" as postulated by Piaget and the young Freud. The religious feeling, to James, points directly to a whole realm of the mind which has yet to be charted: he calls this the "subliminal realm":

just as our primary wide-awake consciousness throws open our senses to the touch of things material, so it is logically conceivable that if there be higher spiritual agencies that can directly touch us, the psychological condition of their doing so might be our possession of a subconscious region which alone should yield access to them. The hubbub of the wakening life might close a door which in the dreamy subliminal might remain ajar or open. (1902: 237)

But James points out that the subliminal realm is not merely a channel for religious revelation, however. As Freud was to do, James sees the subliminal realm as housing all an individual's latent desires and memories:

all our momentarily inactive memories, and it harbours the springs of all our obscurely motivated passions, impulses, likes, dislikes, and prejudices. Our intuitions, hypotheses, fancies, superstitions, persuasions, convictions, and in general all our non-rational operations, come from it. It is the source of our dreams, and apparently they may return to it. (1902: 473)

James associates paranormal and uncanny events with the subliminal realm too, although he urges his readers not to identify the vast new region too much with "psychical research and other such aberrations" (ibid). While Inge also considered that mysticism involved connection to a higher state of consciousness about which little could be said, James was far more explicit in suggesting the contents of the region. His interest in all methods of accessing this state is at the centre of his study.

Just as in the tradition of Christian mysticism examined by Inge and von Hugel, James considers that a process of loss or mortification is a prerequisite of
allowing the subliminal realm to reveal its insights. Healthy-minded, affirmative religion is all very well, but the "twice-born" soul, who has experienced loss, is, James considers, in a position genuinely to encounter mysticism. For life is a process of loss and disillusionment, even when mundane and unspectacular:

The normal process of life contains moments as bad as any of those which insane melancholy is filled with, moments in which radical evil gets its innings and takes its solid turn. The lunatic's visions of horror are all drawn from the material of daily fact. Our civilisation is founded on the shambles, and every individual existence goes out in a lonely spasm of helpless agony. If you protest, my friend, wait till you arrive there yourself. (1902: 160)

James therefore considers that these losses must be faced, that "the completest religions would therefore seem to be those in which the pessimistic elements are best developed...the man must die to an unreal life before he can be born into the real life" (1902: 162). He also suggests that the ego with all its anxieties must be put aside before religious consolation can be experienced: "So long as the egoistic worry of the sick soul guards the door, the expansive confidence of the soul of faith gains no presence" (1902: 208).

Where James goes further than Inge is in acknowledging that mysticism engendered by loss of the rational self could also be accessed by means other than the mortification of spiritual discipline. Drugs, for example nitrous oxide, provides an "anaesthetic revelation" of subliminal awareness; wine, too, can promote a mystical experience: "the sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature" (1902: 377). James does have doubts about the quality of the revelations so obtained, but, being a pragmatist, even allows that mental "instability" - a tendency to neurosis or depression - does not in itself preclude spiritual insight; rather, it may encourage it, precisely because it loosens the hold of rationality upon the mind, and renders the subliminal realm, or the unconscious, more complex and sensitive:

If there were such a thing as inspiration from a higher realm, it might well be that the neurotic temperament would furnish the chief condition of the requisite receptivity. (1902: 19)
This was a new departure in the psychology of mysticism, and one which would provide ambiguous opportunities for those exploring the subject in future, particularly women.

James also explores the difficulties in speaking of mysticism, once it has, by whatever means, been experienced, for he considers that "philosophic and theological formulas are secondary products, like the translation of a text into another tongue" (1902: 422). James draws his readers' attention towards the problem of the ineffability of mysticism, for which, unwittingly, he also suggests a solution.

James is responsible for establishing ineffability as one of the qualifying factors of the mystic experience. But it is not just the mystical experience which defies description in scientific language; there is difficulty in accurately conveying the state of consciousness itself, which, as a philosopher and writer, he is all too well aware:

There is in the living act of perception always something that glimmers and twinkles and will not be caught, and for which reflection comes too late. No one knows this as well as the philosopher- he must fire his volley of new vocables out of his conceptual shotgun, for his profession condemns him to this industry, but he secretly knows the hollowness and irrelevancy. His formulas are like stereoscopic or kinetoscopic photographs seen outside the instrument; they lack the depth, the motion, the vitality. (1902: 446)

The mystical insight, in particular, is so close to the uncharted subliminal state of consciousness that, if one attempts to describe it in language, the way of negatives is more accurate than a positive description, although it ends in the silence of inarticulacy:

Whoso calls the absolute anything in particular, or says that it is this, seems implicitly to shut it off from being that,- it is as if he lessened it. So we deny the "this", negating the negation which it seems to imply, in the interests of the higher affirmative attitude by which we are possessed...Like Hegel in his logic, mystics journey towards the positive pole of truth only by the "Methode der Absoluten Negativat". (1902: 407-8)
In fact, James resorts to the rhythmic and sensual evocation of the sea in order to convey the sense of mystical intuition, just as some of the subjects of his study equate mysticism with a tidal feeling of oceanic submersion:

There is a verge of the mind which these things haunt; and whispers therefrom mingle with the operations of our understanding, even as the waters of the infinite ocean send their waves to break along the pebbles that lie upon our shores. (1902: 412)

Although James establishes the difficulty of speaking about the religious experiences which his volume charts, he has also provided the concept of the "stream of consciousness" which was to become a phrase appropriated to describe a particular style of writing particularly relevant to modernist literature. The following passage, for instance, from the Principles of Psychology, suggests that James saw the need for a new way of articulating consciousness as part of his project for exploring the subliminal realm - the "psychic overtone" where mysticism is experienced:

It is...the reinstatement of the vague and inarticulate to its proper place in our mental life which I am so anxious to press on the attention...it is just this free water of our consciousness that psychologists resolutely overlook... Let us call the consciousness of this halo of relations around the image by the name of 'psychic overtone' or 'fringe'. (Knight, 1950: 97-8)

His concept here is very similar to Virginia Woolf's description of life as "enveloped in a luminous halo" in her 1925 essay "Modern Fiction" (Scott, 1990: 631). Rather than being a superfluous and vague action of the mind, in the Varieties, James suggests that this fringe of consciousness is connected to the primal site of convictions and feelings, and therefore of the utmost importance: "If you have intuitions at all, they come from a deeper level of your nature than the loquacious level which rationalism inhabits" (1902: 72-3). Finding a way to articulate the "free waters of our consciousness" therefore becomes the aim of both psychology and mysticism, as well as (with Woolf) literature.

If James himself does not equate literature with the expression of mysticism, he does suggest connections between spirituality, the imagination, and the psychological truth for which he strives. In the first place, although he does not
dismiss religious belief as "all in the mind", James suggests that it is the psychological impact of the idea of God which brings about both belief and reasons to believe:

the universe, at those parts of it which our personal being constitutes, takes a turn genuinely for the worse or for the better in proportion as each one of us fulfils or evades God's demands...God is real since he produces real effects. (1902: 507)

Although he derives this position (that the idea of God is a moral regulator) from Kant, James' stance regarding the "pragmatic" nature of religious truth is a move towards the acknowledgement of psychological truths which do not necessarily have their origins in a scientifically documented fact or event, but which nevertheless produce a result or effect upon the subject:

James...expanded the maxim [of "Neutral Monism"] into a general principle:
ideas should be treated in terms of their function; they are tools whose worth lies in their utility...Truth is not a purely intellectual value, but a directive, rather, for conduct...it is relative and mutable, according to the conditions and demands of human experience. (Reardon 1966: 393)

The idea that truth is not solely confined to the sphere of the intellect indicates James' holistic drive; though he cannot articulate his goal, it is a coalition of all the levels of human perception: "potential forms of consciousness entirely different...all converge towards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance" (1902: 378). Yet at the same time truth is relative, coloured by individual experience and need. Rather than relying on science, James links this concept of truth with the power of the individual imagination to capture the "reality of the unseen" (his third chapter title). Relating one subject's experience of an unseen presence embracing him with maternal care, James comments that:

such is the human ontological imagination, and such is the convincingness of what brings it to birth - unpicturable beings are realized, and realized with an intensity almost like that of an hallucination. (1902: 71)

James speaks elsewhere, too, of the literal illuminations which mysticism can bring ("photisms") as well as the capacity it gives of seeing ordinary things anew: "The deadness with which custom invests the familiar vanishes, and existence as a whole appears transfigured" (1902: 456). He does not make the connection between these
powers of imaginative perception which are stimulated by mystical experience, and their use in a language of mysticism, but without realising it, he has set down the qualities of a style of necessarily imaginative writing which could explore the truth of subliminal or hallucinatory mystical experience.

James' work was not, however, without its drawbacks for women writers seeking to explore mysticism. Although he acknowledged that the human tendency was to create structure where in reality there was none - "Nature...is a vast plenum in which our attention draws capricious lines in innumerable directions" (1902: 429) - he was unable to realise that some of his subliminal assumptions were in fact unconscious prejudices, inherited from past spiritual dicta. For example, James too easily acquiesced to the prevailing imagery of women as weaker and subordinate to men, and used this as an unquestioned tenet in his diagram of spirituality and mysticism, just as Patmore and others before him had assumed that the soul was female in relation to (a masculine) God, and that woman's subservience to man must therefore be a model for man's relations to the divine (rather than having any implications for man's behaviour to his fellow man, or indeed to women):

The woman loves the man the more admiringly the stormier he shows himself, and the world deifies its rulers the more for being wilful and unaccountable. But the woman in turn subjugates the man by the mystery of gentleness in beauty, and the saint has always charmed the world [and, it is implied, God] by something similar. (1902: 363)

Women, James assumes, are likely to practise a religion of a "first-born", healthy-minded hue, with their sweet, nature-loving, and untroubled disposition, rather than exploring the depths of loss and illumination which a more psychologically profound outlook would provide. Yet this is despite his own numerous examples of religious women throughout history who have embraced the most extreme forms of mortification, far beyond James' own suggestion that the egoistic desires of the self be laid aside. He quotes from the diary of Marie Baskirtseff, for example, who revels in her own misery, and the founder of the Sacred Heart congregation, Margaret Marie Alacocque, whose love of pain and suffering was insatiable: "'nothing but pain,' she continually said in her letters, 'makes my life supportable'" (1902: 82). This polarisation of women into untroubled angels or
delirious masochists was a problematic inheritance for the women writers who read James' book with interest and absorbed many of his innovative ideas regarding the imaginative and psychological implications of mysticism.

A positive aspect of James' work is that he allows those who have experienced mystical phenomena to speak for themselves: their words are taken seriously, and regarded, not so much as "talking cures" of neurotic individuals but as exchanges of experiential information. The emphasis is on plurality, on a "variety" of experiences and mysticisms, within the broad framework which James constructs from his gathered data. Although it is true, as Jantzen has pointed out, that James did cull many of his references to the mystics of the past from a volume already compiled by his contemporary George Starbuck, he did also refer to other sources: diaries, letters, research data of psychological and medical situations, and so on. James was far more interested in the "regions of the mind" which are illuminated, than in perpetuating a particular hagiographical canon. To the criticism that James overstressed the emotional and romantic note of religion and mysticism, one must refer to the title of his work - "The Variety of Religious Experience" - and it is upon this basis of experience rather than theological analysis that he develops his argument, saving himself from accusations of wilful romanticism by his detached analysis of the psychological evidence at hand. He set the early twentieth-century construction of mysticism as comprising the four qualities of ineffability, noetic quality (gaining of a knowledge or insight), transiency, and passivity, which admittedly has a mixed message regarding the potential authority and empowerment of the mystical experience.

However, it is because James' claim that the expression of absolute truth is not possible that the variety of individual expression can be allowed to flourish through personal experience. James has to some extent substituted, for the centralising of a religious structure, the centering of the individual personality, which necessarily involves accessing the realm of the subliminal, which is the channel for mysticism: now in all of us, however constituted, but to a degree the greater in proportion as we are intense and sensitive and subject to diversified temptations, and to the greatest possible degree if we are decidedly psychopathic, does the normal
evolution of character chiefly consist in the straightening out and unifying of the inner self. (1902: 167)

James' work liberates interest in spirituality and mysticism from dogmatic categorisation, working with the Romantic and Rationalist legacies of the previous century. The Varieties of Religious Experience anticipates developments in psychoanalysis (the Unconscious) and in language (the "stream of consciousness" and the incomplete nature of articulation), as well as advocating a pluralist approach to both mysticism and truth. Though not without tensions, particularly in the area of gender, James' thought has associated imagination, mysticism and the unconscious, and produced a popular and scholarly work which encouraged the individual to speak and write of their experience of mysticism, from whatever position of loss has led to their encounter.

9 By the turn of the twentieth century, there is a much wider variety of religious thinkers as well as religious experience. There is respectability in difference even in theological works such as Rudolph Otto's Idea of the Holy, which appeared in 1917, and quickly became a spiritual classic. In this work, Otto recognises the concept of the numinous - inexplicable and unaccountable religious experiential events - which he considers to exist alongside the dogmatic tradition, yet remain unarticulated by it:

So far from keeping the non-rational element of religion alive in the heart of the religious experience, orthodox Christianity manifestly failed to recognise its value, and by this failure gave to the idea of God a one-sidedly intellectualistic and rationalistic interpretation. (1959: 15, 17)

This is not say that Otto was unalterably in favour of mysticism; rather, he tended to regard it as a swerving too far in the direction of the suprarational:

- essentially mysticism is the stressing to a very high degree, indeed the overstressing, of the non-rational or supra-rational elements in religion, and it is only intelligible when so understood. (1959: 36)

More so than James, Otto considers that the mystic may experience a dissolution of the self into the absolute power or deity: "the Identification, in different degrees of completeness, of the personal self with the transcendent reality" (1959: 36), a condition that the Christian theologians, such as Inge, were wary of, and which Otto
describes with some disapproval. The Idea of the Holy offers neither an explanation nor an alternative to this paradox, but the pushing and breaking of conceptual boundaries, of which the loss of individual identity is the most extreme, comprises a recurring theme in the volume, as Otto's interest in sublimation augments James' psychological emphasis on the mind's subliminal realm.

A further example of Otto's mysticism of sublimation is his belief that spiritual love is a transformation of the lower emotions of fear or "wrath"; the energy is redirected towards a higher goal: ' "Love", says one of the mystics, "is nothing else than quenched wrath" ' (1959: 38). While James did accord great importance to the affective impact of mysticism, Otto has a far stronger note of yearning or desiring, as he speaks of the will to redirect or sublimate our actions towards an ideal good beyond our rational being:

a strange and mighty propulsion towards an ideal good known only to religion and in its nature fundamentally non-rational, which the mind knows of in yearning and presentiment... And this shows that above and beyond our rational being lies hidden the ultimate and highest part of our nature, which can find no satisfaction in the mere allaying of the needs of our sensuous, physical, or intellectual impulses and cravings. The mystics called it the basis or ground of the soul. (1959: 51)

While he speaks of a transcendental being, Otto believes, like Inge and James, that the concept of a transcendent deity has its counterpart in an aspect of the individual consciousness - "the ultimate and highest part of our nature" - which again is beyond the arena of rational intellect, just as it is beyond physical functions. Seeking for a comparative experience, Otto describes the wordless creativity of music as effecting a similar sequence:

music, purely as music...releases a blissful rejoicing in us, and we are conscious of a glimmering, billowy agitation occupying our minds, without being able to express or explain in concepts what it really is that moves us so deeply...But we must beware of confounding in any way the non-rational of music and the non-rational of the numinous itself. (1959: 63, 64)

Again, the problem arises as to how one is to express in language the mysticism which Otto suggests produces a comparable spiritual "billowy agitation occupying our
He has already said that "obscure and inadequate" symbols are the only option of which he knows. The more one attempts a dogmatic classification of mysticism, the more one is destined to fail, because:

Not the most concentrated attention can elucidate the object to which this state of mind refers, bringing it out of the impenetrable obscurity of feeling into the domain of the conceptual understanding. (1959: 74)

However, just as music, with its wordless expression of rhythm and melody, evokes a state of deep feeling, language, Otto suggests, may have a similar power in the sphere of the numinous, when used in a way which approaches musical rather than intellectual expression:

The numinous...finds its most unqualified expression in the spell exercised by the only half intelligible or wholly unintelligible language of devotion, and in the unquestionably real enhancement of the awe of the worshipper which this produces. [for example]... the special emotional virtue attaching to words like "Hallelujah" "Kyrie eleison, "Selah". Just because they are "wholly other" and convey no clear meaning... we can see here one factor that justifies and warrants them... (1959: 80)

While von Hugel's examination of mysticism threw up the suggestion that the rhythms and cadances of mystical language could be used to identify a genuine mystical utterance, Otto looks at the words and phrases themselves, suggesting that they must lose their everyday semantic usefulness in order to access the level at which mysticism can be evoked or spoken of. His direction is towards the sublimation of linguistic expression into a more direct and evocative communication of the experience of mysticism which Otto has, throughout his text, associated with the need to push boundaries and explore creatively rather than scientifically. The importance of Otto's work is that it recognises the need to express and recognise the numinous feeling of dependence, piety, or mysticism regarding knowledge of God, pointing to both a transcendent deity and a immanence within each individual, without committing the mystic to using only the language of dogma or doctrine. Neither does Otto say that the mystic should remain competely silent; instead, he points towards the creative and evocative power of language.
Of course, Otto does not whole-heartedly advocate the abandonment of traditional religious doctrine. In fact, he is wary of the dogmatic aspect of religion being usurped or corrupted by mystical expression.

We are not... to deplore the fact that intuitions of this kind find a place in the doctrines of the Christian faith: they do so of necessity. What we must deplore is, that their free character, as springing from "divination", is so generally misinterpreted, that too commonly we dogmatize and theorize about them... so failing to recognize them for what they are, free-floating utterances and trial flights at expression of the numinous feeling. (1959: 188)

The Idea of the Holy, although primarily a theological work, has therefore included in its schema of religion the numinous experience of mysticism, which, while it cannot be subsumed by doctrinal structure, yet demands some linguistic expression. Since Otto did not allow the enjoyment of music to be identified with the "numinous feeling", it is unlikely that he would have equated the pleasure of poetry or literature as he knew it to mysticism, either. But his interest in the power of non-rational language and in the psychological, linguistic evocation of knowledge other than the factual, point unavoidably in the direction of experimental writing.

10 Freud's writings have had, of course, an inestimable influence upon the ideas of psychoanalysis and therefore of its relationship to, and ability to analyse, mysticism. But Freud did not emerge from a totally non-existent or undeveloped field; William James had already postulated the existence and function of that "region of the mind which these things haunt" and through which, he suggested, the communications of the numinous may be received. But unlike James, Freud was not inclined to believe that a neurotic disposition provided a greater sensitivity to mystic experiences. As far as Freud was concerned, religious belief, and its concomitant "mystical projections", was a complex deferring of the pleasure principle which governed the idea of an afterlife:

A momentary pleasure, uncertain of its results, is given up, but only in order to gain along the new path an assured pleasure at a later time. But the endopsychic impression made by this substitution has been so powerful that it is reflected in a special religious myth. The doctrine of rewards in the
may we really attempt to compare the imaginative writer with the Dreamer in broad
daylight and his creations with day-dreams?...It seems to me, however, that through
this revealing characteristic of invulnerability we can immediately recognise His
Majesty the Ego, the hero alike of every day-dream and of every story.
after-life for the - voluntary or enforced - renunciation of earthly pleasures is nothing other than a mystical projection of this revolution in the mind. (On Metapsychology, 1991:41) S.E. vol 12, p.223: "Two Principles of mental functioning.

Later, I shall refer to other writing of Freud which treats the process of loss and renunciation more subtly, but it is clear that, for Freud, religious feeling is one not only of deferred pleasure, but also suppressed guilt over hostility towards father and brothers:

religion and moral restraint [were acquired] through the process of mastering the Oedipus complex itself, and social feeling through the necessity for overcoming the rivalry that then remained between the members of the younger generation. (1991:377) S.E. vol 19, p.37

We are back to the ideas of Kant, who regarded the concept of God as a moral regulator. And, like Kant, religion and morals are a masculine activity: Freud appears to have no more confident an explanation for women's religious sense than he does for mysticism: "The male sex seems to have taken the lead in all these moral acquisitions; and they seem to have then been transmitted to women by cross-inheritance" (1991:377). S.E. vol 19, p.37

In fact, Freud's explanation of "mystical projection" as a result of a deferred pleasure principle was similar to his explanation for creative activity such as writing. Freud assumed that a creative or visionary capacity was a self-induced release of the fantasies of the ego, whether daydreaming or experiencing artistic or spiritual vision: where pleasure cannot be obtained, it will be conjured up by wish-fulfilment. This is particularly the case with the project of novel-writing, Freud explains in his 1908 essay, "Creative Writers and Daydreaming": in Art and Literature (Penguin Freud)

 Unsatisfied wishes are the driving power behind phantasies; every separate phantasy contains the fulfilment of a wish, and improves upon unsatisfactory reality... [as for plots in fiction], it seems to me...that this significant mark of invulnerability very clearly betrays- His Majesty the Ego, the hero of all daydreams and all novels. (1990: 137-138 ) S.E. vol 19, p.149-150

It would seem that, for Freud, fiction writing may be an indication that the promise of pleasure in a religious afterlife is not soon enough: authors indulge in creative fantasy

Freud discusses the hypothesis further in Totem and Taboo(1912-13)
through weakness of character rather than a need to express genuine mysticism. However, unwilling as Freud was to associate creativity with religious mysticism, he does link the unconscious and fiction writing with an aspect of mysticism which further disturbs rational explanation.

Freud took an interest in the concept of the uncanny; in his essay on this subject, he suggests that disturbing events such as coincidences, repetitions, even fits, are linked to the unconscious, as the subject experiences a sense of the familiar and the unfamiliar at the same time:

Heimlich is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, unheimlich. (Penguin fred Art and Literature 1990: 137, S.E. Vol 17 p. 226)

Although Freud links the comparable description of uncanny (unheimlich) phenomena and the unconscious, he does not believe that a supernatural or mystical experience is connected to or communicated through either, as James, for example, might have done. But he does believe that fiction has the ability to explore further the uncanny elements of psychoanalysis, disdaining to investigate this potential himself, other than to suggest that when a fiction writer claims "to move in the world of common reality", consciousness and perception are disrupted. Aesthetics is the correct field of study for this line of thought, Freud implies. It is a small concession, but the connection between imaginative writing and exploration of mysticism has again been made.

If Freud could be seen as a disciple of the rationalism of Kant and Newman, Jung, like Emerson, saw a spiritual "Oversoul", a Collective Unconscious, accessible to those who were able to break through, and perceive beyond, the apparent everyday morality of things; a transcendent consciousness is implied by this collective subliminal region: "Certain dreams, visions, and mystical experiences...suggest the existence of a consciousness in the [Collective] unconscious" (1990: 282). More than Freud, Jung suggests that imaginative visions, particularly when they have a common symbolism, point towards the existence of a "mystic" consciousness that exists outside the individual unconscious. Jung identifies this drive as instinct rather than mysticism, seeking, as much as James, to stress the empiricist nature of his conclusions:
if the assertion is made that our imagination, perception, and thinking are likewise influenced by inborn and universally present formal elements, it seems to me that a normally functioning intelligence can discover in this idea just as much or just as little mysticism as in the theory of instincts. Although this reproach of mysticism has frequently been levelled at my concept, I must emphasise yet again that the concept of the collective unconscious is neither a speculative nor a philosophical but an empirical matter. (1990: 44)

In addition, Jung was, as we shall see, convinced that the theory of sublimation was the explanation of artistic achievement. Connected to his theory of sublimation, he was fascinated by alchemy, and explored the subject in depth in his Psychology and Alchemy (1944). Jung linked this attribute (primarily symbolic) with mysticism, noting too that the magical sublimating force of alchemy allowed for a mutability with regard to gender:

The hermaphroditic rebis has an important part to play in the natural philosophy of the Middle Ages. And in our own day we hear of Christ's androgyyn in Catholic mysticism. (1989: 174)

So although he denies the existence of "mysticism", Jung considered that a Collective Unconscious was indicated and accessed by instinctive imaginative symbolism. This was expressed through the quasi-alchemical process of artistic sublimation, transcending gender and the known boundaries of rational truth. Jung's artistic explorations were generally visual rather than literary, but his acknowledgement of imagination as a path to subliminal regions, whether universal or individual, was clear. Creativity was again a route for, rather than an escape from, unsatisfied drives.

Developments in psychological studies of mysticism, however, did not enlarge upon the links between mysticism, creativity, and the unconscious, which both Freud and (more explicitly) Jung had touched upon. Women writers in particular, had to confront a host of prejudicial and censorious thought which condemned mysticism to the neurotic fallibility of a disempowered gender:

for the practical man the mystic ideal is not only sown with every eventuality of psychic degeneration, or, at least, of morbid religiosity; it is also a menace to ethical or intellectual integrity - probably to both. (Herman, 1915: 79)
A particularly vituperative example of this school of thought was Leuba's *Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (1925). Although familiar with William James' work, Leuba has little time for James' conclusion that feeling and experience must be heard in mystical matters; just because a science of rationalism is incomplete, that is no reason to abandon it altogether, he says: "There will always remain unplumbed depths ... but ... psychological knowledge has already gone far enough to deliver man from the belief that all the so-called 'intuitions' that come to him with an assurance of certainty are therefore true" (1929: 294). However, Leuba has learned, consciously or unconsciously from Schleiermacher, to identify strong religious or mystical tendencies with an extreme form of the emotional dependence defined by Schleiermacher as piety itself. This dependence became almost totally associated with women.

Far from believing that altered states of consciousness pointed to a region of the mind where mystical experience could be explored, Leuba saw mysticism as a pathway to inanimate imbecility. He cites the example of Madame Guyon (1648-1717), the French mystic arrested for her unorthodox inclinations towards the heresy of "Quietism", depicting her as a woman who:

managed to keep herself much of the time in a condition that looked like imbecility; the work she was doing would fall from her hands; she would sit in company without seeing what was going on. (1929: 94)

This condition, if brought about by mysticism, was the worst nightmare of the rationalists, and a slovenly distortion of the Romantic conception of emotional dependence on a divinity. As for any supposed sense of the presence of God, Leuba takes a definite pride in explaining the sense through a series of control experiments he describes: participants are instructed to wait in a darkened, silent room until some one enters, and then to signal that they are aware of a presence. From the results, Leuba concludes that we too easily become "aware" of a personal presence even when it is a fallacious sensation, and that conditions tending to sensory deprivation are especially conducive to this:

One cannot remain for a considerable length of time motionless, with closed eyes, in a noiseless room, without approaching the sleep-state. The surprisingly defective observations of competent witnesses in attendance at
mediumistic seances, we take to have the same cause: a certain degree of mental dissociation occurs. Our experimenters were...in a light trance while awaiting a rather weird phenomenon- the sense of Presence. They were in a condition similar to that of Tennyson repeating his name, of Abramowski experimenting on dissociation, of Madame Guyon hoping, while in contemplation, for the appearance of the Bridegroom, and, generally, of the religious mystics in orison. (1929: 291)

Leuba realises that such a sense of presence may occur under other circumstances-during a brainstorm, or an epileptic-type seizure. But where James would be interested in the insights of these states of altered consciousness, and Otto would laud the apparent inconsequentiality of repetitive or archaic language in order to access a state of prayer, Leuba is merely sure that in all cases it is the mind which is playing "tricks" on itself.

While Freud had little to say on women's conception of religion, Leuba concentrates almost wholly on the female inclination towards mysticism, developing the emotional dependence theme of Romanticism into its pathological sexual counterpart in the female mystics. His diagnosis is concise and uncompromising:

the virgins and the unsatisfied wives who undergo the repeated "love-assaults of God" ...suffer from nothing else than intense attacks of erotomania, induced by their organic need and the worship of the God of love. (1929: 151)

As to the cause of these unproductive trance-states, Leuba notes that the mystics (again, especially the female mystics) were deprived of the necessary conjugal domesticity without which, he considered, they lacked both physical satisfaction and moral guidance:

None of our great mystics enjoyed a normal sex-life: either they lived unmarried and under an exciting love influence ... or they were married without finding in that relation the physiological and the moral satisfaction which it should give. (1929: 193)

Leuba supports his hypothesis with references to the psychiatrists Janet and Ellis, who studied contemporary hysteria in women. Leuba cites one of Janet's psychopathic female patients, who insisted: "I have enjoyments which, outside of God, it is impossible to know" (ibid)."In hysterical and psychically abnormal women", writes
Ellis, "auto-erotic phenomena and sexual phenomena generally, are highly pleasurable, though they may be quite innocent of any knowledge of the erotic character of the experience" (Leuba, 1929: 141). Leuba has half turned around Patmore's scheme of eroticisation, so that it is the feminine, embodied subject, who is herself (himself) engaging in auto-erotic activity, rather than experiencing quasi-sexual union with a masculine divinity that is imposed from above. Officially, men are not excluded from this naive, dislocated, sexual sublimation, but "there are evident physiological reasons that render the participation of the senses more difficult to overlook" (1929: 142). Leuba thus concludes that woman's erotic drive needs controlling and directing by a knowledgeable male influence, just as women mystics in past centuries were placed under the firm control of a male spiritual director, and usually forced to live in enclosure. Leuba refers again to Madame Guyon, whose passion for God was kindled by her contact first with a Franciscan friar, and secondly with an older priest, Father la Combe, to whom she became so attached that she left her home to follow him:

These two souls became twin souls, travelling together - one might almost say one in the other - on the same pilgrimage… La Combe and God became interchangeable. There was, she writes, "complete unity, so that I could no longer distinguish him from God". (1929: 81)

Although he does not name it as such, Leuba associates this tendency (again especially of the female mystics) with the transference phenomenon Freud identified in his patients undergoing psychoanalytic treatment: "the relation of certain classes of patients to their physicians and its practical results, especially when they hypnotise their patients, is in a surprising degree similar to the relation of the mystic to his God and to its results" (1929: 120). As far as Leuba is concerned, hysterical, and mystical, "symptoms" are due to a "feminine" susceptibility which has not received proper support and correction from a male "guide and support". The internal Super Ego, as Freud would suggest, is considerably diminished in women. Where some moral initiative is detectable in these insufficient females, it is in the debased form of the "moral imperative": an inner voice which commands humiliating and repulsive acts, such as kissing the scabs of lepers. Leuba detects such bizarre activities in Marguerite Marie Alacocque and Madame Guyon, explaining that "a physician would see here
may we really attempt to compare the imaginative writer with the Dreamer in broad daylight and his creations with day-dreams?...It seems to me, however, that through this revealing characteristic of invulnerability we can immediately recognise His Majesty the Ego, the hero alike of every day-dream and of every story.
uncontrollable impulses and automatisms" (1929: 77). Concern about the internalisation of vicious gender prejudice is not Leuba's project. Rather, the moral imperative is yet another example of "an inordinate craving for the support of authority and affection, mental vacuity, obsession, and monoideism...a general psycho-physiological insufficiency" (1929: 201) which, for him, characterises the mystical disposition. The biological causes of female hysteria provoke crises which are equatable with mysticism:

It breaks out often in connection with the activity of the reproductive functions; it is, for instance, relatively frequent at puberty, in pregnancy, in diseases of the uterus, and at the climacteric change. It will occur to the reader that potent predisposing causes of mental instability were probably innately present in our great mystics. (1929: 192)

There is some differentiation between the great female mystics, who, nevertheless, still rated as hysterics:

St Catherine of Genoa, Santa Theresa, Mme Guyon and St Marguerite Marie suffered from hysterical attacks,(but)...we hold that the former separate themselves clearly from the insignificant and worthless individuals who, until recently, were regarded as the only possible sufferers from hysteria. (1929: 191)

Quite what this distinguishing factor is remains uncertain in Leuba's text, unless it is the manipulative skills of women such as Saint Teresa who obeyed instructions only insofar as they were in agreement with her purpose: "Otherwise, she is both incoercible and non-suggestible. This is an aspect of her suggestibility that must not be forgotten in comparison of her mental condition with that of ordinary highly suggestible neuropathic or hysterical persons" (1929: 84). There is still the fear then, that the mystic - which we may read here as the female mystic- will undermine the carefully-laid structure of both society and its language, mimicking and manipulating both, while appearing incapable. Leuba does not concern himself with looking outside this circle of symptom and stereotype.

Towards the end of his volume, Leuba asks the question: "What do the mystics want?", a question as tantalising as that asked by Freud about women. Leuba's undated remark to Marie Bonaparte. Quoted in Ernst Jones, Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, (3 vols. 1953-57), London: Hogarth Press, volume 2 (1955) p. 468. The original remark was in German: "was will das Weib?"
criteria are not the four categories of mysticism as defined by James, but apparently normal drives, for success, recognition and self-esteem:

1. self affirmation and the need for self-esteem
2. to cherish, to devote oneself to something or somebody
3. needs for affection and moral support
4. need for peace, single-mindedness or unity, in passivity and action
5. "organic" needs or needs for sensuous satisfaction. (1929: 116)

However, Leuba sees mysticism at best as providing for these needs with the delusion of escaping from isolation, and the subsequent "feminine" feeling of weakness and helplessness that surrounds and invades us. The outcome of mysticism, Leuba contends, is a distorted dependency lacking the intellectual drive: the traditional province of women. What is lacking in his definition of the mystical position are the qualities of ambition and progress; for Leuba, these indicate the only acceptable face of spirituality, in the form of the Bergsonian life-force:

That direction of the mystical effort is perhaps the thing most worthy of notice. It might be spoken of as a manifestation of the Life-Energy, of the Élan Vital... The important thing to do is to determine the conditions of the manifestation of the Life-Energy in order that we may control it more and more. (1929: 317)

The Psychology of Religious Mysticism is only one of many psychological studies of mysticism which appeared in the first half of this century. It is typical in stressing the parallels between mysticism and hysteria, linking both with the general supposed intellectual and physiological disadvantages of women. Prioritising practicality and progress, the "harnessing" and tapping of the Bergsonian flux is, apparently, acceptable to Leuba: emotional or visionary discovery and any practise of contemplation per se, is not. With Leuba, the misogynist implications of aligning mysticism with irrational and emotional intensity, permitting women to be prime contenders but at the same time disabling them from even religious authority and voice, are so strong as to be almost insurmountable. It is against this psychological appropriation of mysticism by the masculine Freudian tradition that women writers worked to rediscover the vein of valuable exploration of mysticism through creativity and accessing of the unconscious; that articulating of the subliminal realm which
James, in 1902, identified as a need, but did not see as a possibility. As I shall show, this exploration was carried on primarily through the medium of fiction. But some women did attempt to work within the religious sphere of esoteric mysticism, and it is to them that I shall now, briefly, turn.

In addition to works on mysticism by prominent philosophers, psychologists and theologians, there were many followers of arcane, occult and esoteric schools of "mystical" wisdom. These sects and texts illustrate the plurality of mystical voices, and the tendency for the mystically-inclined to seek original, even unorthodox paths. Often those involved were women, possibly because of discomfort with, and exclusion from, traditional church hierarchy. Isabelle De Steiger's *On a Gold Basis* (1908), is a typical example of those volumes which employ a tortuously allegorical style:

A man may be a magdalen, and in the alchemic process a contrite soul is spoken of as antinomy; ...The Virgin Mary is equally typical of the soul as representing that stage of the cosmic Ether inferior by degree of emanation to the free ether-Akasa- Eleuthera- Spirit. (1908: 104)

De Steiger has virtually constructed her own language, derived from the esoteric group to which she is allied, to the extent that her text, though concerned with alchemy, is virtually incomprehensible to the general reader. What is apparent, though, is that in her system almost everything stands for something else, as if she is constantly searching for an accurate analogy with which to speak of spiritual things. Discarding the orthodox language of the church, occult groups often devised their own language and symbolism, searching for a way to express what seemed important for them. Forms of mysticism were appropriated by these groups, because of mysticism's traditionally "ineffable" quality, and its adaptability to different perspectives.

In addition, there is esoteric mysticism proper which is generally associated with Theosophy. Modern Theosophy is generally assumed to have started in 1875, when the Theosophical Society was founded in America by H. P. Blavatsky and H. S. Olcott. In the twentieth century its work was carried on, by Annie Besant, Ernest Wood, Krishnamurti, and others. Mrs Besant herself was a firm supporter of
reincarnation, as is Theosophical teaching generally: "all this wheel of births and
deaths on which (men) are bound holds them bound to it by their want of knowledge,
by their not realising that they are really free if only they could understand" (Pope,
1908: 34).

Another theosophist, Mary Pope, published in 1908 a short pamphlet on
Mysticism, which maintained the usual historical and spiritual survey of the
phenomenon, incorporating Dean Inge, Saint Teresa, the medieval English mystics
Walter Hilton, Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich, the Theologica Germanica, and
Plotinus. Nature mysticism is exalted, especially Saint Francis, whom Pope
considered its greatest exponent; the Imitation of Christ is discounted because of its
failure in this area. The Quakers are lauded for keeping to the essentials of mysticism:
"The Friends have kept, brightly shining, the mystic light of the Divine Immanence"
(1908: 14).

Importantly, this Theosophical writer stresses the non-disruptive but
decidedly individualistic strain which is commonly perceived in the mystical
temperament, and which allows for such a large amount of ahistorical comparison
between mystical texts, and mystical personalities. While the mystic "never
needlessly quarrels with authority, he is more often than not a loyal and helpful
member of the church to which, by birth or inclination, he belongs; but he remains
emphatically sui generis- a law unto himself. The liberty he claims, he also gives,
meddling with no other man's conscience" (1908: 14-15). According to Pope, the
Quaker "mystical community" is the exception rather than the rule, and the mystic
can be more appropriately be described as somebody on a quest. In fact Grail imagery
is used by Pope and other explorers along this path. Deduction and reason are still
involved, but are decidedly upon a different plane. "Mrs. Besant... has often... told us
that if we want to prove a thing, we must use proper instruments for that particular
research. We cannot prove a world of four dimensions by three- dimensional
implements" (1908: 16).

Mrs Besant was not an advocate of dogma in the conventional sense, and
recommended its abandonment after the preliminary stages of the mystical life:
dogmas have to be broken into pieces, because they are obstacles in the ever
immortal search for truth. They must be broken when they are outgrown, and
they are outgrown when the unfolding Spirit of man begins to know for
himself, and no longer to need testimony from outside. (1949: 21)

Although Mrs Besant spells it out more clearly than the orthodox supporters of
mysticism would do, the individuality of the mystic, the mystic's suggestion that a
direct communication and communion can be established with God without the
mediation and supervision of the established church, is a tendency that the authorities
of the established Church have always had to be on their guard against- the Catholic
Church in particular. This acknowledgement must therefore have been a particularly
attractive prospect for women seeking to follow a spiritual or mystical path, many of
whom did join, write for, and become prominent in, organisations such as the
Theosophical society. Like the Quakers, the Theosophical society did not practise
gender discrimination, and, because of its recent founding, contrasted favourably with
the more established Churches, whose long tradition of male hierarchy was firmly
established.

The ideas of "other" and evocative uses of language and of the
fictional/spiritual autobiography form favoured with increasing originality by women
writers such as Underhill, Sinclair and Richardson, were not unrelated to each other.
Nor were they unrelated to the background of nineteenth-century religious thought
and its echoes in psychology, both popular and psychoanalytical. Women writing at
this time - the early decades of the twentieth century - were more able to see how all
strands of the philosophical tradition could open for them a space in which to explore
how they had sympathies and/or differences with what was expected of the mystic.
Underhill, Sinclair and Richardson were all aware of the philosophical and religious
tradition of mysticism, as well as harbouring an interest in new psychoanalytical
developments. Rather than embrace an esoteric cult, which would have offered them
an assured but limited audience, they each chose to create their own fictional space in
which to develop the concept of mysticism. Unwittingly perhaps, the combination of
the mystical explorations of male-author texts and the light which new
psychology-oriented education shed particularly upon the psyches of the female
gender (the feminine perception of spirituality), created a special opportunity for
women writers to seize, in writing at least, the initiative, and combine these multiple
disciplines into a creative and empowering unity.
In this chapter, we have seen how the study of mysticism in the early modernist period includes a wide range of authorial styles and ideals, growing from the shifting religious and philosophical lines of thought in the previous century, and learning to access greater confidence and creativity through the developments of psychoanalytic speculation. Some of these studies are open-minded and point towards future developments in linguistics and psychoanalysis, as well as in theology. Others highlight the difficulty faced by women who wished to break through the restrictions and stereotypes that operate even in the realm of mysticism.
"None who are solitary can be young, and I am the most lonely thing in the world"1

Evelyn Underhill may not have felt herself to be young, but her fascination with both mysticism and writing began at an early age; she became a popular writer on mysticism in the early twentieth century. And although it is little known, Underhill began her writing career as a novelist, developing her perspective through the imaginative representation of mysticism in fiction. Underhill's concepts of both mysticism and its expression in writing not only draw from the religious thought discussed above, but also point towards the future development of mysticism in women's writing.

Women of Underhill's generation were beginning to combine spirituality with intellectual lucidity. Underhill's friend, Lucy Menzies, in Mirrors of the Holy, emphasised the advantages of education in her account of Elisabeth Lesseur, who wrote in her (late nineteenth-century) journal that:

It [her studies, especially of classical philosophy] throws light on many things and it puts the mind in order. I cannot understand why it is not made the crown of a woman's education. (1928: 299-300)

Like Lesseur, Underhill's intellectual curiosity, coupled with her love of nature, was awakened early. An article she published in 1893 in Hearth and Home instructs: "In order to become widely and generally sympathetic, a girl should try to cultivate a habit of, and an interest in, everything". Later, Underhill saw her own specialised study and writing as a vocation. She was genuinely concerned about widespread ignorance of the mystical tradition of Christianity, and saw a need to enlighten and

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1 Material from this chapter was read at the conference "Fallen Angels: Twentieth Century Representations of Women's Spirituality", at LSU College, Southampton, on 1st June 1996, and has been used in a subsequent book proposal.  
2 the quotation is from one of Underhill's short stories for Horlicks magazine, "The Ivory Tower"(1904), in which the romantic princess turns out to be an ancient, solitary anchoress. Horlicks magazine vol 2 pp.207-211
inspire: "I look upon it as a sort of educational and missionary work really worth doing" (letter of 1912, in Armstrong, 1975: 146). Rather than enclose her ideas in a private journal, as Lesseur did, Underhill saw a reading public as intrinsic to her writing life.

She did not immediately decide upon non-fiction as the most suitable genre for realising this ambition. Underhill was drawn to poetry; her two published volumes, *Immanence*, and *Theophanies*, are for the most part lyrical verses based on small inspirations from nature. Her poems were published in the 1917 edition of the *Oxford Book of Mystical Verse*3. However, her later verses about the First World War were unsuccessful. "Evelyn could never succeed in the epic vein," comments her biographer, Armstrong, "...the mantle of the public poet did not suit her" (1975: 172, 177). Underhill's verse was more accessible where it dwelt on details of nature, and on the Bergsonian "holy thrust of living things" (in *Theophanies*). Her ability to describe minutiae indicates a writer's eye rather than a politically driven concern: a characteristic which we will come across again in later women writers. But Underhill also considered fiction-writing a suitable genre to convey the importance of mysticism.

Underhill's three novels, which were all published in the first decade of the century, were supernatural novels, a popular contemporary vogue. For example, in James Blyth's *A Haunted Inheritance* (1910), the narrator advocates learning from the paranormal:

> These evidences of other worlds had brought me to my senses, and instead of looking on psychics as moonstruck idiots, I began to see that it was possible that they were justified in despising the ignorant self-satisfaction of the average conventional man of society. (1910: 231)

Although there are references to the "Governor" and the "Divine Guardian" in Blythe's novel, its impetus is sensational rather than theistic: "It is a fearful thing to remember that there are still such weird beings as elementals materialising and dematerialising in favourite spots" (1910: viii). While Underhill's novels also deal with such strange phenomena, she is increasingly concerned with the unifying mystical meaning along with those of Arthur Waite, Aleister Crowley, Francis Thompson, R.H. Benson, Eva Goore-Booth, Alice Meynell, George Russell (A.E.), James Stephens and John Masefield.
underlying the supernatural episodes. How she attempts to express this is closely connected to the way she sees such experiences to be initiated.

2 Regarding Underhill's own early religious experience, in a letter of 1911 she describes having experienced a kind of "Trance Consciousness". Her letter is discussing the concept of "anaesthetic revelation" (of nitrous oxide and other commonly used medical gasses and drugs). Underhill's first-person relation of these events would not have been out of place in the appropriate section of James' Varieties:

At one time of my life I used to have abrupt fainting fits...I used to plunge into some wonderful peaceful but quite "undifferentiated" plane of consciousness, in which everything was quite simple and comprehended. I always resented being restored to what is ordinarily called "consciousness" intensely. (letter of 1911, 1975: 16)

Having fainted, Underhill does not undergo any kind of "vision" in the sense of hallucinatory images or supernatural auditions. She seems more to have contacted a profound state of being where linear thought and structure do not apply. Underhill notes a comparable experience in Mysticism when citing Madame Guyon: "From the moment of which I [Guyon] have spoken, my orison was emptied of all form, species, and images... in a profound recollection without action or speech" (1993: 184). In Underhill's novels, an initiatory episode into the spiritual life is often more graphically visionary, as she experiments with traditional novel form and her own creativity. However, there are connections between them and this experience which she herself claims to have undergone: a "different" spiritual plane often breaks in abruptly upon her fictional characters, as it did upon the young Underhill. In addition, her characters' experiences of mysticism, like Underhill's early experience, are not specifically Christian, although they do, almost incessantly, explore those altered states of consciousness which William James considered so important. Underhill sees such episodes as the means of accessing other worlds and times which underlie our own. Like James, she was fascinated by the preparation - psychological, linguistic, atmospheric - which prompts the new perception, whether "visionary" or not.
Underhill's conception of altered consciousness is not necessarily allied to the various initiatory procedures she explores: her faith is not therefore shaken by hostile psychological explanation (such as Leuba's). But ritual of some kind often has a part to play. These may comprise a simple act of withdrawal, as in the anonymous article "A Woman's Thoughts about Silence" Underhill copied down in 1892:

Go out under the solemn stars, and strive to think of Infinite Love which guides and governs them in their courses from the least to the greatest. (1975: 15)

Underhill, like her fictional characters- Willie Hopkinson (The Grey World, 1904) in the beauty of Italy; Paul (The Lost Word, 1907), in the hallowed atmosphere of ancient churches-responds to the solemnity of such a scene. She advocates wordless concentration upon a single object; Willie gazes upon a iconic Italian fresco, Paul upon a carved stone angel, Constance (The Column of Dust, 1909) upon a cup purporting to be the Holy Grail. In Mysticism, Underhill wrote of Kant, who "found that he could better engage in philosophical thought while gazing steadily at a neighbouring church steeple" (1993: 58).

But Underhill also explored linguistic initiations. Language did not always imply clarity; in the novels, mysterious chanting has a prominent place. In The Column of Dust, Constance, alone in the antique bookshop where she works, summons a disembodied being by the private recitation of a "strange old Hebrew spell":

The words drew from her - she knew not for what reason - a long and rhythmic cry, a wailing music, with curious ululative prolongations of the vowel sounds. It came from some obscure corner of her spirit, which thus found for the first time a language suited to its needs. (1904: 16)

This "wailing music" anticipates the wordless song of an old woman outside an underground station in Woolf's Mrs Dalloway (1925). Both reach back to "some obscure corner of the spirit", older than, but inaccessible to, ordinary language. "If you see in your incantation a method of shifting the field of consciousness, and call your magic wand an autoscope, these things no longer seem silly, but take their place as part of the cosmic plan" (1904: 21), explains Underhill. It was her belief that such incantation could alter one's state of mind, ultimately to a prayerful consciousness.
Otto, as we have seen, remarks upon this method in his *Idea of the Holy*, advocating the use of language as a psychological devotional device, rather than a vehicle of signified meaning. Again the purpose is to allow a latent "spirit" to come to the fore. Hostile psychologists such as Leuba would condemn the sense of presence here as mechanically produced, but the writings of Inge, James, and von Hugel (with which Underhill was familiar) had forged the connections between psychology and religious experience, inspiring Underhill to explore linguistic initiation into a spiritual realm which arises from within the self.

Underhill also explores the initiatory potential of public ritual. In a scene from *The Lost Word*, Paul, a young stonemason, attends his first Masonic rite, during which he receives a vision. The ritual recedes from his consciousness once it has done its work:

> He had lost the Lodge-room, and the ritual by whose incantation he had been freed from the hoodwink of sense; heard only the far-off murmur of words, and felt its atmosphere as we notice some unsubstantial memory which thrusts itself between us and actual things. (1907: 46)

Paul reaches behind the incongruous plane of the ritual liturgy to the truths for which it prepares the initiate. The inference that Underhill regards church liturgy in the same way is not hard to grasp, and is a subject she writes upon at length in later years. Mark, another stonemason in *The Lost Word*, explains: "When human beings are actually in earnest, they all develop the liturgic sense. You see that in the rites and ceremonies with which we surround our games and meals and love affairs" (1907: 195). Underhill consistently agrees with this statement, pragmatically noting in *Mysticism* that a spiritual outlook can also be awakened by more loosely defined liturgical approaches such as "Dancing, music, and other exaggerations of natural rhythm" (1993: 58). All these activities generate an emotional response; in *Mysticism*, Underhill agrees with Schleiermacher: "Mystical activity...like all other activities of the self, opens with that sharp stimulation of the will, which can only be obtained through the emotional life" (1993: 188). But emotional life, for Underhill, was not merely a feeling of dependence. Immersing herself in the emotional complexities with which she devised her novels themselves provided a necessary initiation for Underhill into her vocation as a writer. As an act of sustained and solitary concentration, writing
according to a novelistic formula involved the ceremonial structure of a well known form, and an explicitly emotive and fictional employment of vocabulary and idea which allowed Underhill, and her readers, to access the meditative angle upon which she developed her later work.

3 Underhill was attracted not only to mysticism, but to magic. In Mysticism, where revised editions tend ever increasingly towards traditionally Christian terminology, Underhill retained a substantial chapter on magic and alchemical symbolism. She writes of such projects from her own experience: Underhill's self-styled "irresponsible theistic period" was the one in which she joined the "Golden Dawn", an esoteric group which sought spiritual enlightenment by means of occult practices and magic. During her brief membership, in 1905, Underhill took the name soror quaerens lucem: sister searching for the light/enlightenment. She depicted, in her fiction, similar societies. In The Grey World, Willie Hopkinson, the hero of the novel, is seeking for spirituality and an explanation of his own memories from a "former existence". He joins a spurious society - the "Seekers of the Soul" - where "Table turning, astrology, and divination by coffee-grounds, had all been called in to provide a facile solution to the great conundrum" (1904: 100). Such circles Underhill depicts with contempt - a similar society is ridiculed in The Column of Dust. But Underhill sees the positive aspects of magic ceremonial: in an article in the Fortnightly Review (November 1907), she writes that in so far as occult practice involves a mental, emotional or in general terms a "psychological" preparation of the adept for communion with the unseen object of his adoration, it will have a beneficial result. In Mysticism, she affirms that "all ceremonial religion contains some elements of magic...this is not surprising when we perceive how firmly occultism is rooted in psychology: how perfectly it is adapted to certain perennial characteristics of the human mind - its curiosity, its arrogance, its love of mystery" (1993: 152). Like James, Underhill is fascinated by the psychology of spiritual consciousness. The only trouble with magic, she notes, is that it awakens desires (for love) that it cannot satisfy; and in general, magic is always invoked for some self-seeking end. Underhill differentiates between magic and more genuinely mystical spirituality which is in the direction of will and desire, a concept we also find in May Sinclair. Because of her
reading, or even her personal experience of magical effects, physical anomalies - miracles - do not provoke Underhill's scorn either in her fiction (mind-possession, reincarnation, spirit worlds are all integrated into the novels) or in later work, although her directive is always higher and less tangible than these paranormal "side effects" which magic per se never really rises above. Discussing the second, Illuminative stage of the mystic journey in Mysticism, Underhill admits that strange phenomena may arise, taking the form of: "a) auditions b) dialogues between the surface consciousness and another intelligence which purports to be divine c) visions and sometimes d) in automatic writing...[the form of the phenomena]...depends upon the individual self's psychic makeup towards pure contemplation, lucid vision or automatic expression" (1993: 241). Again, there is a sense of a higher purpose than that afforded by mere strange psychological happenings, which accords with the attitude of the great mystics of the past (such as Saint Teresa) to whom Underhill turns in later texts.

The subject of alchemy was of particular interest to Underhill in that its symbolism of transformation touched the heart of her interest in mysticism:

The art of the alchemist, whether spiritual or physical, consists in completing the work of perfection, bringing forth and making dominant, as it were, the "latent goldness" which "lies obscure" in metal or man. (1993: 143)

For Underhill, mystical experience should be seen as a catalyst, like the philosopher's stone, to further and enhanced life: "a tingeing stone: which imparts its goldness to the base metals brought within its sphere of influence" (1993: 432).

For Underhill, magic is a route towards mystical consciousness, a stage of development which accesses the inexplicable, and a symbolism which presents mysticism as a transforming power which enables and enlightens rather than confines and pacifies. She views writing under similar aspects: with fiction writing in particular, connecting the creative vision of the writer and the magical ("fictional") happenings which may accompany mystical illumination. Underhill's interest in the area of magic, much of which would qualify as the unheimlich, in Freudian terminology, far outstrips James' experiential account, or the steady, historical approach to mysticism made by Inge and von Hugel. Her inclination to employ its
effects in her fiction indicate the constellation of the imagination, the uncanny, and the unconscious which she increasingly evoked in order to speak of mysticism.

4 Philosophical and psychological inquiry increasingly informed Underhill's mystical vision. Vitalism pervaded the spirit of Mysticism:

Bergson, Nietzsche, Eucken, differing in their opinion as to life's meaning, are alike in this vision: in the stress which they lay on the supreme importance and value of life - a great Cosmic life transcending and including our own. (1993: 27)

In later additions, Underhill warned against an uninformed spirituality of immanence which over-emphasises the drive to tap "vitalist" energy in the name of relentless progress, as Leuba advocated, fearing:

a shallow doctrine of immanence unbalanced by any adequate sense of transcendence, which now threatens to re-model theology in a sense which leaves no room for the noblest and purest reaches of the spiritual life. (1993: viii)

Underhill's is not an unthought-out spirituality. Her bent was towards pragmatism, rather than idealism; but she needed some philosophical recognition of a transcendent deity. Popular theories of eugenics and evolution, too, play their part in her conception of mysticism. Underhill never conflates the mystic quest with an intellectual or philosophical one, preferring a biological metaphor:

It is the name of that organic process which involves... the achievement here and now of the immortal heritage of man. (1993: 81)

However, Underhill has an obvious interest in psychology as a tool for the appreciation of mysticism. She was a keen amateur psychologist and clearly believed that concentration upon the human psyche and its limitations furthered the understanding of the necessity and provisionality of religious signs and symbols. In The Mystic Way she describes mysticism as a "sequence of psychological states";

Jantzen comments that "the popularity of [Mysticism] helped to reinforce the appeal of the psychological approach to mysticism in contemporary thought" (1995: 317). Underhill's interest in character delineation, which came to the fore with her early novels, remained and boosted her interest in the psychology of the individual mystic.
This not only led her to look closely at the traditional tripartite "way" of mysticism (Purgation, Illumination, Union), but at the complexities within the individual psyche.

In Mysticism, Underhill replaces James's celebrated "four marks of the mystic" (passivity, transiency, noetic insight, and ineffability) with her own definition, stressing the romantic, experiential and active nature of the spiritual path:

1) Mysticism is practical, not theoretical
2) Mysticism is an entirely spiritual activity
3) The business and method of mysticism is Love
4) Mysticism entails a definite psychological experience (1993: 81 seq)

Gone is the insistence on the ephemeral subjection of an individual to an incommunica
cable revelation. Although Underhill obviously owes much of her interest in psychology, and individual experience to James, her description of the mystic leans more towards the integration of the mystical experience from a theoretical schema and into life as it is actually lived. Having explored the fictional possibilities of mysticism as she did in her three novels, Underhill is, even in later work, far more inclined to invest her writing with a sense of the mystic's character, rather than her or his abstract characteristics, or of the ineffable nature of the supposed mystic peak experience.

Because of this interest in character, already evident in her fiction, Underhill also develops a provisional theory of personality types which inform the spirit of Mysticism as much as her characterisation in the novels give them their essential colour. Underhill uses her psychological knowledge, as well as her novelist's eye, in order to distinguish the three main metaphorical structures of the mystical life as she sees them:

The first is the craving which makes [the mystic] a pilgrim and wanderer ...
The next is that craving of heart for heart, of the soul for its perfect mate, which makes [of the mystic] a lover. The third is the craving for inward purity and perfection, which makes.. an ascetic, and in the last resort a saint. (1993:

She was not the first to do this: in the years preceding her work, others had attempted to categorise the mystics into various groups. For example, Vaughan (1880) made the useful distinction between three classes of the theopathetic, the theosophic and the theurgic mystic - i.e., the saint, the sage, and the spiritualist. Inge divided mystics into similar groups: the speculative mystic, the practical or devotional mystic, and the nature mystic.
126)... we may fairly take as their characteristic forms of symbolic expression the Mystic Quest, the Marriage of the Soul, and the "Great Work" of the Spiritual Alchemists. (1993: 129)

Shrouded in romantic overtones though these definitions are, they help to interpret Underhill's own fiction: Willie Hopkinson in The Grey World, for example, is definitely on a quest as he seeks for satisfaction of his religious curiosity and his own paranormal memories from a former life. Paul, the stone mason in The Lost Word possessed by the idealistic ambition of building a magnificent church, should have saved his heart for a spiritual marriage! Constance, though her soul is prompted to flower, by the catalyst of the Watcher, into spirituality and honesty, gains no credit for the spiritual "gold" she acquires from the quasi-alchemical transformation of her soul. Underhill's three characteristic types of mystic allow room for development and activity within their individual types more than previous definitions, which are comparatively flat.

There is no inevitability about the mystic journey. Underhill admits that physical or mental trauma can result from a mystic experience. Although she believes that mystics generally possess "thresholds of exceptional mobility" (1993: 62), Underhill writes that there is a link between the concentrated interests of the mystic and the hysteric:

Psychologically considered, all ecstasy is a form - the most perfect form - of the state which is technically called "complete mono-ideism", that withdrawal of consciousness from circumference to centre, that deliberate attention to one thing, is here pushed - voluntarily or involuntarily - to its logical conclusion. (1993: 363)

However, there is a distinction between spiritual single-mindedness (such as the master builder Paul, intent on building his church) and neurotic obsession: "the mono-ideism of the mystic is rational, whilst that of the hysteric patient is invariably irrational" (1993: 60). Integration of activity and insight is the key to distinguishing mystic experience.

Underhill warns against too dogmatic a dissection of mysticism's symptoms and accidents, again using a scientific metaphor: "To deduce the nature of a
compound from the character of its by-products is notoriously unsafe" (1993: 61).

Even psychology cannot adequately explain the mystical experience:

those comfortable words "auto-suggestion," "psychosensorial hallucination" and "association neurosis"...do but reintroduce mystery in another and less attractive form. (1993: 266)

Underhill's interpretation of mysticism approaches rather the appreciation of a work of art, to be appreciated, ultimately, "without any help from dialectics", reaching "a point to which thought alone is unable to attain" (1993: 86). She admires the intellectual humility of Dame Gertrude More who entitled her private religious writing "Amor ordinem nescit: an Ideot's Devotions" (1993: 88). However, too little intellect is not to be confused with a capacity to transcend the intellect. Madame Guyon's intellectual failings led to her critical dissection: "this feeble quality of her surface intelligence...makes her an ideal "laboratory specimen" for the religious psychologist" (1993: 183). Underhill's attitude to the intellect, although not without its tensions, is, again, an aid to understanding a central mystery which cannot fully be represented by any theoretical schema:

at best all these transcendental theories are only symbols, methods, diagrams; feebly attempting the representation of an experience which in its fullness is always the same. (1993: 101)

If there is a fuller way of representing the mystic experience, it comes from the area of the mind which generates the creative symbols of dreams and art, and can perhaps only be expressed through this creativity. Freud's work on dream and hysteric encoding interests Underhill; she stresses the underlying creative element of mysticism that often produces visionary material:

If there be any truth in Freud's insistence upon the symbolic nature of normal dreams, it is the less surprising that the dream imagination of the Christian mystics should work up visions of a symbolic sort...Our modern tendency to consider visions quite extraordinary and pathological is probably mistaken. (1993: 288)

I shall return to this idea when discussing Underhill's approach to writing itself, and its ability to represent the "stream of consciousness", including the mind's subliminal
realm. First, I shall look at Underhill's exploration of traditional mystical stages, showing how these lead to a practice of creative mysticism.

5 Underhill devotes a large part of *Mysticism* to a detailed investigation of the mystic journey as defined by the classic stages of Purgation, Illumination and Union. Regarding the primary stage of loss and (self) sacrifice, she ranges from the graphically disturbing to more modern theories of the (psychological) redirection of object cathexis, and that loss of the self which literary theory and feminist philosophy continue to discuss: "That dreadful consciousness of a narrow and limiting I-hood which dogs our search for freedom and full life, is done away" (1993: 333). In her other work too, these contradictions are reflected: for there was a longstanding masochistic tradition of female mystics which undoubtedly influenced Underhill both in her work and her life.

Lucy Menzies, a friend of Underhill, herself wrote and edited books on mysticism. In her *Mirrors of the Holy* (1928), she discusses ten women mystics from various historical periods. In her introduction, Menzies claims that there is no intrinsic group of female mystics as opposed to male ones. Yet in the same introduction she stresses the importance of passive suffering. Mechtild of Magdeburg (1212-1280) displayed a disturbingly masochistic inversion of values:

> When virgins are clothed according to the will of the Bridegroom, they require no other wedding garments; that is to say, they are rich in suffering, illness, sorrow, temptation, many kinds of pain...these are the wedding garments of the loving soul. (1928: 52-3)

The lingering belief that there is an essential connection between being a woman and taking masochistic pleasure in suffering referred to this tradition. William James cites several examples which highlight the tendency: he quotes, for example, from the diary of Marie Baskirtseff:

> In this depression and dreadful uninterrupted suffering, I don't condemn life. On the contrary, I like it and find it good... I enjoy weeping, I enjoy my despair. I enjoy being exasperated and sad. (1902: 82)

The distasteful "moral imperatives" highlighted by Leuba are part of the same inherited and internalised masochistic tradition; when Saints Angela of Forligno and
Margaret Marie Alacocque felt obliged to lick the scabs of lepers, they believed they were acting under divine compulsion.

Compared with the female mystics and hysterics discussed by Leuba, or Menzies, Underhill lacked masochistic proclivities. However, as Jantzen points out, sometimes Underhill's behaviour does display elements of the irrational self-sacrifice associated with the female mystics of the past. Underhill's only obvious "penance" was the wearing of a white lace cap, as a sign, like a religious habit, that while she was in the world, she was not of it; but she may indeed have sacrificed herself and her desired religious destiny when she married her husband: she relinquished her intention to become a Roman Catholic because of Hubert Stuart Moore's objections. Jantzen comments that "she fell, here, headlong into one of the most ancient of all traps for women, the idea that women should sacrifice themselves for men, particularly for their husbands". The letters they exchanged when they were courting did not bode well: "Why are her concerns 'fads'; while his are 'real interests'? ..and what sort of relationship can be built between those who see themselves as 'your nurse' and 'her boy'?" (1993: 92). Hostile psychologists would diagnose a dislocation of roles - infantilising and maternal by turn - indicating a neurotic disorder. "The rhetoric of self-sacrifice has been used far too often to keep women from their own freedom and fulfilment: the facts that women themselves use this language and that it is set into a religious framework have not made it any the less constricting" warns Jantzen (1993: 92).

Additionally, her later relationship with von Hugel (he became her most important spiritual director) indicates a need for Underhill to feel herself dependent, just as Leuba would predict, on a male authority. "I cannot help but feel deeply uneasy about the effects of his (von Hugel's) relationship with her; and the more I probe the unease the more it generalises to disquiet about other significant men in her life (particularly her husband)," declares Jantzen (1993: 91). Whether these connections signify dependence or merely respect on Underhill's part is unclear.

Underhill's fiction demonstrates an uncomfortable attitude towards hidden suffering and sacrifice, especially when it is the female characters who undertake the burden of the suffering. Catherine Alstone in The Lost Word gives up her own happiness to enable her husband to continue with his visionary craftwork. On their
honeymoon, Paul only turns away from his exploration of the local buildings and towards Catherine when he receives an upsetting letter about his planned ecclesiastical construction: then, "he ran to her for consolation; as even big boys will run to their outgrown nurses if only the bruise be sufficiently brown" (1907: 296). Underhill's language resembles her own letters to Stuart-More before they were married, and suggests discomfort with the course of conventional romantic relationships. Catherine "matures" through tending a dying woman (who had achieved a dubious sanctity through hair shirts and scourging,) and attempting to renounce her love for Paul. Her destiny is one of complete sacrifice, which she "infers" from an ancient Pieta: "She (the Virgin) suffered... His was the peace and hers the greater pain" (1907: 292). Underhill obviously intended Catherine to represent the first, purgative, stage of the mystical life, learning of spiritual consolation through sacrificial suffering:

"You are there to suffer. Can't you realise the actual joy that there is in suffering when it is in purifying pain? ...It is the feeling that makes some women desire childbirth- the mystical satisfaction of voluntary pain. There is an ecstasy in willing torture: it confers immortal possibilities." (Mark to Catherine, 1907: 229)

There is an element of "patient Griselda" in the story. Seeing Catherine as symbolic of the human soul serving its God through a period (albeit prolonged) of aridity is more Underhill's point, perhaps, than the uncongenial portrait of a twentieth-century wife humouring an impossible husband. Yet the masochistic life of past women mystics has a clear influence in this text. By contrast, Paul is a martyr to the basic (artistic and spiritual) ignorance of his fellow creatures, including to some degree Catherine herself, but his vocation as inspired architect is never doubted. Underhill had yet to envision the progress of a single soul through the three main stages of the mystical journey; the conventional split between gender-defined adherence to the flesh and the spirit in women and men respectively is starkly portrayed in this text. Her first novel had been more hopeful, if less realistic: Hester Waring finds artistic fulfilment in surviving her bereavement and renouncing society. But as Underhill wrote her last novel (The Column of Dust), the overemphasis on purgative
self-sacrifice on the part of her heroine Constance seems painfully close to an authorial loss of hope.

In the course of the Column of Dust, Constance's higher consciousness is awakened, but this leaves her with no place in society at all. She almost inevitably has to die. She does this very admirably, sacrificing herself for her child: Vera sickens, and Constance wears herself out caring for her. A sinister episode occurs before Constance's death; walking in the thick fog, she encounters a conventual building where women pray for the dead. These "Helpers of the Holy Souls" embody the penance-filled hue of the female role, prompting Constance to spend herself to the death in becoming "that antique symbol of incarnate divinity: a weary, selfless mother wholly concentrated on the well-being of her child" (1909: 175).

However, by the time Underhill comes to write Mysticism, purgative sacrifice is part of a larger spiritual process, which both psychology and literature can inform. In "The Purification of the Self", she has introduced a definite note of psychological sublimation into a process where:

[the mystic] kills his lesser love of the world of sense, frees himself from the "remora of desire," unifies all his energies about the new and higher centre of his life. (1993: 203)

Underhill retains a strong vocabulary ("kills his lesser love"), injecting her later work with an energy which attracts and occasionally aggravates her readership. A didactic tone, which was present to a rather unsuccessful extent in the novels, ("I think that he was purged of the sin of pride at that moment": 1904: 299), takes on a new strength in her later analyses:

In the terms of the hormic psychology, the conative drive of the psyche must be concentrated on new objectives; and the old paths, left to themselves, must fade and die. (1993: 217)

Underhill's thought is similar to that of Freud in Mourning and Melancholia (discussed in the next chapter). Underhill's difference is that she insists upon a rerooted spiritual cathexis rather than another human material objective, as in Freud's thesis. In addition, the way has a positive conclusion, encompassing the multiple fruits of Union which is, in Underhill's view, the clearly visible result of spiritual growth: "From this inward surrender the self emerges to the new life, the new
knowledge which is mediated to it under the innumerable forms of Contemplation" (1993: 327).

Finally, when Underhill comes in Mysticism to discuss the "Dark Night of the Soul", that advanced purgative stage which directly precedes spiritual Union, she has refined her concept of loss and sacrifice until it approaches the metaphysical concept of something beyond language itself, which can only be accessed once a (presumed to be) coherent grasp of logical language is relinquished: "The 'mystic death' or Dark Night ...is that last painful break with the life of illusion...the tearing away of the self from that world of becoming ...to which its intellect and senses correspond" (1993: 401). The impetus of Underhill's thought is therefore away from a pretence of comprehension, towards a fuller insight. Rather than misogynist mortification, she has moved towards a theory of sublimation, which we shall find again in the writing of May Sinclair. Sacrifice of illusion is a necessary crucible - "No transmutation without fire, say the alchemists" (1993: 401) - which generates the Illumination of mysticism's traditional second stage.

6 The second stage of the mystical path is that of Illumination. This state ranges from a heightened perception of the ordinary, to visions, or an illumination halfway between these two phenomena: a gold light which seems literally to be shed upon the mystic's everyday world. Just as in alchemy, it is the ground of being which is transmuted; Underhill stresses that it is the new (illuminated) slant which brings her mysticism to bear upon writing and life.

Initially, Illumination may bring more confusion than clarity, as viewer and viewed merge:

perhaps we should not here speak of *sight*: for that which is seen is not discerned by the seer - if indeed it is possible here to distinguish seer and seen as separate things. (1993: 333)

Underhill uses a range of imagery from the arcane (alchemy) to the modern and technical: "The human cinematograph has somehow changed its rhythm, and begins to register new and more real aspects of the external world" (1993: 192). Early cinema had its influence upon Underhill as it did upon Richardson. However, sacred sites also remain important: "Where there is a shrine set apart, the other world presses
through into this...one may get a glimpse of the vision" (1904: 197). In this extract, Willie Hopkinson is on a private pilgrimage in Italy, but Underhill shows that the city of London also provides revelatory insights. Willie senses a presence in the city as a whole:

He found in her streets the mystical place-spirit which is seldom permitted to enter her houses; and it fed his soul. Seeing her as a dream town set over against the city that has foundations, he felt that in her entity she knew herself so to be. (1904: 175)

Such passages speak more eloquently than the clumsy authorial comments Underhill interposes in some of the "church scenes". She could be explicit about the mystical stage she was referring to: "He (Willie) ...had come at last to the second, or illuminative, stage of the journey: for his way... had been the old mystic's way" (1904: 235).

Willie Hopkinson is the only one of his family to possess a visionary capacity. This gives him a heightened sense of consciousness of the beautiful aspect of ordinary things - an illuminating "side effect"- while distancing him from materiality:

the strange way these things [tables, chairs, food] had of becoming suddenly unsubstantial and remote... the joys [he sees vivid pictures in random cloud formations] as well as the terrors of the visionary were his. (1904: 23)

The "split" between reality as most people see it, and the disembodied visions of sensitive twice-born souls (James's term, but literally true for Underhill's character) is something Underhill moved towards healing as her thought progressed. But the insights of the Jamesian "differences of view" were as strong in her early fiction as they remained throughout her later texts.

Underhill's second novel, The Lost Word, 1907, further illustrated the difficulties of integrating a visionary capacity with a fully embodied life. Here an architect's great work on a church is bound up with his imperative spiritual vision: both are marred by (other people's) human weakness. It is implied that the perfection of the "Pattern-world", glimpsed in a miraculous vision, is impossible to attain in this life. Paul sets to work, finding fellow craftsmen (and women) at the Guild of
Apprentices, and battling with frustration over their imperfections, a battle which is the main lesson of his life:

Unless he could hold up these variously ignorant and eccentric persons to the altitude of his mystical pattern, their hands would degrade that pattern to the level of earth. He saw now how inevitable was the discrepancy between the angel's hand and the shadow that it cast; how impossible that the secret word should be communicated on such a plane. (1907: 84)

Paul is feeling here the mystical frustrations of ineffability and transience, and struggles, as Underhill did, to reconcile his vision of spiritual and aesthetic ideals with the material of this world. These "variously ignorant and eccentric persons" represent the mass of church goers, whom Underhill herself was initially unwilling to join. Paul, suffering from the same reluctance, is caught between the overwhelming illumination of Platonically ideal heavenly values and his failure to integrate them with the human world of relationships and, indeed, insufficient language fully to communicate his illumination. Miraculous vision does not, therefore, automatically eliminate worldly problems.

In Underhill's third novel there is a greater emphasis on that final vision of union which dissolves individuality. Constance is given, under the influence of her "Watcher," a decidedly "Oceanic" vision:

She was an infinitesimal bubble in that unsubstantial mass [i.e., of Life]. In an instant it would be dissolved, reabsorbed in the ocean; all its cherished separateness forever gone. (1909: 67)

Constance's alliance with her "Watching" spirit is a mutual learning experience. He reveals to Constance the visionary beauty of nature: "She was finally made aware of...an angle from which she might perceive the splendour, aliveness, and mysterious qualities of natural things" (1909: 75). Constance educates the Watcher about the plight of the poor, preventing him from dismissing their squalor. Underhill is frequently overdidactic: the Watcher is a hierarchical traditionalist as well as having a "nose" for atmospheric churches. The conclusion of The Column of Dust, where Constance achieves something of a martyr's crown, is intended to be the reader's own

The plot and concerns of the novel have much in common with William Golding's The Spire (1964) which is about the symbolic and spiritual implications of building a cathedral despite human failings.
"Illumination"; the heavenly vision towards which Underhill is working through her writing.

Appreciating the difficulties involved with the mystic vision, Underhill's ideal, as expressed in Mysticism, is for a greater integration of Illumination and the quotidian, and as her writing develops, she is more able to link the illuminative insight with the daily life of the individual. Visionary capacity is within the potential of everyone:

Most surely [humanity] is a vision-making animal...dominated by dreams no less than by appetites- dreams which can only be justified upon the theory that he moves towards some other goal than that of physical perfection or intellectual supremacy. (1993: 17)

Underhill links the increasing capacity for visionary insight with an evolutionary process akin to eugenics and Vitalism. As with all these progressive concepts, the illuminative insight at its most integrated is for Underhill a synthesising concept which yet allows for individuality:

that "light behind," that unity where all these opposites are lifted up into harmony, into a higher synthesis; and the melody is perceived, not as a difficult progress of sound, but as a whole. (1993: 40)

Underhill insists on the vivid realism of her ocular symbolism. Illumination has the real qualities of an enhanced vision, a theme which recurs with later women writers: "one aspect of the universe is for [mystics] focused so sharply that in comparison with it all other images are blurred, vague, and unreal" (1993: 65). The state of Illumination is, at its best, a "new and blissful act of vision" (1993: 239), which: "may also be enjoyed in regard to the phenomenal world... the self perceives an added significance and reality in all natural things" (1993: 240).

In Mysticism, Underhill has developed the idea of a fusion between the symbolism, or symbolic fiction, of illuminated insight, and a real radiance which affects the material world:

The Illuminatives seem to assure us that its apparently symbolic name is really descriptive; that they do experience a kind of radiance...[and] the power of perceiving a splendour always there. (1993: 249)
Underhill did not attain this constant luminosity of vision in her fiction writing, although it was a perception which she recognised and described in later work. In her novels, illuminative visions are spectacular and uncanny rather than an organic shift of perception. Underhill's attitude towards the more fantastic visions which she depicts in her fiction (for instance, the appearance of the Holy Grail in her last novel), is one of sacramental reverence: "Such a vision... is the 'accident' which represents and enshrines a 'substance' unseen" (1993: 271). But in later works, she generally prefers to emphasise the constancy and inspiration of the mystic vision, a change of perspective which is not content to revel in "escapist" fiction or placid acceptance as she writes in a 1908 correspondence: "one sees the world at those moments to be so completely as 'energised by the invisible' that there is no temptation to rest in mere enjoyment of the visible." (Letters, ed. Williams, 1991: 80). It is this shift from the fantastic and uncanny to the integrated vision which later women writers concerned with mysticism sought to support and express.

If the alchemical transformation has a strong connection with mystical Illumination and its expression in fiction, then Underhill's two other tropes for the orientation of the mystical life are also detectable in and applicable to her written exploration of mysticism. The concept of the "quest" came to the fore in her fiction, perhaps most particularly in the first novel, where Willie Hopkinson travels in distance and understanding as he seeks spiritual understanding, and in her third, The Column of Dust. A curious interjection into this otherwise squalid tragedy is Constance's discovery of the Holy Grail, in a "church" in Penrith; she is subsequently traced by its ascetic "Keeper", who bequeaths the grail to her. The Grail itself is depicted as: "merely a cup of rough glass, curiously iridescent, stained with the colours of an imperial grief" (1909: 143). Martin, the dying "keeper", tells Constance she cannot escape her vocation, that the grail, is, in effect, seeking her: "The Finger of God is not to be escaped. It pursues, it caresses, it touches where it will" (1909: 143), and in an atmosphere reminiscent of Francis Thompson's "Hound of Heaven" poem, Constance is relentlessly driven to accept the Grail, and its responsibilities.

Hidden in her cupboard, the glass of the Grail throws all of her knowledge into a different, reversed light, as if it was a supernatural brand of Irigaray's later
Speculum: "How could a sensible and industrious woman, whose investigations of philosophy had ranged from Aristotle to Schopenhauer, find room in her consciousness for that incredible cup, and its fantastic guardian?" (1909: 147). And how can Constance survive with her inner knowledge when conditions are so set against her? To Constance, the Grail provides another route to Illumination. The tragedy of her story is that Underhill could not see a way to integrate Constance's given insights with the censorious society in which she has to live. Underhill has shown that an ultimate goal is hard to depict within the discourse of text, whether fact or fiction, unless it does, like the Grail in her novel or, as we shall see, Irigaray's text, throw a revisionary light on already existing material, itself becoming part of a larger ongoing quest.

Rather than mentioning the Grail explicitly in her later texts, Underhill absorbed the implications of her fictional examination of the subject: her approach to writing involves the re-viewing of a long and colourful mystical tradition, and what is lost in terms of traditional scholarship is gained as fresh insight for Underhill and her contemporaries as they search - by the light of the grail - for the expression of their own mysticism and creativity, in order to continue the "pilgrimage" or "quest" that writing affords. The Grail is, traditionally, a female symbol of spirituality: its mythical qualities of re-vision and quest are continued in women's explorations in the mystic revival.

Underhill also saw the spiritual life in terms of romantic longing. However, the romance of mysticism was far from straightforward. We have seen that romantic configurations of mysticism are typically conceived as the human soul playing a passive "female" role to the dynamic and masculine action of God. Romantic (in the philosophical sense) religious thought, stressing the feeling of emotional dependence upon a deity, reinforced the passive and vulnerable status of the soul. While Patmore eroticised the configuration with mystical reverence in the nineteenth century, hostile early twentieth-century psychologists such as Leuba saw the symptoms of a hystерically suppressed female sexual displacement. Meanwhile, romantic fiction set down the same story of female acquiescence to a human male counterpart. Underhill therefore inherited a difficult terrain when she explored romance in her fiction.
Conventional romance always has a part to play in Underhill's fiction writing, but it is generally an uneasy part. In none of the three novels does a romantic relationship end happily or creatively. For example, in *The Grey World*, there develops a brief and jarring relationship between Willie and one of his female co-workers in a bookbinding workshop, Mildred Brent. Although they become engaged, the relationship is doomed to failure, as the fundamental motive of both is "egoism". Willie proceeds with a romantic quest for a higher form of love. Human romance is dealt with more fully in Underhill's subsequent novel (*The Lost Word*), where the major drama is of the relationship, and eventual marriage, between Paul and Catherine; and Catherine's growth in spirituality to the extent that she can bear more misfortune and frustration than he. Underhill makes it clear that Paul, with his asceticism and vision, is not really the marrying type: "There is a type of artist to whom chastity both of soul and of body seems an indispensable condition of his state. To Paul it was not a beautiful myth, but merely a necessity of nature, that only Galahad should attain the graal" (1907: 112). There is obviously something of the monastery about the conditions in which Paul and his colleagues work on the church - indeed one of the characters later becomes a monk. Compared with her approval of this spiritual atmosphere, Underhill's disposition towards the married state is far from unambiguously favourable: "there is a spiritual chemistry, as the old alchemists knew... the white flame and the red can never burn together" (1907: 204). In *Mysticism* she later reiterates Patmore's opinion that the human relationship is an imperfect version of the heavenly: "The language of human passion is tepid and insignificant beside the language in which the mystics try to tell the splendours of their love. They force upon the unprejudiced reader the conviction that they are dealing with an ardour far more burning for an Object far more real" (1993: 89). While Leuba was to point out that most of the mystics who used erotic language in a religious context did not engage in normal human relationships - they were unmarried or derived no satisfaction from their partners - Underhill's romantic description of the tendency in her fiction refrains from psychologically acute criticism and instead adds to its mystery, although she did not, of course, deduce that those who were celibate and spiritual were necessarily neurotic. She was unable to provide a comfortable integration between human and divine "romance" in the novels, despite exalted
commentaries on the final events of both *The Lost Word* and *The Column of Dust*, and a conclusion to her first novel that depicts man and woman (Willie Hopkinson and the mystic widow, Hester Waring), living in companionate but Platonic harmony.

Did Underhill herself displace her romantic longings to the sphere of religion because her own human relationship was inadequate? Critics such as Jantzen, and, to a lesser extent, Armstrong, insist that Underhill had an uneasy relationship with her husband, although documentation is sparse. Her spiritual and emotional position was far from settled at the time she was writing fiction. As she was planning to marry, she must have been concerned about the problems posed for the mystic by married love. A subsidiary character in *The Column of Dust* does declare that she is fulfilled by this path, but there is little emphasis on its success. Underhill took her fictional characters as far as she was able to envisage; there were personal and traditional tensions in her work.

By contrast, Underhill's spirituality was unequivocally romantic:

The mystic's outlook, indeed, is the lover's outlook. It has the same element of wildness, the same quality of selfless and quixotic devotion, the same combination of rapture and humility...The language of human passion is tepid and insignificant beside the language in which the mystics try to tell the splendour of their love. (1993: 81)

The analogy between human and Divine love is also made explicit: "their finite passions are but the feeble images of his infinite one" (1993: 89), she writes, comparing human love with the religious rapture of St John of the Cross. In Mysticism Underhill even suggests that this romantic outlook is what distinguishes the true mystic from the merely intellectual:

Two forces, the desire to know more and the desire to love more, are ceaselessly at work...Where the first of these cravings predominates, we call the result a philosophical or a scientific temperament; where it is overpowered by the ardour or unsatisfied love, the self's reaction upon things becomes poetic, artistic, and characteristically- though not always explicitly- religious. (1993: 44)

Underhill is obviously inclined towards an emotionally weighted spirituality, which as we have seen was advocated by Schleiermacher in the previous century, rather than
an intellectual approach. In some passages of *Mysticism*, Underhill places a direct opposition between masculine intellectualism, "fatal trust in the squirrel-work of the industrious brain" (1993: 13), and a more feminine, emotional piety. It would be incorrect, however, merely to classify Underhill as an incurable romantic, unnaturally sublimating her impulses to the realm of religion. Her relegation of the "myth" of romance to a more obviously symbolic realm may be more clear-sighted than much of the romantic fiction which was popular at the time. And Underhill's ardent mystic has more active qualities than one might expect of a passive "feminine" expectancy. Mysticism reconciled the two "disciplines" of romantic adoration and intellectual comprehension:

> [True mystical experience] is at once an act of love, an act of surrender, and an act of supreme perception ... Only mysticism can offer the middle term of the series; the essential link which binds the three in one. "Secrets," says St. Catherine of Sienna, "are revealed to a friend who has become one thing with his friend and not to a servant". (1993: 8)

If Underhill classes the mystical "bridge" as an act of "surrender", she signifies by this clarity and open-mindedness, and a pragmatic attitude towards the written expression of both piety and of rigorous theology. And in this extract, she mentions an alternative to relentless romance as an expression of human and divine relationship: "a friend who has become one thing with his friend".

The notion of "friendship", rather than the overused and unequal term of romance, was to become an important concept in women's spirituality. Friendships were important to Underhill: many of them were conducted through another act of writing, i.e., her correspondence. She was close, through the Women Writers Circle, (again, an emphatic element of writing) to May Sinclair and Eva Gore-Booth. Underhill also developed relationships with many people whom she guided spiritually by letter. All these relationships helped her forge her own ideas. So although the romantic approach to spirituality was always strong in Underhill's work, and the uneasy romance in her life and work also reflect her acute sensitivity to the unanswered yearning expressed in spirituality, there is a "bridging" quality of friendship, between different approaches to religion, and invested by Underhill in the act of writing itself (she would after all have regarded the readership of her books as
friends). This element of friendship tempers a romantic note that is uncomfortable for the modern reader; we shall see it come to further prominence in other women writers who continued with the project of fiction.

9 "Is Evelyn to be bracketed with the modernists because she favoured an avowedly immanentist philosophy of mysticism and rode rather loose to the literal interpretation of certain 'dogmatic facts'?" asks Armstrong (1975: 154). She is not generally seen as a modernist, at least as regards her fiction. Mysticism can be irritating for the modern reader because of obtrusive Edwardian stylistic devices such as a proliferation of "we" passages, and prosopopeia (addressing the reader by personification). This is an apposite fault for Underhill, who was so interested, in her fiction, in the pluralist possibilities of multiple worlds, different uses of language, and in the different voices within a character or individual - in The Column of Dust, Constance is literally invaded by another "voice". Great mystics of past centuries often heard voices (Teresa of Avila, for instance). And in Underhill's time, psychoanalysis was encouraging a "talking cure" examining whatever the patient's unconscious has to say. Underhill's discourses fall between the two territories and take cognisance of both. The tendency to split an argument into different voices reflects Underhill's anxiety that the unity she seeks in her eirenic spiritual mission is difficult to represent with philosophical and linguistic coherency. Her creative ambition, however, is inclusive rather than differentiating: by quoting from many texts and voicing many arguments, Underhill sought a means of expression which other writers were attaining more successfully, by greater stylistic innovation.

Underhill explored mysticism, in her fiction, through colourful incident and romantically structured "sensational" plot. She knew of the suggestive power of words to evoke mystical experiences when used in other ways than that of linear narration. She also sought, in later work, to lessen the importance of "uncanny" awakenings of the spiritual sense housed in the unconscious - or subliminal - realm, preferring to integrate the mystic perspective into everyday life. If she did not go back to achieve this ambition in fiction writing, Underhill did leave, in aspects of her novels and in later thought, the impetus for a developing writing style which paid attention to the
constant portrayal of the inner life by more integral means than uncanny sensationalism. Her later writing anticipated these means.

In her later texts Underhill herself was keen to draw attention to the rhythmical and metaphorical emphases which could be linked, not only with the increasing interest in alternative linguistic ways of communicating or accessing the mystic experience (as in James, von Hugel, and Otto), but also with the later concept of *écriture feminine.* In *Mysticism,* Underhill discusses such qualities in automatic or trance writing, which the mystics of the past (she generally cites female cases) have produced:

The very discursiveness of its style, its loose employment of metaphor, the strangely mingled intimacy and remoteness of its tone, link it with prophetic literature; and are entirely characteristic of subliminal energy of a rich type, dissociated from the criticism and control of the normal consciousness. (1993: 294)

Madame Guyon was roused from her passivity by "the gift of writing according to the interior mind" (1993: 295). Despite her dubious status as a mystic, she describes her experience of what James would define as her "subliminal realm" precisely through the act of writing, contacting by an act of written creativity, the "ineffable" experience of mysticism:

In writing I saw that I was writing of things which I had never seen: ...I was given light to perceive that I had in me treasures of knowledge and understanding which I did not know that I possessed. (1993: 66)

Like James, Underhill searches for a way to speak or write about the rich "subliminal energy" of the mystic experience. Underhill believes that the unconscious of the mystic is well worth speaking of, for "the subliminal mind of the great mystic...is abnormally sensitive, richly endowed and keenly observant- a treasure house, not a lumber room- and becomes...a highly disciplined and skilled instrument of knowledge" (1993: 66). It is precisely this desire which is to effect writing to come, particularly that which concerns itself with more experimental expressions of consciousness. Suzanne Raitt has pointed out that Underhill uses the phrase "stream of consciousness" in *Mysticism* (*Vita and Virginia*, 1993: 138). Raitt suggests that May Sinclair, who first used the term as a literary genre, is more likely to have
appropriated the phrase from *Mysticism* than directly from James. In addition, not only does Underhill develop and pass on the idea of the "stream of consciousness" to other writers interested in mysticism, but she believes that mystic experience will alter one's consciousness of the world around, and facilitate the necessary articulation of the subliminal realm, as a creative part of consciousness. This is what James had stipulated was necessary, but could not illustrate with either mysticism or writing. Although she does not achieve this as a uniform style in her own fiction, Underhill has laid the foundations for future writers concerned with exploring the expression of the mystically charged subliminal realm, or unconscious, through writing.

As a fundamental aspect of this project, what Underhill does repeatedly stress (as von Hugel did with Catherine of Genoa), is that the rhythmical tone of mystical writings, found also in the "auditions" mystics receive, are an important indicator of genuine mysticism, more so than the words themselves: "Mystical, no less than musical and poetic perception, tends naturally - we know not why - to present itself in rhythmical periods: a feature which is also strongly marked in writings obtained in the automatic state" (1993: 80); so that: "Life, which eludes language, can yet - we know not why- be communicated by rhythm: and the mystic fact is above all else the communication of a greater Life" (1993: 278). Explanations of the semiotic state were to follow later in the century.

Underhill points out the inherent "fiction" of words anyway: "there is no excuse but that of convenience for the pre-eminence amongst modes of expression which we accord to words" (1993: 76). Writing does, however, allow for that integration of speakable fiction and unspeakable fact which Underhill sees as the essence of life, even though the image she uses here is again musical: "the life of the visible and invisible universe consists in a supernal fugue" (1993: 77).

Where the colour of a recorded religious experience is very strong, Underhill suggests that a disciplined "translation" process has taken place within the capabilities of the individual mystic's psyche: St Teresa's "marvellous self-analyses provide the classic account of these attempts of the mind to translate transcendental intuitions into concepts with which it can deal" (1993: 79). The idea of a translation process, or of a bilinguality among those who have experienced mystical insights, not only refers to Inge and James who suggested that mysticism must be "translated" into
communicative language, but also anticipates modern feminist theories (Nicole Ward-Jouve), which suggest a (woman's) feeling of discomfort or alienation in language. Derrida's and Kristeva's experiments with the parallel text are also anticipated by Underhill's belief that mystical writings are part of a dual reading of spiritual experience:

Most mystics have made or accepted a theory of their own adventures. Thus we have a mystical philosophy or theology— the comment of the intellect on the proceedings of spiritual intuition — running side by side with true or empirical mysticism: classifying its data, criticising it, explaining it, and translating its vision of the supersensible into symbols which are amenable to dialectic. (1993: 95)

Underhill admits that a vision of the "supersensible" alone is impossible: the necessity of language(s) suggest something beyond language:

Though the idea of unity alone may serve to define the End - and though the mystics return to it again and again as a relief from that "heresy of multiplicity" by which they are oppressed - it cannot by itself be adequate to the description of the All. (1993: 107)

Underhill rather advocates "the fully developed dynamic mysticism of the West", which necessarily involves a pluralist approach to descriptive language which suggests the truth of vision within its necessarily "fictional" format.

The most interesting early development of this in Underhill's novels occurs in The Lost Word where, despite the emphasis on elaborate (Masonic) ritual, there is constant referral to a "lack" in language, and in the fiction woven by language. Building is the primary metaphor throughout the book, language itself is examined (hence the title) through the Masonic legend of the Lost Word:

The search for that word, the divine secret of the Mater Architect, lost to the craft forever by the Christ-like tragedy of his death: that acknowledgement of its transcendental quality which is symbolised by the substituted word - the nearest approach that human language can contrive - given to the initiate at each step of his progress, in lieu of the Word always promised, always withheld: this he saw now as that one great search for the mystical key,
perfecting all things and placing the last stone on the temple of the spirit, for which sensual life must be an endeavour and a quest. (1907: 52)

In one sense this Word is a metaphor for Christ, the perfect human being. Left unfettered (by human relationships, and the parallel inadequacies of a language which is lacking), Paul would have been the type of artist-saint who reaches the ineffable world - the "lost word" - behind language, an imperfect edifice through which the truth, sometimes, though incompletely, emerges. As if to stress this idea, Underhill resorts to a foreign language to describe Paul's calling: "un pretre de l'ideal, qui doit aussi faire voeu de pauvrete, de chasteté" (1907: 190). She wistfully concludes that such a vocation, linked so vividly with spiritual realms, to which those banished to human relations and language no longer have direct access, is something of a "Lost Word" itself. Writing its legend is the best that can be done.

Underhill had a democratic, if ahistorical, approach to her writing, and was eager to reconcile layman and "professional" mystic. "The spirit of Mysticism may be summed up by saying that it is romantic and engaged rather than dispassionate and objective, empirical rather than theoretical, actual rather than historical", writes Armstrong (1975: 109). This suggests the tone of a novelist, or perceptive story-teller, rather than an academic. Underhill maintains this approach in her wartime booklet, Practical Mysticism, a Little Book for Normal People, and in her many retreat addresses and booklets- the House of the Soul, (1934) for instance, in which she uses the descriptive metaphors of good housekeeping to describe the tending of the spiritual life.

Underhill reminds us that "We must ...be prepared for a great variety and fluidity of expression, a constant and not always conscious recourse to symbol and image" (1993: 238). She also retains a respect, even a preference, for the apophatic approach of negativity which seeks to divest the mystical of language altogether. These two approaches, although they conflict, are connected in their desire to convey the mystical experience:

At one end of the scale... we have the so-called negative language of mysticism, which describes the supersensuous in paradox by refusing to describe it at all...I am inclined to think that, many and beautiful as are the symbolic and pictorial creations of mystical genius, it is here that this genius
works most freely... produces its most magnificent results. (Essentials of Mysticism, 1920: 72)

Many of Underhill's later works are direct and simple to follow; in The Golden Sequence (1930), for example, she keeps her own instruction to a minimum, following the layout of the traditional hymn around which she arranges her text. This is indicative of Underhill's development towards an apophatic level of expression, as she relinquishes her own expressive but necessarily fictional discourse and simplifies her thought by adherence to the structure of the traditional verse. However, the goal of (her) mystical life remains the same throughout, unifying the different stages and rhythms of her writing, rather than relinquishing an originality that retires into submissiveness.

10 Complementing her vision of mysticism as an active discipline, Underhill cherished craftwork as a model of spiritual discipline, a leaning portrayed in her fiction. The Grey World suggests "salvation" is found in genuine art and craft rather than commerce. Willie Hopkinson rejects spiritual dilettantism for the beginnings of an apprenticeship (a term in craftsmanship) in mystical prayer. Halfway through the novel, Willie refuses to enter his father's business, becoming instead an apprentice bookbinder. With something of the monastic ideal of work as prayer, Underhill writes that "regular manual occupation steadied him, drawing off his earth energies and leaving his spirit clearer". However, as she makes explicit later in Mysticism, "work" is not to be conflated with pure physical labour itself, stripped of spiritual significance: "Much of the misunderstanding and consequent contempt of the contemplative life comes from the narrow and superficial definition of "work" which is set up by a muscular and wage-earning community" (1993: 173). For Underhill, this danger is avoided in the spiritually resonant atmosphere of the craftsman's workshop. Willie "saw a symbolism even in the paint-pot" (1904: 128). Authorial comment displays Underhill's approval of this artistic traditionalism:

The relation of city man to his ledger, of a factory hand to his machine, is not lovely; but there was a sincere and beautiful connection between Carter [a master-craftsman in the bindery] and his work. With him it was a manual religion, faithfully followed without any sordid thought. (1904: 128)
In The Lost Word there is a further illustration of the craftsman's holistic and creative accessing of the divine: son of a Cathedral Dean, Paul's early years give him a fascination for church masonry, embodied in the dilapidated stone angel (symptomatic of modern spiritual consciousness) he tends to, discovering for himself the meditative benefits of steady craftwork:

Being alone, except for the broken angel that he was nursing back to life, he was possessed by the delicious sensation of loneliness which is only obtainable in congenial solitude. His hands were doing Martha's work, but his mind was with Mary's... there was within him that old ecstasy of building - the dreamer's soul and the craftsman's will - which had so long been dormant in our race. (1907: 4)

While Underhill insisted that mysticism be practical, not abstract or intellectual, she had a strongly romantic feeling for art. Regarding her writing as a craft would fit into her scheme of embodying an active mysticism, and illustrates the need she felt for mystical impulses to be embodied in an aesthetic and practical sense. Craftwork fulfilled this vision: it also integrates the temporal nature of construction (of a cathedral, as in The Lost Word, or of bookbinding, in The Grey World, and which Underhill practised) with the lasting value of the product. The Holy Grail, which appears in The Column of Dust, is a piece of craftwork (a chalice), rather than an abstract piece, such as a painting. Even Hester Waring's paintings in The Grey World have an iconic significance, implying that they are used for more than sheer aesthetic enjoyment.

Underhill writes in 1911 of mysticism's craftlike qualities, of the mediating work of artistic symbols as tools to portray and construct access the Divine:

The artist... is bound to tell his love. In his worship of Perfect Beauty faith must be balanced by works. By means of veils and symbols he must interpret his free vision, his glimpse of the burning bush, to other men. He is the mediator between his brethren and the divine, for art is the link between appearance and reality. (1993: 75)

Art, and more especially craft, provided a bridge not only between infinite and human life, but also the different perceptions of space and time of which the mystic was particularly aware.
Emerson and Inge write about depicting the temporal in the eternal and the eternal in the temporal, a dimensional paradox much discussed in twentieth-century critical thought. Prior to this, the paranormal passages in Underhill's early fiction offer a glimpse of this inquiry into space and time; Underhill is obviously attracted by multiple possibilities. They are not all, however, of an ideal nature. In *The Grey World*, James' concept of the "difference of view seen from the different windows" (see above, page 29), is taken a stage further: Willie Hopkinson retains memories of his former life, as an impoverished slum-child dying in a hospital, and his soul going out into a Grey World, so that, while still inhabiting the earth, he is cut off from all human life. Describing this state of half-existence, Underhill makes an obvious Dantean reference to lost souls in a far circle of Hell:

They (the ghosts) had nothing else, it was all in all to them, and their desires chained them down to it, and kept them in it though they could not be of it, and drove them in herds on the hopeless quest of a solution through all the scenes they had cared for only once, and now scarcely could recognise. (1904: 15)

Awareness of the Grey World becomes a symbol for the awakening of the spiritual sense, and the realisation that this material world alone, spiritually insufficient. In fact, Willie discovers a multiplicity of worlds beyond our everyday apprehension: "He saw his grey world now at a new angle - not as the inevitable home of the soul, but as one amongst many convolutions of the spiritual element" (1904: 62).

Although her concepts of space are explorative in this novel, Underhill's concept of chronology is firmly linear. Willie gives an important speech on the pioneering evolutionary position of "sensitives" such as himself:

I've thought sometimes... that perhaps I'm the first of a new regime. A trial piece... That want of incentive for tree-climbing, weakness and lostness in forests made for creeping and leaping creatures which (the first man) must have had - shame for his state mixed with secret knowledge of his powers - all that is just a parable of my life, going with new perceptions amongst people who instinctively resent the light. (1904: 102)
Underhill's interest here is also in the origins of human life and thought, and has a parallel, not only with Darwin, and Inge, (who anticipated the growth of mysticism) but also with Freud, who remained fascinated in primitivism and its consequences for the development of the unconscious, and discussed his ideas in *Totem and Taboo* (1912-13) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). Freud felt that psychical properties were dormant but present since the time of the first men, passed down the generations through the process of "phylogenetic acquisition": "the psychical precipitates of the primeval period became inherited property which, in each fresh generation, called not for acquisition but only for awakening" (*The Origins of Religion*, 1991: 345). Willie is depicted as one of these pioneering figures, prefiguring a general movement of chronological progress towards a goal. In *Mysticism* Underhill returns to this idea of an evolutionary theory of mysticism:

[The mystic] is the "Hidden child" of the eternal order, an initiate of the secret plan. Hence, whilst "all creation groaneth and travaileth," slowly moving under the spur of blind desire towards that consummation in which alone it can have rest, he runs eagerly along the pathway to reality. He is the pioneer of Life on its age-long voyage to the One: and shows us, in his attainment, the meaning and value of that life. (1993: 447)

Perhaps Underhill saw herself (not incorrectly) as the first of many writers who explored and expressed mysticism creatively this century. However, it was not so much her perception of chronological mystical progress which was developed by later (feminist) thinkers so much as her alternative conceptions of time, which were also explored in the novels. In *The Lost Word*, Paul sees a heavenly Cathedral which transcends both space and time, symbolising the interconnections of life as it is ordinarily conceived:

He saw the universe standing as a temple, and the business of true building, the business that is done with hand and soul, as man's little contribution to the reality of things... The petty boundaries of material buildings, the formal churches and narrow faiths, had no meaning apart from this. They seemed the opposing and contrasting chapels which opened from the infinite nave of the temple of God. (1907: 48)
Underhill stresses the pluralities of spiritual life in the "contrasting chapels" which are ultimately unified, and given their purpose, by the "infinite nave". Also in this novel are hints of "invisible watchers for whom all lonely, and all lovely things are made" (1907: 108). In Underhill's third novel, the idea of the "Watcher" gains further examination, as one such alien "out-of-space" entity lodges in Constance's mind, further transgressing spatial boundaries.

In her later texts Underhill examines the potentially mutable nature of cosmic dimensions as sturdy but ultimately dispensable tools of the craftsman's trade: "we have no reason to suppose that matter, space, and time are necessarily parts of reality; of the ultimate Idea. Probability points rather to their being the pencil and paper with which we sketch it" (1993: 12). This idea anticipates the connective plurality of times and systems of later feminist critical thought: "If it be dangerous to say that any two systems of knowledge are mutually exclusive, it is still more dangerous to give uncritical priority to any one system. (1993: 22)...[instead Underhill acknowledges] the huge, many levelled, many coloured life, the innumerable worlds which escape the rhythm of our senses" (1993: 29).

Underhill suggests that if the mystical perspective is unawakened, the human psyche is only with difficulty able to appreciate these other spatial and temporal connections; she withdraws from a "masculine" claim of objective truth:

your cinematograph machine goes at a certain pace, takes its snapshots at certain intervals... thanks to the time at which the normal human machine is set, it registers for us what we call, in our simple way, "the natural world". A slight accession of humility or common sense might teach us that a better title would be "our natural world". (1993: 31)

When the ego-boundaries are transcended, Underhill believes, one can glimpse eternity. "Now and again... the barrier of personality is broken, man escapes the sense-world, ascends to the apex of his spirit, and enters for a brief period into the more extended life of the All" (1993: 74). However, Underhill's interest in life and the integration of divine and human perspective lead her to credit the process of (linear) time, of becoming as well as being; her narrational writing reflects this interest:

anticipating Kristeva's "Monumental time"
[Bergson and Alexander]... look upon the Real as dynamic rather than static, as becoming rather than being perfect, and invite us to see in Time - the precession or flux of things - the very stuff of reality. (1993: 28)

In *The Lost Word*, Paul's unmet challenge is to integrate his vision of eternal or monumental time(s) and space(s), that of his ideal pattern world, with the temporal flux and flow of ordinary life; to elide the eternal facets of "being" with his task of "becoming" in the world. For Underhill, this process of integration, in which the eternal and ideal dimensions are immanent in the mundane, is *the* mystical task, yet potentially possible for every human being: "We are amphibious creatures: our life moves upon two levels at once - the natural and the spiritual. The key to the puzzle of man lies in the fact that he is the meeting point of various stages of Reality" (1993: 34). This was the project of her life and her writing.

Regarding historical and chronological accuracy, Underhill has been constantly criticised for unscholarly ahistoricity: her texts, particularly *Mysticism*, it is claimed (Armstrong, Jantzen), disregard historical context in favour of a unifying frame of reference within which her ideas and references are set. For example, Underhill writes that the mystic journey is broadly similar for all:

The general movement of human consciousness, when it obeys its innate tendency to transcendence, is always the same. There is only one road from Appearance to Reality. "Men pass on, but the States are permanent forever". (1993: 80)

We must of course be wary of Underhill's wishful and romantic ahistoricism. *Mysticism* (and some of her other works, especially the *Mystic Way*) comprises hundreds of quotations from all geographical and historical areas, chosen to illustrate Underhill's overall thesis that the universality of the mystical outlook transcends chronological distinctions. It is true that this has contributed considerably to the popularity, and accessibility of the book: "this, rather than intellectual rigour...engenders both the intellectual frustration and the enormous appeal of her book" (Jantzen 1993: 84). However, a review of Underhill's open and speculative attitude to time mitigates her historical inaccuracy. While she uses historical resources for her data, she also creates a new work in *Mysticism*, employing a creative approach to fact, while not creating a "fiction" as such. Additionally, in later
editions of the text, Underhill admits the necessity of historical context: "So too the literary, social and historical links between the mystics, the influence of environment, the great part played by forgotten spiritual movements and inarticulate saints, are beginning to be better understood" (1993, preface to the twelfth edition: xi). Her historical appendix to Mysticism, revised with each edition, is far more informative than Inge's corresponding appendix in Christian Mysticism, where he merely collates speculative definitions of mysticism. Underhill's active philosophy of craftsmanship, which involved both accuracy and research, coalesced with her open-minded attitude to and interest in chronology, and geography, both during and after her novelistic period. The scope of thought Underhill gives to the spiritual tenets of "being" and "becoming" indicates not only the ingenuity of the psychologically acute fiction writer, but also the creative leap into unknown worlds of critics, philosophers and mystics to come.

Abstract considerations of space and time aside, Underhill also examines the physical embodiment of mysticism. Again, her thought anticipates future feminist and religious ideas, though not without tensions. She sometimes suggests that mysticism necessarily imposes some physical distress:

> It seems likely enough that where [mysticism] appears nerves and organs should suffer under a stress to which they have not yet become adapted, and that a spirit more highly organised than its bodily home should be able to impose strange conditions on the flesh. (1993: 61)

The "incarnational" aspect of Christian mysticism is something which Underhill contemplated throughout her life until she could utilise all her insights into the "new" mysticism of integration:

> To be a mystic is simply to participate here and now in that real and eternal life; in the fullest, deepest sense which is possible to man. It is to share, as a free and conscious agent- not a servant, but a son... This gift of "sonship", this power of free co-operation in the world-process, is man's greatest honour. (1993: 81)
Despite the patriarchal pronouns, Underhill envisages a state where the dualistic split between mind and body, spiritual and practical life, is healed. This was neither a purely intellectual project nor a disembodied affectivity.

In her study of mysticism (Sense and Thought, 1920) based on the anonymous fourteenth century Cloud of Unknowing, Greta Hort explores the importance to mysticism of kinaesthesia: of thinking through the body:

The body whose nature and needs are shared in varying ways by the animal world, as well as by the rest of creation is equally a part of God. There is a oneness which runs through everything... and the mystic's former experience has prepared him for seeing and tasting this oneness. (1920: 102)

Earlier in the century less mainstream writers of mysticism were adopting the same non-dualist position: Adela Curtis, (of the "Order of Silence"), writes in her 1907 tract The New Mysticism of:

An attempt to realise the body as mental or spiritual... The new mysticism... declares that it is only by the redemption of the body that man will attain to the spiritual or Christ-consciousness. It says, that here and now we can develop Divine Nature which is our True and Real Self by reforming our conception of matter. (1907: 21)

Underhill is less explicit, being versed in traditional practices of asceticism. But she never advocated physical mortification to those she directed spiritually. For Underhill, the fusion of spiritual undercurrents with everyday, physical and practical life was, though problematic, of the essence. "Inclusive" became a keyword of her spiritual development- the integration of the mystical into her life, and eventually into the body of church institutions:

It is the "inclusive" mystic, whose freedom and originality are fed but not hampered by the spiritual tradition within which he appears, who accepts the incarnational status of the human spirit, and can "find the inward in the outward as well as the inward in the inward". (1993: x, preface to the twelfth edition)

Underhill never linked this further quest for "Union" explicitly to women's issues, but as her early novels show, she is all too aware of the difficulty, especially for an educated woman, of finding a satisfactory spirituality for both mind and body. While
her later work points to integration of mind and body as the way forward for mysticism, it is other women fiction writers - specifically May Sinclair, who refined the term "new mysticism" - who explored the role of the body in greater depth, considering its implications for gender issues.

13 Underhill did not call herself a feminist, condemning those "raptures of feminine weakness" (quoting Saint Teresa, 1993: 361) which brought mysticism into disrepute. She did not discuss gender in her religious texts. However, we should ask how far Underhill was aware of the problems facing women mystics, and whether she herself was a female, or indeed feminist, mystic.

At first, her idealism was directed towards finding the purely human role model. In 1892, aged 16, she wrote down a summary of her hopes, ideals and ambitions. One section concerned the ideal man and woman:

My idea of a man is that he should be true, strong, intellectual, and considerate... It does not matter if he is not good-looking or shy or brusque, for those are outside things...My ideal of a woman is that she should be clever, vivacious, accurately but not priggishly informed, gentle, truthful, tactful and tolerant, and should have a due sense of proportion...in real life my mother comes nearest to it. (Cropper, 1958 :4-5)

Underhill's perceptions of gender are undeniably restrictive here. Ideal males are active- "ready to help the poor and oppressed" (ibid) - and Underhill is explicit about the secondary importance of manner and physical presentation, in a way that she is not when she goes on to discuss the ideal woman. Although only her mother is suggested as a role model, it has been argued (Jantzen) that Underhill never completely relinquishes an unconscious prejudice against her own gender, i.e., is reticent about woman's participation in direct 'action'. While she writes: "it is better to love and serve the poor people around me than go on saying that I love an abstract Spirit whom I have never seen", she is no political activist: she will visit the poor but distance herself from occasions such as the General Strike. Her early declaration: "If I had been a rich man, I would have been a doctor, and lived among the poor, and

though relations with both parents were not as close as they might have been. (Armstrong)

Underhill was, however, a committed pacifist by her death in 1941.
attended them for nothing" (quoted in Jantzen 1993: 95), was never translated as a possibility for her own gender. What then were Underhill's options as a woman mystic?

Diana Greene, in her study of Underhill, (Artist of the Infinite Life) places her within the context of earlier spiritual women:

For medieval religious women, religious life had greater continuity than it did for men... ordinary experience was seen to be full of meaning. Mysticism was more evident in their religious expression, and their devotional life was more penitential and ascetical than that of their male counterparts. (1990: 148)

Underhill's life and work reflects these characteristics. She valued the divine in the ordinary, making no "grand gesture" in preference to sustained effort. Greene also points out that religious had a certain autonomy through their unprofessional status which was yet under the Church's protection. This became true of Underhill later on.

Ursula King, in an article entitled "Why Look at Women Mystics?" (1981), links her inquiry with the group of twentieth-century writers on mysticism which include Underhill. Mysticism, King claims, provides many possibilities for women. The call to the spiritual life gave women in the past a freedom from social ties which made them stand apart. King notes that the utterances of different mystics tend to emphasise either objective reality without, or subjective religious experience within - the Jewish mystics of the Kabbalah or those of Eastern Orthodoxy stress objectivity by mostly speaking about God but little of their personal inner life. However, in Western mystical literature, the role of the spiritual autobiography is very important, this tradition stems from the middle ages, but was given, as we have seen, an added emphasis by the twentieth century, due to a convergence of rational and romantic strands of religious thought, and the developing interests in "talking cure" and case history in the psychoanalytical schools. Women especially tended towards mystical autobiography and subjectivism in expressing religious experience, a suggestion examined later in this thesis.

If Underhill does not practise overtly autobiographical writing, this does not mean her "woman's perspective" is unimportant, but might explain why she was

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Her study also mentions the less prominent figures Margaret Smith, Grace Warrack, Geraldine Hodgson, Phyllis Hodgson, Hope Emily Allen, Emily Herman, Hilda Graef, and Annemarie Schimnel.
quickly accepted into the general canon of contemporary mystical surveys\textsuperscript{1}, while making important steps towards a tradition of women's creative examination of mysticism in relation to their own experiences. If she does not write her own story explicitly, Underhill does anticipate the concept of "herstory" (as opposed to history). Novel writing in particular allowed Underhill to depict gendered tensions.

Neither the novels nor their author are explicitly feminist, however. In two out of the three novels, the central character is male, although in neither case endowed with a "masculine" temperament. Underhill preferred to depict a masculine generic example of the mystic quest. Greene notes that Underhill disliked women's "limitations", their sentimentality, and their self-serving attitudes, without examining the social and cultural causes of such attributes (1990: 148). Indeed, "the greatest female sin is the devaluation of self and the inability to love oneself" (1990: 148). If Underhill was susceptible to this tendency in her own life, at least around the time of her marriage, she also used this anxiety in her fiction, helping through her own prolific writing, to expose and dispel some of the low (self-) expectations of and from women that still troubled her generation.

Underhill's first novel \textit{The Grey World}, in fact reveals her most ambitious vision of woman's mystical potential. Searching for a spiritual direction, Willie Hopkinson finds an iconographic painting on the wall of an Italian monastery. Its painter, an unconventional "anchoress" who lives alone in an English wood. Willie eventually moves near Hester Waring to imitate her life. The painting which inspired him to seek her out is a representation of the Franciscan "Lady Poverty", reflecting Hester's own qualities:

\begin{quote}
A woman's figure; spare, simple, ugly almost, in its short torn canvass dress that showed the bare feet worn by long travelling... Round her head, a cloud of wheeling birds made a halo; and within the halo a vision of the Cross... a reticence of handling, which suggested behind the plain lines of the picture an ineffable peace, the secret of a complete inward happiness... this woman held out her hands in a sort of compelling welcome to her lovers. (1904: 287)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{1} Incidentally, she was not the only woman to do this: there were, for example, Eleanor Gregory and Emma Herman, whose (contemporary) work however is slighter and less vigorous.
The "ineffable" tranquillity of the woman is concomitant with her "secret of a complete inward happiness", as if to illustrate James's stipulated mystical "ineffability" and "noetic insight". Underhill, though, has explicitly pictured a feminine representation of the spiritual state, emphasising Willie's romantic quest. There is, by contrast, still only a gesture towards Christocentrism, in the cross of wheeling birds.

Hester Waring's utterly spiritual character is the split-off complement to the predatory Elsa who earlier attempts to seduce Willie through a spurious brand of mysticism:

Both had dropped to some dark, elemental plane of existence... some black and unsuspected world to which he had never penetrated; yet it was as truly a part of his Ego as the soul that he watched over so carefully. (1904: 292)

Underhill's interest in psychology informs this passage, although the "dark elemental plane of existence" would usually be classified as the Id, rather than a part of the Ego. The concept of man's - and woman's - sinful soul is still strong: Underhill writes, "It is so hard for a man, if he be of pure life, to realise that there is anything of the animal in his woman friend" (1904: 119). The extremes of female character in this novel suggest the clichéd virgin-whore dichotomy. There is a definite "femininity" about Willie himself, but his talents are enhanced by his masculine gender: "And Willie is just a little effeminate, is he not? and surely, what a woman can do well, a man is sure to do better?" (1904: 215). Nevertheless Willie, abandoning the "masculine" drive towards material and career success, becomes increasingly aligned with the non-competitive, artistic, female group. During his spiritual journey, he adopts the traditional "feminine" qualities characteristic of the mystic and contemplative.

Willie unquestionably seeks a maternal element in his spiritual quest. As well as seeking refuge in "mothering" churches such as "Our Lady of Pity" and looking upon London as a mother, he is inspired by a painting of the Madonna and child in the National Gallery:

she, in an ecstasy of contemplation...dreams above her child, lying very helplessly and gladly upon its mother's knee - as all that is holy on us lies upon the lap of perfect beauty. (1904: 306)

After Freud published 'The Ego and the Id' in 1923
Only making peace with his own mother after her death, Willie comes to Hester to find a Madonna and Child prominent in her workshop: "That goes deeper than a crucifix", she said. 'It's the essence of the offering.' (1904: 258)

In this novel, Willie also realises the importance of plurality in spirituality and retorts angrily to his stern father and stubborn sister: "Listen! Your senses only know one world... but there's world after world, and mode after mode of perception, wrapped behind it" (1904: 295). Underhill's evocation of a never-ending series is reminiscent of the sensual language used by President Finney in his description of divine love ("These waves came over me, and over me, and over me", in James, 1902: 249). Neither language nor the human frame can encompass the infinite qualities of spiritual perception such as Willie or James's subject, Finney, have received. Underhill does not make explicit the link between mysticism, pluralities, and the feminine, but Willie's story suggests the links. And there is something strangely sensuous about Hester's dwelling place. Underhill depicts an exotic, fecund and private setting, overriding the purely maternal images which otherwise proliferate in the novel:

Between their [trees] brown and purple trunks and dark network of their crowns, the sky, very blue, peeped in...trees fell away suddenly for a little glade of vivid mossy grass. It seemed to thread its way far down into the heart of the wood, as if searching for a treasure house hidden there, and ended where a small white red-roofed building stood solitary, giving to its surroundings a touch of unEnglish magic. (1904: 295)

The Grey World has a positive outlook both for a feminine spirituality, and for the woman artist and mystic. However, the question of women's potential within society has been somewhat sidestepped due to Hester's retiring from it, and also by the symbolic emphasis Underhill places in this novel on the maternal aspects of mystical compassion.

The subordinate position of women in society is explicit in Underhill's subsequent novels. She has no respect for the unofficial groups of women who comprise the facetious and sentimental spiritual gatherings featured from time to time in her fiction. There is some heavy-handed comedy, but Underhill is not at this stage concerned that she is reinforcing the alignment of women with shallow esotericism
rather than true spirituality. The hostess of the group depicted in *The Column of Dust* knows Constance through her own kindly and conventional husband, who visits the bookshop where Constance works. Constance develops an emotional dependency upon Mrs. Vince despite her hypocritical liberalism: "Spiritual Eugenics! that must... be our ideal. To bear one or two children of beautiful character, and shed an atmosphere of peace upon the home" (1909: 49) (she has a son of comparable age to Constance's "niece"). Yet when Constance reveals at the end of the novel that Vera is in fact her own illegitimate daughter, Mrs Vince disowns her. It is Christmas, the festival of "the celebration of a Birth - a fatherless Birth! seen in the light of our modern concepts, it might well be the typical feast of womanhood" (1909: 233) (Mrs Vince's phrases). The quotation makes the situation of society's hypocrisy, and the particular problems of women, especially clear in this novel; Constance thinks to herself: "men were interesting animals, but women mattered most" (1909: 70). Mr Vince, however, voices the general prejudice:

"Women are queer... One doesn't understand 'em. Not that one wants to, for that matter; but it's more comfortable not to do the wrong thing if one can help it... nowadays they...don't seem to understand what men want. Oh, very nice to us, do their duty, and so on, of course... But clever, and always worrying about it; as if brains in women were a sort of disease."...it was an axiom with him that one should never disturb women's religion. They required it, poor creatures. (1909: 43, 45)

Underhill only makes clear his (and, by implication, a superficially kindly society's) prejudice against Constance, in the extraordinary last section of the novel, when Mr. Vince visits Constance's poor lodgings offering a patronising brand of friendship after his wife has disowned her: his words "disclosed, instantly, the ground upon which she faced him; that foundation of mutual contempt on which the relation of the sexes is raised" (1909: 255). He provokes an outburst from Constance, who declares that having a child the most worthwhile act of her life, and that she little cares for the father's role:

"What do I care who my child's father may be? What does he do in it? Starts the machinery which ends in birth. His part is over then, and I'm left in charge
of the race - Rights of women? Haven't we got them? Do we not stand side by side with God and share with the pangs of creation?" (1909: 259)

The outburst refers to the popular subject of eugenics: anxiety about the mental and physical inherited traits of infants born to the less respectable. Constance's attitude is considerably more physical than Mrs Vince's "spiritual eugenics" project; the contrast is obviously intended as the children of the two women are of comparable age.

Constance's belief in the importance of the women's reproductive role is reminiscent of Schreiner's *Women and Labour*:

the intellectual capacity, the physical vigour, the emotional depth of woman, forms ... an untranscendable circle, circumscribing with each successive generation the limits of the expression of the human race. (1978: 129-130)

However, Constance's proud and angry speech sits uncomfortably alongside her previous avowal (to the "priest" of the Holy Grail) that her ruling goddess is "Life itself" (i.e., the enjoying of it) and her evident dislike of the child. Vera is described in unrelentingly harsh terms, "As a life she was without value- ugly, evil, an abortive thing" (1909: 263). Whether this is because Underhill herself was unsure of the morality of Constance's position, or whether she was debating with herself the nature of childrearing in general (always to remain theoretical for Underhill), her implication is that women are certainly not meant to make their mark by motherhood alone.

Femininity itself is, it is implied, a restrictive calling. Mrs. Vincent's friend describes what could be taken to be Constance's opposite, the truly "Womanly woman": she is "sublime as a mother, and often unaccountably clever in making love... if you mean by womanly the deep-bosomed, quiescent creature with steady nerves. For the rest, she is afraid of life; like priests and other people who are born to the perfect performance of a restricted job" (1909: 88-89). The awful irony is that Constance, who has attempted to taste all of life, finds herself forced to hide unapproved on the margins. Underhill suggests that, for women like Constance, at least, who want fully to live, rather than retreat into some deluded niche like the weak-willed Mrs Vince, no place can be found. Myth and experience ultimately jar and Constance dies as surely as Tess in Hardy's pastoral tragedy. This is despite Constance's friend Mrs Reed proclaiming what Underhill no doubt believed:
"complicity of myth merges in unity of experience, if we could but understand...The many are comprehended in the One" (1909: 81).

In life, too, Underhill had an ambiguous attitude towards women's rights. Although a female pioneer in the Anglican Communion, she did not espouse the feminist cause. However, despite criticism to the contrary, Underhill was hardly stifled by her Anglicanism, finding far greater opportunities for authorship and spiritual guidance than she would have done had she become a Roman Catholic at the time, or had she remained a marginal commentator on a hugely popular subject. Not only was she the first Anglican woman to give retreats, and to lecture at King's College, London, Underhill was also prominent in ecumenical movements, especially the Anglo-Russian committee, and eventually as a pacifist. In addition, even her later works (including Worship) contain innovative and individual emphases which correspond to the female spirituality Jantzen implies that Underhill abandons. For example, Underhill favours a more democratic form of church service, incorporating times of silence with other members of the congregation, in a distinctly Quaker-like fashion. "If Evelyn does not show herself a revolutionary pioneer in liturgical matters her preferences do nonetheless anticipate the shape of things to come as, e.g., in her endorsement of a 'corporate' type of service over against both the purely hieratic - 'the splendid ceremony in which all is done by a few professionals,' - and the silence of corporate worship devoid of representative actions save for extempore prayer" (1975: 283).

Like many of the women mentioned in Leuba's Psychology of Religious Mysticism, Underhill did rely heavily upon her male spiritual directors, of whom, successively, she had three, and of whom by far the most important was von Hugel. Before they had even met, von Hugel read the first edition of Mysticism and offered criticisms and advice. He subsequently became her spiritual director (not that she always followed his advice, even with regard to Mysticism). Where von Hugel would like to analyse and differentiate, Underhill's tendency was always to find unifying strengths in common. He maintained his suspicion of those whom he termed "D's": people detached from any particular Christian faith, and Underhill did move away from this position herself, probably in part due to his advice. Jantzen is critical of von
Hugel's influence, suggesting that Underhill stifled her own individual voice which would have been of primary concern to feminist ideas today:

when she was reading and writing and thinking outside of institutional pressures and without overt male direction, she was emphasising themes that are standard in women's spirituality today: the interconnectedness of all things, the importance of looking for God within, the necessity of making the connections and allowing for spaciousness of thought and love...If she had persisted with this line, strengthening it with the rigorous historical study of the mystics, she might have found her own voice more clearly, rather than becoming to such a large extent a voice of the institutional church. (1993: 94-5)

It is difficult and contradictory for Jantzen at once to criticise Underhill's over-inclusive tendencies and lack of consistent levels of scholarship, yet at the same time to regret that she came to realise her need to be anchored to some extent in an academically-inclined tradition. Greene is closer to the truth of the situation when she suggests that Underhill's position within the church, but not within its hierarchy (like many earlier women mystics) "produced innovation and allowed for a certain protection" (1990: 148). There is sufficient material in Underhill's work to demonstrate that she remained a creative and thoughtful writer whose work is relevant to issues of religion and gender, both on a thematic and a linguistic level.

14 While she introduced important psychological concepts of mysticism, Underhill constantly sought a creative representation of spirituality. The notion of writing as a craft appealed especially to Underhill, as it integrated the aesthetic and practical functions of inspiring creativity and of providing a structure in order to communicate mysticism. While her first attempts at this craft were in the formal category of novelistic fiction, she never lost the vital perspective that writing-as-fiction offers, and was able to build, on this creative basis, a traditional, but also open-minded vision of "new" and (inter)active mysticism. In Mysticism itself, Underhill describes a favourite mystic, Ruysbroeck, "gathering these scattered symbols to unity again" (1993: 117). This is what she herself attempts. Mystical ecstasy does indeed involve a physical and spiritual synthesis:
a whole being welded into one, all its faculties, neglecting their normal universe, grouped about a new centre, serving a new life, and piercing like a single flame the barriers of the sensual world. Ecstasy is the psycho-physical state which may accompany this brief synthetic act. (1993: 26)

The representation of this enlightenment is, Underhill concludes, as impossible in the eyes of Western logic as the truth of a fictional text. The "new centre" around which her writing works is (re)visionary, yet indescribable. While Irigaray was later to write of a vital (feminine) "blind spot" at the centre of language, Underhill quotes Eckhart describing the paradox of mysticism: 'In the midst of a silence a hidden word was spoken to me'. (1993: 38). The similar paradoxical reality (language within silence, space within an abstract concept) of fiction, and the necessary fiction of all written language, are, for Underhill, the basic premises to which she adheres in order to craft her vision.
CHAPTER THREE
MAY SINCLAIR: MOURNING THE FEMININE

Throughout the foregoing metaphysical discussion one point must have struck the unmetaphysical reader, as it certainly strikes the writer: that a good half of the problems under consideration arose solely from the limitation of language\(^1\).

1 Although Evelyn Underhill was one of the most prominent of women writers concerned with the exploration of mysticism, she was not alone in this project. Many early-modernist women fiction writers explored mysticism in terms of their gender and their own experiences, such as Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West, Katherine Mansfield and Sylvia Townsend Warner. There was also May Sinclair, a direct contemporary and friend of Underhill, who took, in her own fiction writing, the concept of mysticism to more experimental and subjective lengths. She was acutely sensitive to the implications of gender in mystical experience, and determined to resolve these tensions in her work. While Underhill made an initial exploration of the fictional expression of mysticism, subsequently preferring to direct her creativity into more formally religious texts, Sinclair placed considerably more emphasis upon her fiction writing, although she, too, explored philosophical and religious interests (principally philosophical Idealism) in some non-fiction texts. But the extent to which she found she could best communicate her developing concept(s) of mysticism in fiction, and the greater amount of autobiographical material she employed in this fiction writing, indicated the important movement of mysticism into self-expressive women's writing that stayed both determinedly creative and mystically-oriented.

Underhill read works of contemporary psychology and spirituality such as those by James and Inge, and Sinclair also derived inspiration from these sources, particularly those assimilated by Underhill. But Sinclair was also interested in the psychoanalytical developments of Freud and Jung, enabling her to examine the psychology of mysticism with greater depth. For example, Sinclair, far more than

\(^1\) A Defence of Idealism, 1917: 346
Underhill, examines the role of mother-child relationships, suggesting that issues of loss must be addressed here if mystic insight is to be achieved.

Sinclair used Jung's concept of sublimation to enlarge upon Underhill's psychological interpretation of Purgation in *Mysticism*: "sublimation is a turning and passing of desire from a less worthy or less fitting object to fix it on one more worthy and more fitting" ("Symbolism and Sublimation II", in Zegger, 1976: 59). For Jung, sublimation was the basic psychological premise upon which civilisation was founded, though Sinclair wished to retain the priority of religion:

All religion, all art, all literature, all science are sublimations in various stages of perfection (I have arranged them provisionally on what I think Professor Jung would consider the right ascending scale. Personally, I should place Religion first and last). (Manuscript: "Psychology and the Way of Sublimation", c.1915: 22)

Indeed, Sinclair deduces that, according to this scheme, "Civilisation is one vast system of sublimations" (ibid). Psychology and experience, however, point to the fact that difficulties arise from contradictory elements in human nature: "in man we have a creature in whom the libido is actually in conflict with itself and with its own sublimation" (ibid). Sinclair goes on to mention the Freudian emphasis upon the libido as the driving power of the unconscious, intent upon its own satisfaction, but she also makes it clear that "transformation" of such desires and impulses onto a higher plane are what make a true act of sublimation:

When you come to Art and Religion what you may call their sublimative values will depend, not only on the amount of libido actively and voluntarily "carried over", but on the extent to which the higher psychic channels are involved. It is not enough to transfer; you must transform. Always it is a question of the more or less completeness of the transformation. (1915: 40)

Although Freud does not insist, in his examination of the relinquishment of object cathexes in *Mourning and Melancholia*, that a raising of the level for cathexes be achieved through the work of mourning. on a metaphysical level, the climbing from a lower plane of desire to a higher one could constitute a notion of mourning and relinquishment itself. In this way, Freud's theory would coincide with Jung's more

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2 Pennsylvania University Manuscript Collection.
spiritually-oriented diagram of progress for the psyche through "Purgative" loss and creative (and spiritual) release.

In Freud's 1917 essay on "Mourning and Melancholia", he analyses the processes of adjusting to painful losses. Mourning is described as:

the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one...[however]...In some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition. (On Metapsychology, 1991: 252)

Mourning is a process which must be experienced in order to free the ego from a no-longer present loved object:

Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it. (1991: 253)

Freud notes that the process is generally both painful and time-consuming. However, mourning is necessary for the regaining of emotional health, once the grieved-for lost object has been completely relinquished by the psyche. In melancholia, however, "one can recognise that there is a loss of a more ideal kind," identification of the lost object may not even be consciously possible, but the loss is more severe, even pathologically so, because the melancholic's own ego was bound up with the identity of the lost object. In melancholia, Freud explains:

the object cathexis proved to have little power of resistance and was brought to an end. But the free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way an object-loss was transferred into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification.... this contradiction seems to imply that the object-choice has
been effected on a narcissistic basis, so that the object cathexis, when obstacles come in its way, can regress to narcissism. (1991: 257-8).

Freud suggests that not only do melancholics suffer a more severe sort of mourning than the general, nonpathological subject, but that through a narcissistic drive in their libido to identify and merge their own ego with the love object, they suffer a sense of their own identity loss or conflict, incapable of relinquishing the shadow of the object within their own ego in the face of "reality" because boundaries have been unproductively, hysterically blurred: "the disposition to fall ill of melancholia...lies in the predominance of the narcissistic type of object choice...Narcissistic identification ...paves the way to an understanding of hysterical identification..." (1991: 259).

The distinction which Freud draws between mourning and melancholia has its parallel in the productive and unproductive states of what Sinclair would term as "new" and "old" mysticism, as well as a more fundamental parallel with states of true and false mysticism, between genuine contemplation and the frustrated language of hysteria:

Even in the worst instances...there is a perpetual striving after something stronger than the soul's passive blessedness, and higher than its voluptuous spiritual ecstasy. This excess of feeling demands and finds expression; now and then it flashes into metaphysical intuition; again it crystallizes into some perfect and transparent phrase, and you have the beginning of a naif art; and where art is, there is sublimation. (1917: 302: "The New Mysticism")

The concept of living creatively with "loss" is a key issue when exploring Sinclair's fiction, and the way in which she incorporates or foreshadows various theories of lack and loss is fundamental to her understanding of mysticism, writing, and femininity. It would be incorrect to see Sinclair's work without the mystical experience as its goal: psychological inquiry was extremely important to her, but never ruled out her feeling for a transcendent Absolute which was approached through the creative vision. To this end, Plato's idealism was regarded highly by Sinclair, the more so because it provided a sense of absolute values at the top of the ladder of sublimations. Without it Jung's schema, was, for Sinclair, insufficient:

The trouble begins when we ask what and where, on [Jung's] scheme, is truth?... And God? God also is purely relative. In fact, [quoting Jung] "God is
not even relative, but a function of the unconscious, namely the manifestation of a split-off sum of libido which has activated the God-imago". What would Professor Jung's mystics say to that? ("Psychological Types", English Review, May 1923: 4)

Sinclair's exploration of mysticism, through her fiction writing, principally involves her coming to terms with the concept of loss, the traditional first stage of the mystical journey which Underhill and others had recently outlined. True mysticism is shown repeatedly in Sinclair's fiction to be a (successful) mechanism of response to loss - whether loss of the mother's love, loss of opportunity, loss of partner, loss of social or economic status, and loss of social structure itself, due to the War. Furthermore, Sinclair's writing addresses loss of literary and linguistic constructs, developing Underhill's disturbance of plot and language in order to explore and express mysticism. As the conditions of mourning are varied, so too are the creative recoveries which mark an access to mysticism.

Sinclair's two novels which are best known today are Mary Olivier (1919) and Harriett Frean (1922). Both explore the subject of loss and its relationship to mysticism. Like Underhill's novels, mysticism is not directly linked to orthodox Christianity. Neither Mary Olivier, Dorothy Harrison, nor even Matty the wife of the Rector of Wyck easily embrace Christianity, though all have a strongly developed and mystical religious vein in their characters. Sinclair herself considered Christianity a complex creed: "it is not as if Christianity were a simple matter that everybody is agreed about. You may mean one or more of several different things" (1915: 79). For Mary Olivier, the only aspect of religion to which she can really connect is that of mystical compensation for loss. In the instance of Christianity, this implies, for Mary, the necessity of the loss of the physical presence of Jesus.

He said it was a good thing for them that he was going away. If he didn't the Holy Ghost wouldn't come to them; they would never have any real selves; they would never be free...It was a good thing for them that Christ died. That was how he saved them. By going away...the Atonement was that - Christ's going away. (1980: 320)

Christianity was too cumbersome a vehicle for Mary's sense of peace which only came after embracing a positive, creative acceptance of loss. This also occurs at
the end of the novel, after what has been described (Zegger) as Mary's own mystical journey during her life. At the end of the novel, she has acquired the insight to transform grief:

She could see what it was now. She had gone through life wanting things, wanting people, clinging to the thought of them, not able to keep them off and let them go. (1980: 378)

Mary Olivier has, by this time, developed a view of object cathexis which, while it involved an internalisation of the object, allowed a sense of spiritual detachment:

If you looked back on any perfect happiness you saw that it had not come from the people or the things that you thought it had come from, but from somewhere inside yourself. When you attached it to people and things they ceased for that moment to be themselves; the space they then seemed to inhabit was not their own space; the time of the wonderful event was not their time. They became part of the kingdom of God within you...Knowing reality is knowing that you can't lose it. (1980: 378-9)

Freud's essay, published two years before Sinclair's novel, regards the process of mourning as a functional necessity in order for the subject to continue living in the real world:

Each single one of the memories and situations of expectancy which demonstrate the libido's attachment to the lost object is met by the verdict of reality that the object no longer exists; and the ego, confronted as it were with the question whether it shall share this fate, is persuaded by the sum of the narcissistic satisfactions it derives from being alive to sever its attachment to the object that has been abolished. (1917; 265) *S.E. vol 14 p. 255*

Mary Olivier's quest, however, has always been to transcend the limited conditions of what constitutes worldly reality for her, and to catch instead a glimpse of the "ultimate Reality", in which memory and imagination play a part in realising the strength and "heaven" within her own self, which was beyond social expectation or approval:

You could stand aside and look on at its happiness with horror, it didn't care. It was utterly indifferent to praise or blame, and the praise or blame of other
people; or to your happiness and theirs... It was stronger and saner than you.
(1980: 312)

To achieve this mystical insight, Mary gives up not only worldly ambitions, but also the approval of her own family. Her particularly painful struggle is that which she engages in with her own mother, only really receiving the illumination for which she has been searching after Mrs. Olivier dies. There are then, it is implied, no further losses to be sustained, and Mary realises her own freedom in her loss: "A you that had no hereditary destiny; that had got out of the net, or had never been caught in it" (1980: 312).

The more one considers Mary Olivier, the easier it is to see the whole structure of the novel as an examination of reactions to loss, and of transcending the "awful conflict in your own soul" (1980: 312) which the prospect of loss evokes. Mary's early phobia of funeral corteges perhaps foreshadows the ultimate answer which ameliorates - indeed sublimes - her pain, as she faces loss after loss in the unrelenting deaths of family members. All the sons, most of all the eldest, Mark, fight for their lives between two opposite impulses: centrifugal and centripetal, away from and back again towards the mother who loved them fiercely in their infancy and childhood but who fails to set them "spiritually" free in the way Mary Olivier sets Richard free. Freud's comments in his essay describe the melancholic trap of ambivalent emotions, when a narcissistic object-cathexis imprisons the subject in the kind of uncomfortable internal conflict experienced by all members of the Olivier family, and resolved, perhaps, only by Mary:

In melancholia, the occasions which give rise to the illness extend for the most part beyond the clear case of a loss by death, and include all those situations of being slighted, neglected or disappointed, which can import opposed feelings of love and hate into the relationship or reinforce an already existing ambivalence. This conflict due to ambivalence...must not be overlooked among the preconditions of melancholia. (1981: 260) 

If Mary Olivier was able to transcend her losses by mourning, which enable her to access both mysticism and creativity, it was in Harriet Frean that Sinclair describes the path of mysticism by envisaging what it is not: the narcissistic prison of the melancholic.
In Harriett Frean, Sinclair depicts the emotional prison into which it is possible to fall should there be no creative or spiritual redirection in the face of loss. Harriett Frean lacks the ability to process her losses creatively; her denial leads not to a higher perspective but to a depressed frustration verging on mental illness. The condition is analogous to what Sinclair would have described as the "old" mysticism of inactivity verging on Quietism, and to the frustrated language of hysteria.

The damage and restriction visited on a life because of an overwhelming, melancholic, narcissistic identification with an object choice which is inevitably lost, is to be found in Harriett's dependency - economic, social, and emotional - upon her family home, and more specifically her mother, that she is unable to free herself from. Though her father becomes bankrupt and dies, it is only when her mother too is dead that Sinclair explicitly reveals how much Harriett is bound up with the psyche of Mrs. Frean:

Through her absorption in her mother, some large, essential part of herself had gone...All her memories of her mother were joined to the memory of this now irrecoverable self. She tried to reinstate herself through grief; she sheltered behind her bereavement, affecting a more profound seclusion, abhorring strangers...She clung to the image of her mother; and always beside it, shadowy and pathetic, she discerned the image of her lost self. (1980: 108-110)

Harriett never manages to recover from her fundamental narcissistic choice of love object, which is her mother. Like Mary Olivier, Harriett also relinquishes a lover, Robin Lethbridge, and feels that it is a beautiful thing to have given him up for a higher moral cause. But unlike Mary Olivier, Harriett Frean fails to establish a basic distinction between her mother's identity and needs and her own; even the relinquishment of Lethbridge is more her mother's decision than Harriett's own. After her father's death, when Mrs. Frean and her daughter must move house, Harriett is concerned only to find out her mother's preference and comply with it, taking pains to appear in seamless accord with that desire: "She was afraid to say more than that lest she should show her own wish before she knew her mother's" (1980: 95). The irony is that neither, apparently, are able to realise their true desires, (realise them in actuality,
or even in their own consciousness). Harriett's last and most fundamental thoughts are about her mother, as she raves after her operation and the anaesthetic she has received. But this fantasy reunion with her is far from approaching any mystical trance or ecstasy: it is certainly not the case that Sinclair established a longing for the lost mother as the fundamental route to women's mysticism. The closing of this novel with the description of Harriett's final distressing confusion brings it full circle to its outset, where, once, huge shadows in Harriett's nursery presaged the entrance of her mother for a goodnight kiss. This shadow accords with Freud's description (above) of the shadow of the internalised, narcissistic love-object falling over the subject's ego, indicating a narcissistic inability to separate the self from the object choice.

Arnold Waterlow (whose life story is told in a similar manner to the life stories of Mary Olivier and Harriett Frean, in the novel of his own name) achieves a more successful "separation" from the physical and emotional presence of his mother than do either Mary Olivier or Harriett Frean, perhaps because since he is a man, the world of work, however oppressive it is to his naturally intellectual inclinations, provides him with a foundation of independence, as do his relationships with other women - one unhappy marriage, one successful long term liaison. But even with Arnold Waterlow, the primary fear of not winning his mother's love strikes deep into the heart of his character as an adult. When in his infancy - four years of age - he claims to have seen a sudden revelation of God in the sky, he is rebuked by the mother he loves unrequitedly. He may already have been unconsciously compensating for the loss of mother's love, even when he whispers "God is love" into her ears, again only to be reprimanded.

Jungian thought supported the notion that all individuation must involve a release from the parents, or the parental archetypes. Sinclair agrees:

Parents and man's childish passion for them are the backward forces that retard his development as an individual...the conflicts with parents must be fought to the finish and the child must win it or remain forever immature.

("Symbolism and Sublimation" 1976: 58)

Sinclair's mysticism, informed by this thinking, would certainly not require the woman to remain immature and childlike in the sense of the Victorian "Angel in the
House”. For Sinclair is of the opinion that "Jung's quarrel with Christian religion is that besides being a first class engine of repression it has fostered an infantile dependence on God as the father to which man is already too much prone" (ibid.). That this was often the only pattern of female spirituality was attested to by Sinclair's contemporaries, such as Radcliffe Hall.

Hall published her second novel, The Unlit Lamp, in 1924. It describes the life of an intelligent, ambitious daughter whose chances of happiness and fulfilment are thwarted by the strangling emotional hold of her mother on her life. The novel is sensitively but bleakly written: Joan Ogden's life has been wasted, "withered on its stem" because of the collaboration of social and familial imprisonment visited upon her. Towards the end of her mother's life and the end of the novel, Joan, now middle-aged and weary with constant duties, lapses at times into an exhausted meditative state:

A great peace possessed her, one of those mysterious waves of well-being that came over her at times ... Joan sat on in a kind of blissful quiescence. 'All is as it should be,' she thought dreamily, 'and I know exactly why it is so, only I can't quite find the words. Somewhere at the back of my mind I know the why of everything'. (1981: 283)

However, this quiescent, quietist surrender to her fate is only a brief rest in Joan's humdrum life. It is a far cry from her earlier religious feelings, where, in contrast to her mother's Anglo-Catholic Orthodoxy:

Joan had formed her own picture of Christ, and in it He did not appear as the Redeemer especially reserved for elderly women and anaemic parsons, but as a being immensely vast and fierce and tender. Hers was a militant, intellectual Christ. (1981: 181)

The Unlit Lamp illustrated a massive contemporary situation; A Times article of 1914 spoke of the plight of spinster daughters with demanding old mothers, naming it as one of the greatest of "women's real and imagined wrongs" and describing the mothers in question as "vampires on the hearth". It was one of the chief aims of feminist political action to enable single women to take their place in an active, productive society, and not merely to be drained by a previous generation, however...
deprived the mothers in that generation may have been. There is no "new" mysticism in situations of this sort.

If Sinclair's writing does suggest a "return to the mother", it involves taking on the mantle of creative power, the mother's power to create and give life, rather than be a frustrated slave, a candidate for Quietism. One of the chief differences, after all, between Mary Olivier and Harriett Frean is that Mary Olivier finds a release and a happiness in creating by means of her writing, and moreover in writing poetry, or verse plays. The aspect of production, of activity, is a prime characteristic of the "new mysticism", espoused by Sinclair, who first employed the term in her volume on Idealism. As we shall see, when Cixous later employs maternal imagery regarding _ecriture feminine_, she mixes metaphors of mothering and being dependent upon a mother. The sense of taking part in the stream of creation is also evidently important to Sinclair's concept of what "the new mysticism" should involve. But this creativity itself also takes account of loss.

5 George Tanqueray, a successful writer in _The Creators_, believed that in writing, as in life, one must "Look and let go" (1910: 15-16). The motto marks a fundamental difference between the melancholic prison of Harriett Frean and the mourning of Mary Olivier. Mary acquires the wisdom of loss which leads her to creative heights.

The argument will always remain that even Mary's life was one of denial and repression; little was gained by way of external achievement. But this has been the case in the traditional ascetic aspects of mysticism, and in "Psychology and the Way of Sublimation", Sinclair draws attention to the visionary potential, as well as the neurotic pitfalls, of those who have lead a traditionally ascetic life. Discernment is not easy regarding the merits of their spiritual achievement:

> The ascetic at his best was the guardian and often the source of spiritual tradition... And if in the visions of many ascetic mystics we have a demonstration of the revenges of the repressed libido, still, even in the reign of asceticism, a great deal that passes for repression was really sublimation. (1915: 39)
At its best, visionary creativity is a healing and bridging power between dualistic splits of personality types and within the individual psyche. Sinclair points out Jung's statements in *Psychological Types*, where the healing power of creativity is equated with mysticism:

In Professor Jung's mythology, Prometheus and Epimetheus stand retrospectively for the introverted and extroverted man, and Pandora for the "creative phantasy" that reconciles their opposites... there is no middle way except the state of mystical absorption in God, mystical deliverance from "the pairs of opposites". (1923: 2)

Rather than diagnosing a particular psychological type, Sinclair concerned herself with the healing that could take place within the individual psyche, through the mysticism of creativity. Mary Olivier's predicament is no better than that of Harriet Frean or Joan Ogden in the *Unlit Lamp*, yet her creative, intellectual and spiritual faculties lead her to an integrated acceptance of her life, expressed by the creative act of writing. As Mary becomes a writer, her mysticism is a "new mysticism" which involves a creative production from however abject a position the mystic finds him or herself in. Contrasting with the escapist stupor of Mary's alcoholic father and brothers, Mary accesses a creative spiritual force which identifies her as an artist and a mystic.

The qualities of mystic and creative artist had been compared before. Underhill, in *Mysticism*, writes explicitly of the similarity of the mystic's vision with that of the artist, and more generally with all humankind:

I do not care whether the consciousness be that of artist or musician, striving to catch and fix some aspect of heavenly light or music, and denying all other aspects of the world in order to devote themselves to this...However widely these forms of transcendence may seem to differ, the mystic experience is the key to them all. (1993: 446)

Sinclair also uses religious language - devotional and sacrificial - when describing the creative process. Jane Holland in *The Creators* speaks of her life as a writer:

You had to come to it [writing] clean from all desire, naked of all possessions...For the divine thing fed on suffering, on poverty, solitude, frustration. It took toll of the blood and nerves and of the splendour of the
passions. And to those who did not stay to count the cost or measure the ruin, it gave back immeasurable, immortal things. It rewarded supremely the supreme surrender. (1910: 195)

Sinclair certainly believed that there was a link between mysticism and art, or of an artistic perception of the world (she writes of it in "the New Mysticism", in A Defence of Idealism). As if a form of mysticism itself, writing rewards the devotee in proportion to the sacrifice and attention s/he is prepared to give. Some of the characters who find a spiritual impetus for their art progress through a mystical journey during their life: Mary Olivier, for instance, whom Zegger describes as undergoing the three classic stages of Illumination, Purgation and Union. This scheme is similar to the mystic analogies of Underhill's characters, as they discover the spiritual potential of art and craftwork. But Sinclair concentrates her examination of mystic creativity more explicitly upon writing, and sees concepts of loss within writing as integral to the mystic expression of this discipline. This involves a reorientation of the style and structure of the writing Sinclair describes and experiments with herself.

If her character Jane Holland writes in a conventional enough vein of plot-structured literary realism, Sinclair also took an interest in the new literary movements, particularly that of Vorticism. Its goal was liberation of reality through loss of conventional structure: "But movement and rhythm are realities, not appearances. When I present rhythm and movement I've done something. I've made reality appear," (1917: 214) exclaims the Tree of Heaven's character Michael Harrison to a group of literary modernists:

He went on to unfold a scheme for restoring vigour to the exhausted language by destroying its articulations. These he declared to be purely arbitrary, therefore fatal to the development of a spontaneous and individual style. By breaking up the rigid ties of syntax, you do more than create new forms of prose moving in perfect freedom, you deliver the creative spirit itself from the abominable contact with dead ideas. Association, fixed and eternalised by the structure of language, is the tyranny that keeps down the live idea. (1917: 214)

Sinclair's interest - naming, in fact - of the "stream of consciousness" technique, is a natural progression of her fictional character's project, and quite probably drawn as
we have seen, from Underhill's reiterating of James' concept of a stream of consciousness in the context of Mysticism. The more the "rigid ties of syntax" are broken up, the more freedom, movement and spontaneity are allowed to find expression in a style of writing, the closer that expressive style becomes to the expression of the numinous as described by Otto, James and Underhill. Underhill's previous explorations in this area (her heroine Constance's "strange ululative cry" when saying a magic spell, for instance) had started a process of linguistic exploration, which led Sinclair towards a subjective, individual and poetic fictional style, used ever more effectively to explore mysticism in women's writing. The implications of "stream of consciousness" were bound up for Sinclair, as they were for Underhill, in the exploration of mysticism. It is surely no coincidence that Sinclair advocated and gave the name to the "new mysticism" as well as to the "stream of consciousness"; both were expressed for her through fiction writing, in a style that moreover increasingly became associated with the subjective experience of women.

Christopher Vivart, the central character of Sinclair's Far End, explains the new technique to a critic:

"The book is a stream of consciousness, going on and on, it's life itself going on and on...No reflected stuff"

"And what have you gained, you, more than God Almighty, when you've got it?"

"Can't you see? I gain a unity of form, a unity of substance, an intense reality where no film or shadow of anything extraneous comes between. I present a world of one consciousness, undivided and undefiled, a world which is everybody's world". (1926: 108)

The "new mysticism" to which May Sinclair subscribes involves an integration of the spiritual perspective with the life here and now, corresponding to the depiction of the highest form of mysticism as described by Underhill:

To be a mystic is simply to participate here and now in that real and eternal life, in the fullest, deepest sense which is possible to man. (1993: 447)

However, "a world which is everybody's world," is, paradoxically, a world which has been dramatically pared down from the traditional authorial discourse of the "writer as God", omniscient and omnipotent. In literature which makes use of
stream-of-consciousness technique, the heights of omnipotent observation are "lost" for the sake of the continuous, detailed viewpoint of an individual life. We do not learn the details and exploits of the life which Vivart wishes to create and describe so singularly. But Sinclair's own most complete works in the stream-of-consciousness format look at women's lives such as Mary Olivier or Harriett Frean, lives particularly undistinguished and unremarkable in terms of worldly experience, achievement or dramatic episode. Mary Olivier herself becomes a writer, if not of stream-of-consciousness novels, yet of poetry and drama which we could suppose emphasise the "rhythm and movement" so important to the new writing. Are we to assume that the loss of active "masculine" life leads to a potential gain in inner life, and ability to sublimate this lack into the new mysticism of literature? Sinclair would seem to be suggesting this when, for instance, Jane Holland in The Creators disputes with her sister-in-law over the necessity for the writer to have first hand experiences.

Experience? Experience is no good - the experience you mean - if you're an artist. It spoils you. It ties you hand and foot. It perverts you, twists you, binds you to everything but yourself and it. I know women - artists - who have never got over their experience, women who'll never do anything again because of it. (1910: 268)

Rather than plot and intrigue, Sinclair's fictional authors tend to search for a way of presenting insight and emotion. Vivart, while he does not speak of storyline, considers that the writer can conceive of "continuous ecstasy...by adding flash to flash and imagining an endless series" (1926: 219). If this role exceeds that of literary entertainer, it points towards the spiritual power of the writer which Sinclair considered in other contexts.

The healing work of creative art is, Sinclair suggests, of an importance beyond that for the artist herself. The salvific potential of the creative product depends upon the depth to which the artist has looked within herself, gaining self-knowledge akin to that of the mystic and the psychotherapist, as the result should encompass and surpass the work of both:

The [Creative]artist has made, created and fashioned something. He has projected and transplanted something into the outer world, even if it be only a portion of himself, supposing that, like the mystic, he too has turned from the
outer world and looked into his own soul. This sublimative value should be
great in proportion to the greatness of his work...the great artist even when he
cannot save himself, saves others. (1915: 87)

Just as Underhill saw a strand of missionary and educational work in her writing,
Sinclair sees here a mission in the life of the artist. And, as Underhill had lauded the
craftsman for his (/her) combination of the spiritual and practical worlds, writing, for
Sinclair, culminated in the level of concrete activity that typified the highest stage of
mysticism: "Concrete activity is the field most fitting to the religious life. It is that last
stage on the 'Way of Perfection' which the Catholic Mystics called the 'Unitive Life' "
(1915: 107). Indeed, this stage is "far above Purgation, Contemplation and
Illumination in all of which the Unconscious still rules" (ibid). Sinclair's unconscious
is more of the Freudian mass of unarticulated desires than mystic insight, but the
concrete activity which she sees writing to be, integrates even this powerful realm,
letting its spiritual aspects speak and act: "It is the sublimation of the love of God
itself, by which that love is carried over into the service of mankind" (ibid). Writing
which articulates and communicates the spiritual reality of life is the completest
expression of mysticism, even if, as Sinclair believed, it necessitates the loss of
conventional linguistic trajectory. This is not a sacrifice injurious to its artistic and
mystical impetus:

What then does it lack?

Nothing, if you bring love and religion into it. Almost everything worth
having, if you leave love and religion out. (1915: 107)

6 If not so romantic a conception of mysticism as Underhill's, Sinclair's
mysticism was not a disembodied abstract. The body was not left out of her writing
any more than the love and religion she considered so important. In the "new
mysticism", "physical desires are not repressed, but accepted, valued for what they
are, and worked through" (Zegger 1976: 107). Even more than Underhill, Sinclair
acknowledged the importance of "writing from" the body which was to become a
predominant theme in later feminist critical thought. Mary Olivier, who attains
creative mystical insight, is attuned to and aware of her physicality; Harriett Frean is
not. As a girl, Mary Olivier loved to run and jump and take playful physical risks.
Later, there is some suggestion that she was physically involved in a relationship with Richard, her publisher. Her knowledge, and her subsequent detachment (she allows herself to mature and grow old) is more complete and successful than Harriett Frean's, who, as the final "anaesthetic revelation" of her life discovers, remains unaware of her own desires and capabilities. Harriett does not succumb to a physically disabling manifestation of her frustration and repression, but another character in this novel, Priscilla Heaven, does. So too does a female character in *Anne Severn and the Fieldings* (1922), who suffers from chronic "false angina", knowing through her body what she cannot admit in her conscious mind, that her husband does not love her and the relationship is causing her pain. And where an unrecognised neurosis becomes transferred to ostensibly religious or mystical outlets, Sinclair warns in the characters of Agnes Lambert (her name, resonating with overtones of the martyr, is significant) in *a Cure of Souls* (1932) and Grace Minchin in the *Rector of Wyck* (1934) that an unheeded or exploited (by lazy clerics) libidinal desire can result only in temporary and partially authentic symptoms of mysticism. Agnes Lambert believes she is travelling on the paths of Purgation and Illumination, to be followed by an immense manifestation of the divine favour; both she and Grace Minchin are wrong because they have failed to decipher correctly their emotional and physical drives; the result is crippling rather than Unitive.

The direction of Sinclair's study of mysticism and psychoanalysis is clearly shown in the early novel, *The Helpmate* (1907), where the central female character, Anne Majendie, must learn to integrate her strong religious impulses with her physical and emotional humanity. She has to come to terms with her physicality in order for her spiritual life to be balanced and creative, rather than hysterically repressive. The novel describes her marriage to her husband Walter, whom she cannot forgive for a previous affair, and for whom she suppresses all physical desire from her conscious mind. Anne's denial is illustrated by the vivid longings of her dreams, and in frustrated scenes such as Anne's sensual brushing of her hair in front of Walter, to whom she nevertheless denies physical intimacy. The single child they do have suffers from a fatal physical defect which, it is implied, is derived from its mother's repressed emotional bitterness. The short-lived infant "was white, and weak, and sickly, as if it drew a secret bitterness from its mother's breast" (1907: 232).
Eventually Anne realises her mistake, and amends the destructive rift her rigid religiosity had established - the false dichotomy of body and soul:

She saw love as a divine spirit, going down into the courses of the blood and into the chambers of the heart, moving mortal things to immortality. She saw that there is no spirituality worthy of the name that has not been proven in the house of the flesh. (1907: 433)

In her *Defence of Idealism*, Sinclair explains how she would never connect physical austerity and psychological impoverishment to true mystic feeling:

I am as convinced as any alienist is that its [mysticism's] more abhorrent psychological extravagances are the hysterical resurgence of natural longings most unspiritually suppressed. These exponents are worthy only of the pity we give to things suffering and distressed. (1917: xvi ii)

Sinclair never depicted, as Underhill did on occasion in her fiction, physical self-castigation as a saintly occupation. Instead, she was more than willing to consider the physiological response to a heartfelt mysticism; sublimation of which was the opposite of a repressive asceticism:

What are we to make of [Saint John of the Cross'] confession that the ecstasies of the soul's union with God are often so poignant that they interpenetrate the body, itself, so that it is awakened and partakes of the soul's passion after its own kind? (1915: 87)

Unfortunately, as Sinclair knew from her studies in the Medico-Psychological clinic, a balanced attitude was difficult during times of stress. Denial and repression - or chastity and unworldliness - have traditionally been female characteristics, but the War, as Sinclair noted, brought male neuroses to the attention of the medical community. Sinclair makes an interesting psychological study of stunted, and Wartime, masculinity in *The Romantic*, seeking categorically to disprove an association between unnatural abstention and romantic sublimity. John Conway, the pathological romantic of the novel's title, denies the importance of his physicality in his romantic relationship with Charlotte Redhead. The result is as incomplete and damaging as was Charlotte's previous relationship, in which there had been no emotional or spiritual component. John's surname speaks of the false nature of his
ardently expressed aesthetic path. Conway explains his lack of physical desire by assuming a faculty of sublimation he is very far from possessing:

People don't know that...what they're destroying with their blind rushing together. All the delicate, exquisite sensations. Charlotte...I can get all the ecstasy I want by just sitting here and looking at you, hearing your voice, touching you. (1920: 54)

Conway comes to a sorry end; proclaiming desire for military glory, he is killed in a typical retreat of cowardice, leaving Charlotte to deal with her grief and anger, helped towards understanding and forgiveness by the ambulance team's psychiatrist, McClellan.

Sinclair is not suggesting that in order to be the perfect mystic, it is necessary to enjoy the perfect body. The most naturally spiritual character in The Helpmate for instance - spiritually far superior to the male clergyman Cannon Wharton, who displays an ineptness typical of Sinclair's (male) clergy - is Edie Majendie, Walter Majendie's sister, who is confined to her room and crippled by a severe spinal disability. However, Edie's understanding is, because of her unusual perspective, comprehensive and altruistic rather than obsessively introverted (as is the able-bodied Anne's):

Edith Majendie was a loving but shrewd observer of the people of the world. Lying on her back she saw them at an unusual angle, almost as if they moved on a plane invisible to persons who go about upright on their legs. The four walls of her room concentrated her vision in bounding it. She saw few women and fewer men, but she saw them apart from those superficial activities which distract and darken judgement. (1907: 33)

By coming to terms with her own position of loss, Edie reaches a fuller, more human mysticism than her sister in law, Anne. Her predicament is of course extreme, and bears about it the resonant tradition of helpless female invalid in Victorian Romantic fiction. But the figure of Edie Majendie may throw some light on just why it is that women characters in general tend to have greater access to mystic vision than do those male figures who lack no opportunities to develop. Whether Sinclair intended an essentialist definition or not, the general positioning of women on a level of loss or lacking, and their consequent opportunity for spiritual development, does parallel
later feminist critical theories which place the woman as lacking - lacking authority, lacking a developed super ego through their incomplete passage through the Oedipus complex, and living in a societal position which depicts (sees with the patriarchal gaze) woman's body as intrinsically "lacking" by the absence of the literal and figurative phallus.

Truly to embrace an embodied feminine mysticism may require further letting go and coming to terms with loss - loss of one's children, first from the maternal body, then from the maternal protection of the home. In addition, because of the War, it is the women who grieve over sons and husbands killed in action. Even in times of peace, it is, in Sinclair's fiction, the women who are left to mourn when fathers and sons/brothers die or fall away through business failure, the moral failure of alcoholism, or the hereditary danger of heart failure. In Sinclair's writing, acceptance and integration of physicality are an important theme; loss is an inevitable aspect of this process. Female sympathies tend to transcend, rather than deny, their own physical embodiment. This is a perspective which Underhill was working towards, but failed, in her fictional characterisation, adequately to realise, foreseeing only denial and exclusion should women develop the physical, emotional, and creative courage to which they are prompted by their mysticism (both Hester Waring and Constance, in their different extremes, are examples of this). With her greater medical and psychological interests, Sinclair advanced the "embodiment" of mysticism, in the bodies of her characters as well as in the style of her writing. And at the same time, she advanced the mysticism of loss to a further gain in psychic strength, again allied to the woman's position.

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Veronica was good...It was as if in her the walls that divide every soul from every other soul were made of some thin and porous stuff that lets things through. And in this life of yours, for the moments that she shared it, she lived intensely, with uncanny delight and pain that were her own and not her own. (The Tree of Heaven, 1917: 230)

Just as the female body relinquishes, and transcends, the boundaries of culture, nature and language by its capacity for maternity, Sinclair's female characters often demonstrate a fluidity in their boundaries which borders upon the telepathic. They may be inclined explicitly towards mysticism or merely towards a sensitive "negative capability" which makes them creative artists, whether painters, writers, or propounders of something more profuse and atmospheric. This is a natural progression for the female mystic, who, losing the false sense of self which is the individual ego in competitive, patriarchal society, gains in terms of Union, or at least in the psychic space which connects human beings. This too can be seen as a development of the psychic sense illustrated in Underhill's female characters such as Hester Waring, Catherine Alstone (the Virgin "speaks" to her) and Constance (able to summon an alien being). Sinclair develops this theme to suggest a strong link between psychic ability, prayerful willingness, and women. Her earliest novel, Audrey Craven (1897), depicts a heroine who is searching for an (artistic) identity and who is prepared to absorb (often unwisely), and be coloured by, various influences she encounters while awaiting her longed-for revelation. Interestingly, this novel depicts at its outset the subtly-introduced but central metaphysical idea of the fluidity of the psyche: the young artist, Ted Haviland, paints a large work on the subject of metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls. The act of "relating" takes on a higher creative and spiritual emphasis with this psychic interpretation, evident throughout Sinclair's work.

Often Sinclair's mystical female character relates strongly to nature, often, also, to a domestic or family setting. These scenes absorb and transmit a spiritual response, just as other evocative places, such as the cliffs in Kitty Tailleur, mark the
eponymous heroine's dramatic crises of conscience and death. Some scenes, such as the "Tree of Heaven", symbolise the mother or wife who is holding a group or family together by her self-sacrificial love: "Frances' Tree of Heaven secured them all" (1917: 55). Hilda Vivart in Far End has an enduring sense of the abiding presence of their first home: "The house looked down at her, waiting for her in its eternal peace" (1926: 9). Elizabeth in The Dark Night first experiences an illuminating awareness of "God himself in the fire and the light" near the tree in her garden (1924: 113). And Gwenda Cartaret feels her individual identity fusing with that of her surroundings as she communes with nature in The Three Sisters:

her inner life moved with the large rhythm of the seasons, and was soaked in the dyes of the visible world, and the visible world, passing into her inner life, took on its radiance and intensity. (1914: 355)

Gwenda's clergyman father, hidebound by dogma, cannot appreciate his daughter's sensitivity to their surroundings. Only the uneducated Jim Greatorex understands Gwenda's nature ecstasies.

As a contrasting expression of empathy, Matty, the future wife of the rector of Wyck, also experiences mystical epiphanies in which she extends her compassion and sense of self to the people around her, demonstrating on a supernatural level the maternal urge to nurture which later distinguishes her from her over-efficient daughter:

All her life she had moments when she was so happy that her heart went out to the whole world... She loved all these people... She loved them; she was glad they were there for her love to flow over them and hold them. (1934: 34)

If the "mysticism of charity" which Matty exemplifies here is a cliched position in which to place a clergyman's wife, Matty does not achieve her compassion without losses of opportunity in the intellectual and social sphere. Her sublimative synthesis of "love and religion" contrasts with the rigidity of Matty's daughter Millicent and her all-female community, who nevertheless lack the empathy to break through the emotional and spiritual barriers of the poor, whose conditions they devote their energies towards improving.

The occurrence of the First World War allowed the feminine ability for psychic boundary-blurring to become especially prominent in Sinclair's mysticism.
Women who are frequently left in a position of mourning experience a surge of spiritual power which unites them to the suffering of their menfolk, or to the wounded they care for. By this extreme empathy, women are able to identify with the Divine Will itself. Sinclair herself describes such an experience of prayer as "willing" when she nurses a desperately ill patient in Belgium:

There is nothing that I can do for him but to will. And I will hard, or I pray - I don't know which it is; your acutest willing and your intenest prayer are indistinguishable. And it seems to work... And the sensations go, and the swarms and streams of images go, and there is nothing before you and around you but a clear blank darkness where your will vibrates. (1915: 254-255)

This experience is recorded in Sinclair's Journal of Impressions in Belgium, relating her time with a volunteer ambulance corps. It is reproduced in her fictional writing, leading to the consideration of prayer as a union of wills between mystic and divinity. The compassion with which the mystic relates to other (suffering) humans is a vital part of this mystical act:

Through all her preoccupation and the quick, dextrous movements of her hands she [Charlotte Redhead] could feel her pity tightening her throat: pity that hurt like love ... nothing existed in her mind but the three wounded men. (1920: 101)

Sinclair connects her thoughts to psychoanalytical theory. In "Some Retrospections and Reflections", the second part of Sinclair's Psychology and the Way of Sublimation, she connects the acts of relating to self, world and the Absolute (embued with a Vitalist sense of life-energy):

the Will that has come to us via Psychoanalysis is not a mere working hypothesis, but a Will with its actual history behind it and its sublimations proved... the same indestructible Will-to-Live that is and moves in us is and moves in the World outside us and builds apparent bridges across the Great Gulf between. (1915: 136)

Telepathic powers, Sinclair suggests, are a development of this acute feminine sensitivity. She had read and corresponded with Underhill, who had also been interested in paranormal phenomena, mentioning Underhill in her chapter on mysticism in the Defence of Idealism. In this work, Sinclair voices her belief in
clairvoyance, once barriers have been relinquished, in the spiritual realm of the individual personality:

there are some grounds for supposing that the country of abnormal consciousness stretches forwards as well as backwards, and belongs every bit as much to our future as to our past. (1917: 292)

Veronica in the Tree of Heaven and Cecily in Far End experience a psychic communion with their absent soldier husbands, and paranormal knowledge of their husbands' deaths; Dorothy Harrison, too, experiences this blurring of boundaries to a lesser extent, having received a vision which transcends that of political feminism (see below). The communicative and healing powers of spiritual awareness are explored in some of the short stories: "the Flaw in the Crystal" describes the potential dangers of too much personal involvement on the part of the psychic healer. These unusual and extreme powers illustrate a general tendency in Sinclair's female characters. For example, in the Tree of Heaven, Frances Harrison, the mother of the family, demonstrates her own "will to heal" while nursing her youngest son, absorbing his pain into her own:

She was lost to herself and utterly absorbed in Nicky. And her agony became a sort of ecstasy, as if, actually, she bore his pain. (1917: 34)

Frances knows that it would be better for Nicky if she could relinquish her maternal hold on him, but having once nurtured him inside her own body, she still feels the partially unsevered ties between them. Nicky's childhood sweetheart, and, briefly, his wife, Veronica, tells Frances that the maternal bodily link can never quite be abolished, perhaps hinting at but paying too little attention to her own ties of physicality to her husband: "You think of their bodies more than we do, because they were part of your body. Their souls, or whatever it is, aren't as real to you just at first" (1917: 355). Women's emotional and physical bonds appear as different shades of the same empathic continuum, stemming always from an experience of loss. Even in slighter works such as Kitty Tailleur, Jane Lucy possesses the extreme sensitivity which gives her the insight of a psychic, or of a writer:

Jane was always listening for a call from some foreign country of the soul. She was always entering surreptitiously into other people's feelings. They never caught her at it, never suspected her soft-footed, innocent intrusions. (1908: 5)
Jane's talents resemble the psychic powers of Veronica, though Jane is less acutely clairvoyant precisely because her position of loss is not so formidable - Veronica is not only an illegitimate child but seems destined, by heredity and fate, for isolation and loss of various kinds throughout her life.

Sinclair acknowledged the horror of the Great War which overshadowed the access she suggests it gave women to their natural telepathic powers, and indeed the mysticism experienced by the male combatants themselves (see below). In Far End, for instance, we see some cynicism on the part of the men who fight: mysticism is acceptable for discussion among ladies, but physical unpleasantness is not: "We'll tell them about the ecstasy," Morry said. "They'll like that; but we won't tell them about the lice" (1926: 74). Nevertheless, the loosening of gender-roles which the times brought with them allowed a far more pressing need to connect with that "flashpoint of reality" which Mary Olivier gains by solitude, other characters by a combination of loss of ego and extreme sensitivity to others. The ultimate dissolution of inner and outer boundaries occurred for Sinclair during a moment recorded in her Journal of Impressions in Belgium, when the will to heal and help fused with acceptance and detachment in the face of imminent destruction:

There was something odd about that short stretch of grey road and the tall trees at the end of it and the turn. These things appeared in a queer, vivid stillness, as if they were not there on their own account, but stood in witness to some superior reality. Through them you were somehow assured of Reality with a most singular and overpowering certainty. (1915: 193)

In the "Retrospection and Reflections" referred to above, Sinclair is wary of the ideas of Schopenhauer, whom she considered to be too concerned with a split between the conscious and unconscious, and also of the work of von Hartman, whose thought, Sinclair considered, was spoiled by his pessimistic equation of the Absolute with the Unconscious, the will-to-live consequently seeking the route to unconsciousness or death, through self-annihilation. Sinclair is far from holding this opinion herself. In the same paragraph, she writes:

But that Will-to-Live whose fortunes we have so far followed apparently seeks an immortal life through perpetual sublimations of itself...what we call the Unconscious, ...presupposes Consciousness as its indispensable forerunner and...
condition. If it indeed be not the most intensely conscious form of
consciousness we can conceive. (1915: 137)

For Sinclair, then, the Absolute is an ultimate form of consciousness, a living energy
that can therefore be accessed by empathic, "willing" relationships not only with its
Absolute being, but also through the consciousness of other people, especially, as in
the case of the injured and those whose care for them, when contact is made in or
through a position of loss. Sinclair has learnt from Underhill's cautious interest in
magic phenomena and ability, and developed it, through the crucible of apparent
sacrifice or Purgation, into a psychic force of intimate communication, which builds
upon rather than bypassing human relationships. How far this drive to relate ventures
into the political realms is another question.

8 Sinclair was active from 1908 in the fight for women's suffrage, alongside
Violet Hunt, Cicely Hamilton and other writers. She was the author of a suffragette
pamphlet, Feminism (1912). However, in her fiction, Sinclair does not present a
predominantly political project for the emancipation of women. Indeed the end of
such novels as Mary Olivier is far from a statement of women's rights. "To a modern
feminist," writes Jean Radford, "the ending of Mary Olivier may well appear an
elaborate rationalisation of - yet again- self-denial" (1980: 2).

Mary Olivier did not have connections to a politically active suffrage
movement, but Dorothy Harrison in The Tree of Heaven, does. In the Rector of
Wyck, Sinclair shows, through Millicent's secular women's community, that collective
movements designed for the amelioration of social conditions are not necessarily
sensitive to the needs of spiritual and emotional health. And in the Tree of Heaven,
Dorothy's reaction to the fervent women's movement is decidedly hesitant:

Dorothy was afraid of the Feminist Vortex...She disliked the excited faces,
and the high voices skirling their battle cries, and the silly business of
committees, and the platform slang. She was sick and shy before the tremor
and the surge of collective feeling... It was her soul they wanted. these Women
of the Union. (1917: 110)
However, Dorothy is not immune to the esprit des corps- or "esprit d'esprit" as her brother Michael describes the coercive atmosphere at his boarding school: "The Vortex fascinated Dorothy even while she resisted it" (1917: 110):

She liked the feeling of her own power to resist, to keep her head, to beat up against the rush of the whirlwind, to wheel round and round outside it, and swerve away before the thing got her... She would stay on the edge of the Vortex, fascinated by its danger, and resisting. (1917: 110)

Dorothy's resistance in spite of a certain attraction could even be what leads to her higher vision of social harmony in her isolation cell in Holloway jail. Her stance constitutes a refusal of narcissistic identification with the fervent idealism of the "sisterhood", and is therefore a profoundly unhysterical reaction. In her prison cell, Dorothy senses a higher purpose, the spiritual unity which Sinclair pinpoints as a hallmark of genuine mysticism:

"You'll not believe this part of it, but I was absolutely happy in that cell. It was a sort of deep-down, unexcited happiness. I'm not a bit religious, but I know how the nuns feel in their cells when they've given up everything and shut themselves up in with God...I used to read like anything, and I thought of things. They sort of came to me...the things that came to me were so much bigger than the things I went in for." (1917: 192)

Dorothy's reaction to the collective but exclusive spirit of the Suffrage movement corresponds with the general examination of group pressures and enthusiasms which Sinclair is exploring in the Tree of Heaven. The "vortices" of public school as experienced by Dorothy's brothers, the literary movement of Vorticism itself, the whirlpool of new (a)morality, and the biggest vortex of all, that of patriotism in the face of the First World War are all explored. The grand exception in this novel becomes patriotism, which Sinclair, like Underhill, subscribed to in accordance with the spirit of the times. Dorothy's brother Michael finally capitulates to the fever of the War in a way that Dorothy does not with the feminist suffragettes. However, Sinclair attempts to convey the same ultimate message of transcendence to be drawn from both situations: there is a wider purpose, a higher sense of peace and vision - involving both men and women, as Dorothy explains to her fiancé:
I sort of saw the redeemed of the Lord. They were men, as well as women, Frank. And they were all free. They were all free because they were redeemed. (1917: 193)

In direct contrast to the separatist tendencies of the political progressives with whom Dorothy finds herself partially affiliated, her vision of "the redeemed" is inclusive, liberating rather than trenchant. It seems that the mystical perspective is not immediately conducive to direct political action, but we should be wary of discerning a split between passive and active vision where Sinclair shows Dorothy transcending dichotomies of gender and politics (she is imprisoned for her political action, after all). Sinclair affirms, (like Woolf) the bisexual nature of the artist, transcending both the natural and the political body. "Among all artists there is a strain of manhood in every woman, and of womanhood in every man" (Audrey Craven, 1897: 92). Just as in Virginia Woolf's vision of the marriage of male and female in the creative artist's mind, Sinclair also connects creative and mystical vision with darkness and communion, finding not only sexual inclusiveness and transcendance, but also the traditional mystical symbol of the Dark Night of the Soul.

9 Sinclair wrote a narrative poem The Dark Night (1924), evoking the traditional state of desolation prior to mystic union. She describes the condition and its consolation:

In the stillness of the dark night,
When space and time are not,
And the flesh dies,
Where the eyes do not see nor the ears hear,

nor the hands touch any thing,

I have him who is neither seen, nor heard, nor held by any hand. (1924: 112)

Sinclair was acquainted with St. John of the Cross' poem, "On a dark night", which describes mystical union in terms of a romantic tryst. Sinclair compares En Una Noche Escura to the poetry of Emily Bronte, who evinces "the language of a mystic, of a mystic who has passed beyond contemplation: who has known or imagined ecstasy. The joy is unmistakable: unmistakable, too, is the horror of the return...[Emily's poetry expresses] the rarest and the most tremendous experience that
is given to humanity to know" (The Brontes, 1914: 177). Writing about "the Visionary", Sinclair comments on Emily's similarities to the great Spanish mystic:

There is a long way there between E.B. and St. John, between her lamp-lit window and his "Dark Night of the Soul", and yet her opening lines have something of the premonitionary thrill, the haunting power of tremendous suggestion, the intense, mysterious expectancy of his. (1914: 178-9)

We have seen an eroticisation of mystical experience which remained evident in early twentieth-century religious thought. Underhill's angle was romantic rather than erotic; Sinclair's tended towards the philosophical. But in the final stages of loss as an approach to mysticism, Sinclair reintroduces a diffused eroticism as a means of expressing mystical consummation between aspirant and Absolute, as charged with emotion as it is stripped of language. However, Sinclair does not confine the image of the romantic tryst to straightforward scenarios. Gwenda Carteret, the mystical sister in Sinclair's Three Sisters, is obviously based on Emily Bronte, particularly in her mysticism of place and nature, which lead her, darkly, to transcend her own being:

Her passion found no outlet in creating violent and voluptuous sounds. It was passive, rather, and attentive. Cut off from all contacts of the flesh, it turned to the distant and the undreamed. Its very senses became infinitely subtle; they discerned the hidden soul of the land that had entranced her.

There were no words for this experience... It seemed to her that she was what she contemplated, as if all her senses were fused together in the sense of seeing, and what her eyes saw they heard and touched and felt. (1914: 355)

While Gwenda does not involve herself in human romance, in The Dark Night Sinclair juxtaposes the quasi-romantic union of mysticism with disappointments in human relationships. Elizabeth's handling of her loss, and her ability to forgive the man who has failed in loyalty to her is a successful example of the grief which Freud describes as a process of mourning. What Freud considers the "priority of reality" is for Elizabeth (and Mary Olivier and Arnold Waterlow), the sense of a transcendant spirituality, which comes only - usually literally - after a night spent in isolation and darkness in which all object cathexes must be relinquished:

The thin walls of thought
And the webs of space and time
Are broken,
And there is nothing any more
That shall come between God and me.
I have only to strip myself naked,
Only to loosen the clasp of the clinging flesh,
To slip from the shining net,
And I have him there at my will. (1924: 112)

In this passage, Sinclair's verse goes beyond the scenario of the romantic tryst to something far more spiritualised. When looking at these states of mystical detachment, the issue of mysticism is an extreme form of the state of freedom which is encountered by the subject after a prolonged, Purgative period of mourning. Just as Freud traces the relinquishment of the libido from the lost love-object, Sinclair suggests that in mysticism, desire is withdrawn from all surrounding objects - even those of "reality" such as space and time.

The ultimate letting go is the loss of the self, which Sinclair addresses in the dark night of Arnold Waterlow. Arnold achieves a mystical detachment; again in the literal darkness of night, when he is wrestling with severe grief (the death of his long-term mistress). The insight comes to him that: "His soul was so filled with grief that there was no room for God in it" (1929: 340). Arnold realises the necessity of detachment from his own self, his own ego, and this relinquishment is immediately followed by mystical consolation:

He must give himself up. This was the tremendous secret...deliverance from the self that grieved and longed and struggled for its peace... His will waited in the darkness, effortless and still... Something stirred in the darkness; he was conscious, again, of a queer, still throbbing, subtle and strange, as if his whole being were set to a finer pitch of vibration; then stillness again; then an incredible happiness and peace, and the sense of irrefutable certainty. (1929: 315)

The union he experiences corresponds to the mystical "willing" of Mary Olivier, and of Sinclair's own wartime experience. Arnold's revelation is not one of logical thought; like Pascal's "night of fire", it is an irrefutable inner discovery:
The God he had found last night was more than the object of his metaphysical thinking, the thought of thought; more than the Reality seen in the sudden flash of his mystic vision; closer than thought or seeing... the secret, mysterious Will within his will. (1929: 315)

Arnold Waterlow is unusual among Sinclair's novels in that its chief character is a man who is able to access that mysticism of loss which is encapsulated in the Dark Night. One could argue that Arnold relinquishes his self more successfully than either Mary Olivier or Elizabeth: the description of his experience is more precise, more explicit regarding "deliverance from the self". Arnold lacks love from his mother as do Mary Olivier and Harriet, yet separates himself from her more successfully. Freud might suggest that a masculine passage through the Oedipus complex produces a stronger sense of self; it is unclear, however, whether Sinclair would support this hypothesis, or simply wish to demonstrate that once a certain attitude to loss as related to the self is obtained, then divisive categorisation such as gender ceases to be relevant: "For the perfect Way is the way that everybody can tread without distinction of age or sex or race or sentiment or intellect or creed" (Psychology, 1915: 107).

Although treated warily by Christian commentators such as Dean Inge, a release from the ego is traditionally important in mysticism. As Sinclair notes elsewhere, the surrender of the self is also common to Eastern and ancient traditions. While it is necessary to spend time alone in order to reach this level of self-knowledge, the question arises: is a diminishment of the importance of relating a necessary result? Zegger suggests that, unlike Woolf, Sinclair did not consider interpersonal relationships of primary value. He reminds us that Mary Olivier concludes: "If you looked back on any perfect happiness you saw that it had not come from people or from the things you thought it had come from but from somewhere inside yourself" (1976: 116-7). However, Sinclair's writing implies that it is a loss of possessiveness in relationships, which leads to mystical Union. We have already seen that loss on one level of relationship leads, particularly with female characters, to an increased psychic union with loved ones. Sinclair's conception of the Dark Night is not in the final analysis isolationist. Indeed in The Helpmate, Anne Majendie makes

In Psychology and the Way of Sublimation, Sinclair examines the theme of self-surrender in Buddhism, Hinduism and Mithraism.
the mistake of cultivating a barren isolation: Anne regards prayer as an escape rather than a life-enhancing perspective: "I have my refuge, no one can take it from me. Nothing matters as long as I can get there" (1907: 154-55). Attractive though this "flight of the alone to the Alone" (Plotinus' phrase) was, Sinclair, like Underhill, saw its solipsistic flaws. She preferred to explore a mysticism which, far from rejecting life, validated it, however superficially mundane. Sinclair's favourite Bronte sister was Charlotte, who combined active and contemplative qualities in a life and body of writing itself very sensitive to the issues of loss, and fused, as did Sinclair, spiritual insight with the stories of human relationships illustrating her interests. As Underhill had struggled to find a balance between religious ideals and social integration, Sinclair further develops the necessity both for the Dark Night of detachment and the union of relationship.

Although the "Dark Night" usually indicates a lack of spiritual consolation, there are occasions in Sinclair's fiction, just as in the mystical tradition, when a character encounters a vision of evil, a dark opposite of mystical Illumination. No satisfactory explanations are offered by Sinclair or her contemporary religious commentators for this phenomenon, but Evelyn Underhill, writing to Sinclair about an episode in "the Flaw in the Crystal", indicates that such a situation of fear and desolation may, as in other less starkly delineated cases, offer a positive outcome in terms of faith, should those subjected remain psychologically strong:

It's simply amazing about that evil vision of the world, and makes me quite afraid of you! I've never heard of anyone else having it in that violent form, though the other day a man I know rather well told me that after a year of intense spiritual exaltation he lived in a modified state of that kind, in much misery for two years. My own belief about it is that where not associated with insanity it is educative, ought to be endured as long as possible... The heavenly vision seems to be much commoner, doesn't it? (May 2, 1911)

The description of a sense of dread in this way would be more expected of a fiction writer than a documentor of practical spirituality. Yet Underhill does not dismiss the scene as irrelevant fantasy. The examination by Sinclair in her fiction of extreme states of darkness point again to the creative sublimation, the mystical journey, that facing and accepting losses can engender.
There was one undeniable vision of evil which Sinclair neither imagined nor ignored. This was the First World War, bringing psychological and physical damage:

The number of people suffering from functional nervous diseases in this age of "nerves" was already sufficiently alarming, before the strain of the War period increased it to an extent, which only those working behind the scenes can grasp. (Sinclair's 1919 report for the Medico-Psychological Clinic of London, in American Philosophical Society Journal 1962, vol 106: 39)

It was by all accounts a spiritually testing time. Underhill, by this time an indefatigable spiritual director, wrote in this letter of 1917 of the difficulty of wartime spirituality:

The present abnormal conditions are as bad for the spiritual life as for every other kind of life. We are finding it frightfully difficult and most of us are failing badly. The material world and its interests, uproars and perplexities are so insistent that detachment is almost impossible... Transcendence of the here and now demands at present a strength of will and a power of withdrawal which very few possess. (1991: 147)

Underhill's last sentence corresponds with the strengths shown by many of Sinclair's female characters: the power of their will, the strength of their ability to accept loss, to withdraw their libidinal object cathexes to a spiritualised plain. But precisely because of its general tendency to disrupt the status quo of society, war, in Sinclair's fiction, does allow mysticism to protrude more obviously through the "gaps" or "rents" in society. The perils of war destroy any superficial sense of identity, forcing believer and atheist alike to contemplate ultimate issues. Male and female - or rather, combatant and non-combatant - experiences of the War are different, but the common element of "Greatest Possible Danger" - forces the individual, whether nurse or soldier (or civilian), to come up against an ultimate moment of reality. There is romanticism in Sinclair's description of the war (especially in The Tree of Heaven) but there is also realism about its horrors. If there is mysticism as a direct result of war, it is a "spiritual compensation" rather than a logical consequence of combat.

\footnote{\textit{as Sinclair writes in A Defence of Idealism} 1917: 379}

\footnote{Sinclair's repeated phrase in the \textit{Journal}, 1915}
However, it is possible to take issue with the value of war mysticism, "this gorgeous fight-feeling" as Nicky Harrison puts it in his letters home from the front. With creative mystics such as Mary Olivier, feelings of sudden and uncalled-for illumination do occur to the soul beginning its mystical journey, but only after a prolonged period of nurturing, suffering, and loss is final Union experienced along with productive creativity and emotional maturity. It seems sadly appropriate for the majority of male "mystics" in Sinclair's fiction to be those fighting soldiers who gain their brief ecstasy at the price of an untimely surrender of their own lives in the course of destroying others. Wishing as she did to restore an element of spiritual justification and compensation to the all-pervading spirit of patriotism in Britain during the Great War, Sinclair, far more than Underhill, overstressed the dubious links between the mysticism of fighter and healer, soldier and bereaved sufferer.

The most wholeheartedly patriotic of the novels is the Tree of Heaven, where the two Harrison brothers, Nicky and Michael, both die in action, having experienced the "ecstasy" of "going over the top" on the front line. It is in their letters home to their childhood companion (and, briefly, Nicky's wife), Veronica, that most of Sinclair's attempts to justify the mysticism of front line soldiers takes place.

Nicky is the first to go out (Michael has some trouble squaring patriotism with his individualistic personality), and attempts to disprove assumptions that the soldiers' mysticism has either to do with sexual urges, "nothing but a form of sex-madness," (although he admits that he knows one man who believes that is precisely how it is to be diagnosed), or a barely concealed instinct for murder: "simply submerged savagery bobbing up to the top - a hidden lust for killing, and the hidden memory of having killed" (1917: 323). Instead, he stresses the danger of being killed rather than killing: "you're bang up against Reality - you're going clean into it - and the sense of it's exquisite...I've been near enough to the other side to know" (1917: 323). Nicky's language, however, is boyish and excitable; it is his literary brother Michael who describes more sensitively the mystic battle scene: "It has to do with absolute reality," Michael writes, urging the same point as his brother, "With God. It hasn't anything to do with having courage, or not having courage: it's another state of mind altogether...it's all curiously quiet and steady" (1917: 347). But the rhetorical questions he proceeds to employ voice the doubts in Sinclair's mind and our own, as
we read of this "exquisite moment" of the fighting man, who, however much he would deny a link with (masculine) sexuality, draws an undeniable parallel:

...Why should you be so extraordinarily happy? Why should the moment of extreme danger be always the 'exquisite' moment?...

...Doesn't it look as if danger were the point of contact with reality, and death the closest point? ... it always comes with that little shock of recognition. It's happened before, and when you get near to it again you know what it is. You keep on wanting to get near it, wanting it to happen again. You may lose it the next minute, but you know. (1917: 347)

Again, war mysticism is a "compensation" for the horrors of the trenches: "it's our 'glory', our spiritual compensation for the physical torture, and there would be a sort of infamy in trying to take it from us" (1917: 348). Michael also claims that his experience is linked with the kind of peaceful contemplation practised by the individual communing with nature:

It's not as if danger were the only point of contact with reality. You get the same utter satisfaction from seeing a beautiful thing... You know what it was like when you used to sit looking and looking at mother's 'Tree of Heaven'. (1917: 349)

Michael's capitulation from the position that war was a hateful "thing that challenged the resistance of the private soul" (1917: 286) illustrated Sinclair's patriotic streak. It is probable that in suggesting a non-divisive continuum between the mysticism of the fighter and that of the peaceful contemplative, she was attempting to further the "oneness" of the spiritual vision. But Michael's reversal is clumsy in a character who has resisted group identification since he was a child refusing to go to a party, through school days, and during his association with literary groups on whose margins he preferred to remain. The subtext of a return to his mother's love and approval surfaces; hence his feelings of "homecoming," his fond comparison of spiritual life in the trenches to life underneath his mother's Tree of Heaven.

A further parallel between the potential shortcomings of masculine mysticism and masculine sexuality appears in The Romantic, where John Conway (a field worker rather than an actual combatant) cannot sustain his fantasy of heroic ecstasy any more than engage in a full relationship with his potential lover, Charlotte. She has
to be satisfied with an unfulfilled anticipatory admiration; his "funk" in one area indicates Conway's fear of impotence in another. In neither is any fruitful mysticism achieved, despite Charlotte's fervent belief in her hero:

And in John's face and in his alert body there was happiness, happiness that was almost ecstasy; it ran through and shone from him, firm and still, like a flame that couldn't go out. It penetrated her and made her happy and satisfied and sure of him. (1920: 143)

Conway's self-gratification at the fun of the game contrasts with the silent powers of physical and spiritual nurturing displayed by other characters:

Unless you can go into it as if it was some tremendous, happy adventure- that's the only way to take it. I shouldn't be any good if I didn't feel it was the most romantic thing that ever happened to me...it doesn't matter if you're killed, or mutilated...Of course I want to help, but that would be nothing without the gamble. The danger...War's the most romantic thing that ever happened. (1920: 67)

For Conway, this may well be the case, for the mutilation of his psyche equals the physical mutilation regularly sustained by soldiers serving on the front line. Both illustrate Sinclair's belief that "The libido of the neurotic, of the sexual pervert is utterly unholy, because it frustrates the purpose of Evolution by sending the individual backward on the path by which he came" (Psychology, 1915: 65). The concept of Evolution, so closely associated for Sinclair with that of sublimation, does not necessarily bear the marks of romanticism or heroism in their conventional guises. There is always a fundamental aspect of loss instead. True loss, however, and therefore true mysticism, belongs, in accordance with the rest of Sinclair's fiction, to the woman Conway mistreats for the sake of his own elusive glory.

11 Why is it that the majority of characters in May Sinclair's novels who experience, learn and act on genuine mystical feeling are women? Is it because, as psychoanalysis suggests, women enter the masculine world destined to live in a (depressive) position of lack and loss? Is there a genetic factor which combines with hereditary to produce the natural-born mystics such as Veronica in the Tree of Heaven, whose natural father was said to posses clairvoyant powers? Sinclair was
indeed interested in heredity, as well as the whole question of determinism, and has
Mary Olivier search through weighty reference works to throw light on the madness
and disease in the Olivier family. But although she accepts some elements of
predetermination, Mary Olivier's final conclusion is one of individuation,
self-determination through contact with a cosmic "willing" consciousness, and
through the spiritual constituency of her own relationships and the losses involved in
this project.

Although Sinclair never constructed so conscious and comprehensive a
critique as Irigaray's revisionary critique of Western philosophy, she did have an
abiding interest in the three main areas which were covered in Irigaray's important
later work, many strands of which were highlighted in Mary Olivier, the story of a
woman, who, like Sinclair, worked from a position of social and educational
deprivation to come to terms both with psychological development of the self and
with Western philosophy and spirituality from a feminine perspective.

We have seen how Sinclair was aware of and incorporated into her fiction
psychoanalytic theories, Freudian and Jungian perspectives about the development of
the personality, and more specifically, the processes of loss or sacrifice, which can
lead to the higher vision of sublimation, paths to a "greater reality" (owing much to
Platonic Idealism) and the liberation of the self. Sinclair concentrates on the
psychology of the family; the difficulty daughters in particular have in separating
from the mother, and vice versa, the sudden surprising strength of inner resources,
and contact with a specifically feminine reality that does not rely on visible
achievements, but embraces a "maternal" creativity of its own. Most of all, Sinclair is
concerned, as was Underhill, to establish a wholeness, a healing process, which
division and splitting of the psyche prevents from taking place. Her interest in
psychology and psychotherapy inform this concern:

Janet (In his État Mentale des Hystériques)... shows that the root of the
neuroses and psychoses, of all mental maladies... lies in dissociation: the break
between one idea, or group of ideas, and its normal context and logical
connections; the cutting off of one psychic state, or group of states, from the
stream of consciousness itself. This isolated and abandoned tract is the home
of all the obsessions, the fixed ideas, the morbid "complexes" unearthed by the
psychoanalysts, the day-dreams and phantasies of neurotic and insane persons; it is the home of lapsed instincts and memories, of things forgotten because of their dreadfulness or uselessness; it is our ancestral or racial territory, the place of our forgotten and yet undying past, of what has been conscious once, and is no longer conscious. Portions of our present that we have no use for and that would only hamper us are continually going to join this forsaken past. If we are to keep the image of consciousness as a "stream" we had better say that they sink to the bottom and stay there until some eddy in the deep stirs them up again. (1917: 291)

The eddy in the deep is often, in Sinclair's fiction, that loss or position of loss which must be worked through for healing to take place. When this cannot happen, the eddy occurs too late, and, as in Harriett Frean, the unresolved, narcissistic conflicts are only stirred up at the moment of literal death. However, despite the considerable use which Sinclair did make of psychoanalytical tools, she always maintained that there was a greater reality outside of the human psyche, which could be accessed, but not explained by the complex processes of the unconscious. "She was critical of the psychoanalyst's lack of concern for absolute truth and for a metaphysically comprehensive view of the world," writes Zegger:

Jung's theory of God as a "split off turn of libido which has activated the God-imago" repelled her. She felt that in mystical experiences, in art, in beauty, and even in love man came in contact with an absolute reality that could not be explained away as a creation of the libido. (1976: 59)

Nor was she entirely happy with the Jungian interpretation of symbols; again, for Sinclair, it is too relative, insufficiently explained as merely a psychological technique, paying too little attention to the symbol's connecting power with the unnameable absolute within and transcending human experience:

"it is ...the mediator and reconciler, the healer of psychic strife", Jung himself says: "The symbol lives through the holding back of certain libido forms, and then in its turn becomes an effective control of these libido tendencies". (1923: 3)

Instead, Sinclair saw psychoanalysis and its critical tools as a viable way of working through the less-than-perfect conditions imposed by society, heredity, temporal
conditions - the constraints of determinism, towards the wholeness and unity which, according to idealism, it is possible for the individual to strive for. The spiritual vision, reaching for a wider Absolute than the single individuated psyche is an integral and sublime part of this quest: "Psychoanalysis would seem to be the best if not the only method of conversion - the turning around for the ascent toward the sun" (1976: 58).

Sinclair was a staunch proponent of Idealism and wrote two volumes on the subject, as well as incorporating it into her fiction. Christopher Vivart explains the basic difference between Idealism and Realism to an inquiring character in Far End: Idealists are the fellows who say the world arises in consciousness and has no existence outside it. And realists are the chaps who say that the world arises outside consciousness and is independent of it. Idealists swear that the world exists because we know it, realists swear that we know it because it exists. These are the two great philosophical theories, and they are implacable and irreconcilable. (1926: 47)

Sinclair herself, and many of her characters, were interested and involved in metaphysical speculations and new movements in philosophy. T.H. Green's philosophical Idealism, with which Sinclair was familiar, was a reinterpretation of German Idealism:

in contrast to utilitarianism, which tended to be materialistic, hedonistic, and non-hierarchical, Green regarded man's spiritual nature, his consciousness, as primary; he views the universe as being divinely ordered and hierarchical, a manifestation of God's consciousness to which man is related by his own consciousness. (Zegger, 1976: 19)

Thus Sinclair intercalated her spiritual perspective with the emphasis on the powers of the mind which idealism insisted upon. Her ideas on prayer being a certain alignment of the will of the individual with that of God stem from this notion of the

Sinclair is explicit about the necessity of psychotherapy, and was in fact a keen founding supporter of the Medico-Psychological Clinic of London:

The symptoms complained of are often the sort which the lay mind is accustomed to regard as outside the province of medical aid...to be only satisfactorily cured by Psychotherapy. ("May Sinclair and the Medico-Psychological Clinic of London" Theophilus Boll, American Philosophical Society, vol. 106 no 4 Aug. 1962)
human psyche being related to God especially through the medium of consciousness. In addition, by 1918, Sinclair was inclined to drop the two distinct terms, as her concept of the stream of consciousness became further developed. Division into "realism and idealism", "subjective and objective" is:

"missing the new trend of the philosophies of the twentieth century. All that we know of reality at first hand is given to us through contacts in which these interesting distinctions are lost. Reality is thick and deep, too thick and too deep, and at the same time too fluid to cut with any convenient carving knife. The novelist who would be close to reality must confine himself to this knowledge at first hand...[and]simply plunge in. (The Egoist, April 1918)

Emphasis on the power of the mind made way for metaphysical speculations which sometimes verged, as we have seen, on the paranormal side:

Mind is the only entity capable of literally containing its own process, of being at once process and total configuration. A moment's reflection will show the possibility of this apparent paradox. It is more or less to be found in the experience of any finite consciousness that not only anticipates but has power, within limits, to shape its own future, that, in remembering, from moment to moment rolls up its past into its present and perpetually covers the process of its will. (The New Idealism, 1915: 241)

Mary Olivier makes her own voyage through Western philosophy, encompassing the works of Hegel, Kant, and her favourite, the exiled but uncompromising Spinoza. However, the route of her thought always returns to Plato, to his sublimating philosophy reaching out to the reality of things - of ideals, in themselves:

Beauty in itself. In itself- Beauty in beautiful things... It would be like the white light in the colours. (1980: 131)

The route to ideal perfection, however, is not straightforward, and Sinclair investigates the journey to find that more and more preconceptions buckle under the luminous darkness of her search. Her belief in the powers of the mind has already been discussed in reference to the blurring or transgressing of man-made boundaries. Flexible, too, are the temporal and spatial concepts upon which the universe of Western philosophy is tentatively constructed. When Sinclair's metaphysical speculations are discussed in a playful, abstract way (particularly in the short story
"The Finding of the Absolute" in Uncanny Stories, and also "Heaven", in the Intercessor, there is a lot of humour in the telling. Being able to laugh at one's own insights is certainly a quality Sinclair possesses, as in her description of the following dream:

In this dream I made, and chanted, an endless (it seemed endless) metaphysical song. I explored the very depths of Absolute Being... I cannot for the life of me remember what it was, except that with a supreme and inexpungable certainty I knew it. (Psychology 1915: 14)

The messages of dreams are not to be ignored, of course, (for example those of Anne Majendie in The Helpmate) any more than fictional examinations of such subjects, but Sinclair stressed the necessity for a wider frame of spiritual and philosophical referral than that of purely one's own psyche. She was showing through a mimetic reflection of Western philosophy, the inadequacies of purely rational thought as well. However, non-linear concepts of time, and quasi-supernatural qualities of place and space are also hinted at in her more serious novels, particularly the "family" dramas and the fictional biographies of Mary Olivier and Harriet Frean, questioning, even more than did Underhill, the apparent reality of mundane situations or linear chronology in a way that foreshadows later probing of "women's space" and "maternal", "cyclical" or "monumental" time. Like Underhill, she credits the artist and the mystic with fresh temporal and spatial dimensions:

Our inner states do succeed each other at different rates of vibration, and what escapes us on the slow, steady swing, we seize when the pace quickens. Our perceptions, like our passions, maintain themselves at higher and lower intensities. It is with such rapid flashes of the revolving disc, with such hurrying of the rhythm of time, with such heightening of psychic intensity that we discern Reality here and now.

...lovers and poets and painters and musicians and mystics and heroes know them: moments when eternal Beauty is seized travelling through time. (1917: 379)

Sinclair even suggests that the two dimensions are ultimately interchangeable:

"Time is stuffing for the gaps in space...space stuffs [the gaps in time] by enduring through all instants". (1934: 228)
At the point of primary creation, both language and science are seen to fail in logical descriptive power, as Spalding discovers when he is newly initiated into the secrets of heaven:

He saw the vast places of time intersecting each other like the planes of a sphere, wheeling, turning in and out of each other. He saw other space and time systems rising up, toppling, enclosing and enclosed. And himself as a tiny inset in the immense scene, his own life from birth to the present moment, together with the events of his heavenly life to come. (Uncanny Stories, 1923: 247)

Morality, too, is seen as a relative construct, as arbitrary in its way as the new theories of language as an arbitrary series of signs which were being explored by Saussure and his followers.

Your parochial morality doesn't hold good here ..Why should it? It's entirely relative. Relative to a social system with limits in time and space. Relative to a certain biological configuration that ceased with our terrestrial organisms. Not absolute. Not eternal. (1923: 230)

Again, Sinclair differs from the existentialist concept that there are no eternal values, however: Beauty and Love are for her the eternal absolutes, and established in the soul only through the confusing details of the individual life. In her short story, "The Finding of the Absolute", Sinclair has a spiritualised Kant unravel the secrets of the universe for Heaven's new arrival, proving that the small detail, irrelevant in itself, is the key to beginning the mystic process, in spirituality, metaphysics, and life itself:

Only wills disciplined by struggling against earth's evil, only intelligences braced by wrestling with earth's problems are fitted to create universes...pain and evil...are purely relative to the states of terrestrial organisms (1923: 242)... You will begin with one small cubic section, which will gradually enlarge until you have taken in as much cubic time as you can hold together in one duration. (1923: 244)

At the heart of all this revelation is the Godhead, and Sinclair hints but cannot speak of the origin of the "divine fire" which inspires so much of her characters' mysticism. In the words of the Protestant scholar, Rudolf Sohm, translated (as Outline of Church History) by herself:
Religion must end in the incomprehensible; and the power which makes it religion, the power which satisfies the soul and frees it from the stress of earthly things, the power which perfects both the nation and the individual life belongs to religion by virtue, not of the incomprehensible in it which transcends human thought and understanding; the power of religion lies in the mystery through which it leads to God, the incomprehensible Being whom the understanding cannot reach. (1958: 196)

Sinclair makes references in her fiction to various mystical traditions: classic Catholic mystics in a *Cure of Souls*, Eastern wisdom in *The Intercessor*. She also paid due attention, as did Mary Olivier, to the religions of paganism and pantheism, realising with Sohm that they "preserved mysteries" which it was impossible to speak about in language saturated in the linear articulations of Western philosophy. Psychology alone tended to excise these spiritual themes to the impoverishment of purely "moral" systems: "And all the religion that the New Psychology seems to allow you is the morality that remains when you have extracted all the godhead that is the soul of it by some process the reverse of sublimation" (1915: 107). Although she espoused no particular religion herself, unlike Underhill, Sinclair was always searching, in her fiction, for a spiritual dimension to her own thought and creativity. Because she refused to see either the Absolute spiritual value of integration, or the symbol itself, as mere relative expressions of the individual psyche, yet was always aware of their inadequacy to express any final revelation, fiction writing in particular was an honest way forward for Sinclair to experiment with, and express, her interests in this area.

If we can reach any conclusion about the base of spirituality upon which Sinclair constructed her ideals and her fiction, it lies with the latent knowledge of femininity which resonates in the texts under discussion. Encompassing pluralities of approach, the feminine perspective addresses even more paradoxically the concept of loss, of abjection and the dark night of mourning which releases the creative and unitive powers of the "new" mysticism. Sinclair explored a variety of approaches to mysticism, femininity and loss. She herself wrote of the validity of plurality in the journey or story of individual sublimation, still insisting that multiple paths returned one to a concept of unity:
We have only to look back on our own childhood to make out a very good case for variety and multiplicity. But to the devout Psychoanalyst it is as it was with Hegel and his Dialectic: "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose". (1915: 113)

It is from this paradoxical return to a tradition of unity, which hints at a spiritual system or symbolism beyond that of introverted psychological self-speculation, that Sinclair's concept of mysticism chiefly derives:

There is ... a pure and beautiful Mysticism that springs from the vision or the sense of "One-ness" of all things in God. It knows nothing of Passion's disturbance and its strain. Its saints are poets and its counterpart in philosophy is Spiritual Monism.

...The question for students of comparative religion is, not whether it is a survival (for all life is a survival), but whether its presence marks a reversion or a progression - whether it is a sort of verriform appendage, or a form inspired with the secret of the life that was and is and is to be. (1917: xviii)

As Radford noted in her introduction to Mary Olivier, this is not an easy question to answer; critics will differ in opinion as to whether in Mary Olivier Sinclair has put forward the "secret of the life that was and is to be" while yet achieving nothing in the generally accepted notion of "progression". Similar arguments later rage around the Speculum of Irigaray; how does the "mysterique" of femininity advance the life of those trapped at the dark heart of the Western philosophical tradition; or should they be emulated, imitated, rather than "emancipated"? Sinclair's humorous dream-insight regarding Absolute Being also points to the impossibility of expressing "being" in coherent language without the "becoming " involved in both life and fiction. Thus Sinclair found her path to the being of mysticism through the becoming of her own creativity, and the sacrifices and sublimations this path necessitated. Sinclair merges the projects of religion and psychotherapy, valuing modern methods of analysis over the traditional confessional, precisely because the aims are similar but the achievement of psychoanalysis is more successful. The traditional sacrament of penance "does not involve the uncovering and explanation and therefore healing in the most radical way, of 'sin' ". The language of religion also permeates Sinclair's concept of the function of art, for as well as being a sublimation of the creative and
libidinal drives, "the artistic 'function of reality' brings us back again to that very function of redemption we seemed to have lost sight of". (1915: 99) It is because of her use and fusion of all three terms - religious, psychotherapeutic, artistic - that Sinclair's writing is of such interest in an examination of spirituality and creativity, particularly from her feminine position, and her method extends compassion towards those who are helpless in their loss, as well as examining a way forward for those (generally female) characters who are at the heart of her fiction. For Sinclair, the union of the will of the mystic and the Will of the Godhead or "Ultimate Reality " fuses sublimation with creative art, and both with the mysticism which is a resolution of loss.
CHAPTER FOUR
DOROTHY RICHARDSON'S ILLUMINATION

_In the Light wait and walk, that you may have fellowship one with another_¹

1 Of the three women writers under discussion in this thesis, Dorothy Richardson was the most innovative and pioneering. As we have seen, May Sinclair took the mystical impetus in Underhill's writings and developed the perception of mystical experience stylistically, psychoanalytically and spiritually. But it was their contemporary, Richardson, who transformed women's experience of mysticism into a new creative praxis, taking the lessons of the past and with them transforming her own present. Hers was the Illumination which followed the representation of loss that figured so highly in the work of Sinclair.

Richardson was no more under the sway of any particular psychology than she was of any literary method or religious dogma. However, like Sinclair, she was familiar with Jungian ideas. Jung's work on the symbolically resonant alchemical process are especially relevant here. We have seen that Underhill was interested in the symbolism of alchemy; Jung was also fascinated by this ancient tradition of spiritual transformation, which anticipates Richardson's constant references to the transforming ground of her own being, a sublimative force which illuminates all that is about her.

In _Psychology and Alchemy_ (1944) Jung suggests that spirit and intellect must work on the "prima materia" of all that is in order to reveal spiritual and creative gold:

> Our understanding (intellectus), aided by the "celestial and glowing spirit," must transform this natural work of art - chaos - into the celestial nature of the quintessence, and into the life-giving (vegetabilis) essence of heaven. (1980: 340)

In his historical and psychological investigation of the phenomena, Jung realises the symbolic resonances in the subject of alchemy. His is a holistic tradition, enabling the

¹George Fox and the Children of the Light, ed. Fryer, 1991: 204
body of the earth to be transformed into an organic and nourishing totality, which possesses distinctly maternal qualities in its aspect of inner gestation and nurturing:

The earth (as *prima materia*) is not a dead body, but is inhabited by a spirit that is its life and soul. Through the spirit received from on high, the earth hatches the minerals in her womb as the mother her unborn child. This invisible spirit is... the root of all the substances necessary to the alchemical process or arising therefrom. (1980: 342)

Jung refers to the alchemical process of the golden light of the sun which becomes an immanent spiritual source when it is reflected from within the individual's being:

Little by little the sun has imprinted its image on the earth, and that image is the gold. The sun is the image of God, the heart is the sun's image in man, just as gold is the sun's image in the earth... and God is known in the gold. This golden image of God is the anima aurea, which, when breathed into common quicksilver, changes it into gold. (1980: 343-4)

We have seen that Underhill also writes of the alchemical process in *Mysticism*, linking alchemy to the mystic transformations she proceeds to investigate:

The art of the alchemist, whether spiritual or physical, consists in completing the work of perfection, bringing forth and making dominant, as it were, the "latent goldness" which "lies obscure" in metal or man... By his search for the "Noble Tincture" which should restore an imperfect world, he became a partner in the business of creation, assisting with the Cosmic Plan. (1993: 143)

Both these presentations of alchemy stress the creative perception required to achieve the alchemical illumination. An innate light within the mystic or artist causes the gaze, wherever it alights, to illuminate what it contemplates, and reveal gold within the everyday as if possessed of a philosopher's stone. If Richardson does not explicitly evoke this symbolism, it seems particularly appropriate in exploring the creative and mystical Illumination which informs her writing.

2 As Underhill described in *Mysticism*, Illumination is an important second stage of the mystic's journey, following the initiate's way of Purgation and loss:
Our whole selves - not merely our sentient selves - are regarded as being bathed in Astral Light, as in the ether of physics.... [artists] share in some degree the experiences of the way of illumination. (1993: 233)

While Sinclair explored, in her fiction, the connections between loss, femininity and creativity, Richardson took "the illumination of the self" into her writing. Miriam Henderson's affinity with the visual and spiritual implications of Illumination are the key to understanding her pilgrimage as a mystical one. The word "Light" has many associations: happiness, freedom, clarity, also of "seeing the Light", and of a sensation of weightlessness and levitation which Miriam experiences, as did earlier religious mystics. Richardson had an obvious talent for conceiving the literary equivalent of a still life: in the short story "Peach Harvest," she describes how "The morning light, filtering through larch-trees, stretching their delicate fingers towards the slumbering house, pours softly into the quiet room" (Beinecke manuscript: 4-5). In a similar impressionistic manner, light, and the effects of light, pervade the four volumes of Pilgrimage:

Miriam, her fatigue forgotten, slid into a featureless freedom. It seemed to her that the light with which the room was filled grew brighter and clearer. She felt that she was looking at nothing and yet was aware of the whole room like a picture in a dream. Fear left her. (I: 43)

The passage is typical of her illuminative moments. However, there is a development in Miriam's absorption of the light she encounters. It takes on many meanings and stretches her physical and spiritual perceptions. In the first volume of Pilgrimage, a teenage Miriam encounters light as she is struggling with independence and responsibilities. The scene is set in night-time Germany, where Miriam is a student-teacher at a young ladies' academy:

Tranquil moonlight lay across the room. It surprised her like a sudden hand stroking her brow... It passed over her trouble like her mother did when she said, 'Don't go so deeply into everything, chickie. You must learn to take life

Such as, famously, St Teresa of Avila.

In this chapter, where letters and articles are quoted with no publication reference, they are taken from the Dorothy Richardson papers in the Beinecke Library, Yale.

All quotations from Pilgrimage refer to the four volume Virago edition of 1979; volume numbers are cited in every case.
as it comes...' ...But mother did not know. She had no reasoning power... The moonlight was sad and hesitating. (1, 169)

At seventeen years old, any "glimmering" of insight still carries a connotation of the family, here in the person of her mother- the moon being a suitable symbolic prompt. Miriam yearns for the trusting acceptance which the moonlight seems to offer. Yet her struggle throughout the text is for an integration of her artistic detachment and her powerful intelligence. Simple surrender to the circumstances without exercising her "reasoning power" is not enough for Miriam, just as it was unable to sustain her mother, whose later suicide casts great sadness over Miriam's life. Miriam must learn to consolidate her sense of being an individual self, rather than passively allow its annihilation.

As she develops, for Miriam, illumination must have the qualities of stillness and motion, of watchfulness and participation, just as contemplation and activity is balanced in the "new" mysticism we have seen appear in the work of Underhill and Sinclair. At the end of Pilgrimage, light for Miriam comprises both activity and rest:

She turned back to her adventure in the sky. What was it about those vibrating particles of light that had made them seem so familiar and so reassuring?... The rapture and the rapturous certainty. Joy, wonder, recognition. No excitement, because no barrier. There must somehow be sober intoxication. Movement that is perfect rest. (IV, 282)

Miriam's pilgrimage is one which involves finding this illuminative balance. And where Underhill, and, to some extent, Sinclair, depicted fictional influxes of light as distinctly paranormal phenomena, Richardson is more concerned to integrate mystical Illumination with her heroine's daily life and surroundings. The descriptions can still be exhilarating, however:

With a single upswinging movement, she was clear of earth and hanging, suspended and motionless, high in the sky..."I've been up amongst the rejoicing cloud- tops", she wrote. (IV, 279-80)

As this extract illustrates, Richardson is aware, too, of the physical implications of "light". Miriam has to transcend the feeling of weight in her body to practise contemplation: "Miriam knelt heavily on the hard floor, feeling the weight of her well-known body" (1, 263). A posture of physical submission is of no help to Miriam.
who instead seeks a way to associate herself physically and visually with the light. Richardson depicts Miriam incorporating lightness into her own physical activity. Cycling, for example, represented the growing recreational opportunities for women. Richardson relished this new-found emancipation which was both emotional and physical. Miriam equates her cycling with an uplifting spiritual experience:

> Everything shone with a greater intensity. Friends and thought and work were nothing compared to being able to ride alone, balanced, going along through the air. (II, 146)

Cycling is right for Miriam because there is an element of stillness (of necessity balanced) and rest even with the flowing movement, which brings about her heightened perspective.  

On the other hand, sometimes the lights are internal and literary, as in Miriam's rejoicing over Dante:

> she had lowered her eyes to the gleaming, wet pavement to listen again and again into the words of the wonderful line; how they had closed about her; a tapestry of intensifying colour, making a little chamber filled with deep light. (III: 308)

Though the words are colourful and hypnotic, it is the enclosure of pure light they evoke which is Miriam's delight.

Pilgrimage is of course not a text of trouble-free illumination. A major lesson for Miriam is the necessity for acknowledging the darkness and shade which surrounds and complements her inner light:

> Light makes shadows. The devil is God's shadow? The Persians believed that in the end the light would absorb the darkness. That was credible. But it could never happen on earth. ...[she criticises those who are] not aware of the wonder and beauty of gloom. (III, 249)

Miriam spends much of the third volume of Pilgrimage pondering the different strands of her personal spiritual inheritance: puritan asceticism and west country joy. She concludes that sorrow forges a more thoughtful spirituality: "Il Penseroso knew

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5 This adds a spiritual aspect which has been picked up by other writers such as Lavinia Byrne in her discussions of women's spirituality-she cycles for purposes of prayer and meditation. (Loudon 1992) Incidentally, bus journeys also provided this combination of movement and stillness; both Miriam and her creator were extremely fond of them.
and L'Allegro did not" (III: 250). It would therefore be inappropriate to label Richardson, or her fictional persona, as blithely optimistic, as James suggests (see above, p.7), that the spiritually "once-born" (primarily women) tend to be. Miriam is herself "twice-born": not in a supernatural way, as was Underhill's Willie Hopkinson, but twice-born of two spiritual heritages: one stressing loss, the other hope. Her illumination involves transcending this dichotomy, just as the traditional path of mysticism described illuminative insight as a stage of heightened faith which proceeded from the purgative journey of loss: "her life would be the battlefield of her two natures," thinks Miriam, but she feels a presence which suggests gain after the loss sustained by this conflict: "launched, without her belongings, but richly accompanied, on a journey to the heart of an unquenchable joy" (III, 250-1). For Miriam, illuminative light is increasingly associated with an inner presence which is the real goal of her pilgrimage.

3 Miriam's sense of a benign presence guiding her is, as well as illuminative, intuitive and personal:

the mysterious friend, her star, the queer strange luck that dogged her path, always reviving happiness, bringing a sudden joy when there was nothing to account for it, plunging her into some new unexpected thing at the very moment of perfect helplessness. It was like a game...something was having a game of hide and seek with her. (III, 237)

Just as Miriam describes oscillations between light and dark, Underhill, in Mysticism, describes a stage - "the characteristic intermediate stage between the bitter struggles of pure Purgation and the peace and radiance of the Illuminative Life" - similarly consisting of consolation and withdrawal:

The "Game of Love" is a reflection in consciousness of that state of struggle, oscillation and unrest which preceded the first unification of the self. It ceases when this has taken place and the new level of reality has been attained. (1993: 227-8)

Miriam's experiences seem to support this view. She learns from the inner fluctuation: indeed, she is fond of games in general, for they generate the sensation of:
breaking through into an eternal way of being. In all games it was there, changing the aspect of life, making friends dearer, making even those actually disliked, dear, as long as they were within the rhythm of the game. (IV, 87)

For Richardson, even more than for Underhill, these "rhythms" in one's consciousness were an intrinsic aspect of Illumination. Although she does not draw a comparison (as Underhill, in fact, did) between these inner rhythms and those of mystically-inspired speech or verse, one of the characters whom she most admires, towards the end of Pilgrimage, is a poet, incorporating these rhythms into his art:

In his gentle composure and sensitive awareness he is something like the ideal Quaker. Living in reference to a Presence...Unifying sound, rather than unifying silence, is the medium of his social life. (IV, 273)

Although she develops a strong sense of an inner presence, Richardson's own spiritual journey was not vitally connected with Church or Christianity: "faith seems to me just an abnormal condition of the mind with fanaticism at one end and agnosticism at the other" (I, 259), the young Miriam exclaims, while a governess at Bambury Park. However, she also declares that "There's something in me that can't be touched or altered" (I, 246). Richardson wrote that at the corresponding time of her own life she had "so far...not encountered" (Rosenberg, 1973: 81) the mystics, though she was struggling with the problem of religion.

At this stage, spirituality for Miriam implies a necessary isolation. It is rumoured that while ill, Grace, a pupil, had: "seen the white light away in the distance far beyond the noise of the world". Like Underhill and some of Sinclair's characters, Miriam has difficulty integrating spiritual experience with social interaction; she feels forced to choose between: "either a playing a part all the time in order to be amongst people in the warm, or standing alone with the strange true feeling" (I, 320). Yet the sense of an inner presence is vitally connected with the spiritually heightened "edge" to her surroundings, which Miriam perceives early on in Pilgrimage: "a sort of edge of reality on everything; even on quite ugly common things - cheap boarding houses, face-towels and blistered window frames" (I, 320). This light is needed for the fullness of experience: "it seemed as if always something were needed in the background to give the full glow to every day" (II, 311).

For a thorough chronological documentation, see Rosenberg, 1973: 80-82
Developing this tendency, Miriam's illumination heightens her perception of London itself, where she carves out an impoverished but independent existence. Life in London symbolises life within a hidden centre:

She would find a coolness at the heart of the swelter of London if she could keep a tranquil mind. The coolness at the heart of the central swelter was wonderful life, from moment to moment, pure life. (II, 405)

Richardson produces the sense of an organic spiritual presence dwelling within Miriam's London, and simultaneously within herself. The fusing of an inner and outer spirituality was described in a similar situation by Underhill, when the Grey World's Willie Hopkinson, walking alone in London, experienced the city as a maternal presence. The three psychological types of mystics Underhill delineated in Mysticism (the pilgrim, the lover, and the mystic who finds God within the self), reappear in Miriam's responses to London: Miriam journeys there as if on a questing pilgrimage; at times she relates to the city as a spiritual lover; she also identifies with London as in some way synonymous with the ground of her own being. With Richardson, therefore, the terms are more fluid and integrated than Underhill's. But however "profane" Miriam sometimes feels her perception of joy to be, the sense of a spiritual presence within her is as strong for Richardson's character as a paranormal vision was for Underhill's characters, or an Absolute Will was for Sinclair's:

Unqualified and unprepared, utterly undeserving as she felt, she was aware, within the controlled tone of her slight words, of something that moved her, as she listened, to a strange joy. It was within her, but not herself; an unknown vibrating moulding force. (III, 35)

As she searches for a spiritual group with whom she feels in sympathy, it would seem inevitable that Miriam should be drawn to the Quakers, with their emphasis on an inner light. Richardson herself wrote a book on Quaker history, and edited a collection of their founder's sayings (Gleanings from the work of George Fox). In Quakers Past and Present (1914), she writes of the fluctuating experience of an inner presence, which is stronger and steadier for both mystics and artists:

...to most of us, beyond these more or less universal experiences [of transient insight], the times of illumination are intermittent, fluctuating,... The "artist" lives to a greater or less degree in a perpetual state of illumination, in
perpetual communication with his larger self. But he remains within the
universe constructed for him by his senses, whose rhythm he never fully
transcends. (1914: 54)

For the mystic, journeying towards an inner presence is "a setting forth to seek
something already found" (1914: 35), which, when it is achieved, results in an
atmosphere of creativity and recollection. Miriam characterises this as the "Quaker
difference": "A Quaker difference, perceptible in the weightiness of his (Richard
Roscorla's) simple statement and in his present air of waiting" (IV, 441); "the blessed,
peaceful moment of Quakerly deliberation" (IV, 460). The influence of Underhill's
Mysticism in Quakers Past and Present is apparent; Richardson acknowledges the text
in her bibliography. Underhill, in turn, took a particular interest in the Quakers in her
later book on Worship: the Quaker meeting is "a noble experiment in corporate
contemplative prayer" (1946: 309), allowing the experience of an immanent
spirituality within a worshipping community. Although she was not inclined towards
group activity, Richardson was certainly aware of the value of this spiritual
community. To John Cowper Powys she writes: "mystic beauty...is a something found
at its best only in large, crowded, yet harmonious families in a community - life that
had no peer on earth." However, she sees herself as supported and uplifted by such a
spiritual group only to be restored to a stronger intensity of individuality:

Anyone alighting in the centre would surely be wrapped in white flame and
either disappear into "the air" or at least be lifted to maximum intensity of
individual being whatever that may be... rings do their happy work and break,
and life is lived individually... the little moment of individual apprehension is
all we have. (September 1929)

Although Miriam only attends one meeting, she feels a "sense of release and of
home" (IV, 422), and admits that the group practise of silence was very powerful for
her:

being in the silence was being in something alive and positive; at the centre of
existence; being there with others made the sense of it stronger than when it
was experienced alone. (III, 327)

It was the case, however, that Miriam, like Richardson, remained principally an
individual in her meditations. Officially, Richardson was a member of the Church of
England, and, like Underhill, recognised the need for some traditional structure in religion. But she was also too uncomfortable with the gender imbalance implicit in such structure to make it her spiritual home:

Realise the necessity of churches as teaching bodies - comparable to Academies of Arts - but on the whole no more fully representing the religion of their period than do Academies the arts of theirs, and suffering, moreover, the defects of the qualities of being composed of academies of males, (To Eleanor Phillips, 1948)

For Richardson, then, mysticism remained very much a personal matter, and she stood slightly outside her nearest spiritual family just as Dorothy Harrison was reluctant to join the "vortex" of like-minded women in a political context in Sinclair's Tree of Heaven.

Dearer to Richardson than their group structure is the Quaker practice of "centring down", a method which Miriam uses to restore contact with her own "changeless central zone of being" (IV, 299), where mysticism is experienced:

Down and down through a series of circles each wider than the last, each opening with the indrawing of a breath whose outward flow pressed her downwards towards the next, nearer to the living centre. (IV, 498-9)

The similarities to her own private technique are obvious; for it is of vital importance to Miriam that she centres herself within the shifting scene of her thoughts and feelings: in meditation she accesses what sounds very similar to the realm of the mind which James and religious thinkers after him associated with ineffable mystic experience: "the motionless unchanging centre of her consciousness, bowed beneath the weight of incommunicable experience" (IV, 305). But this region is not a marginal, fringe region for Miriam: it is the centre of her self which constitutes the ultimate goal of her pilgrimage.

What of the possibility of creatively expressing a life lived with this zone at its centre? At first, Miriam seems to conclude that the mystical life is as "incommunicable" as did James. She appears prepared to embrace a wordless existence: "Silence is reality. Life ought to be lived on a basis of silence, where truth blossoms. Why isn't such an urgent thing known?" (III, 188). Darkness - not light - should also be sought, Richardson writes to various correspondents: "at night, banish
all thought, take in, rather than give out. Drink in the flood of peace and serenity waiting to be drunk in" (to John Austen, 1945); "eye-closing takes one away from externals, back to one's centre. And that is Wisdom's moment". (to Robert Owen, 1949). However, whatever sense-simplification, the outcome is the same: a sense of presence within the self which Richardson connects with both mysticism and creativity. It takes precedence over external situation: "There's more space within than without" (IV, 168), Miriam affirms. And as Miriam develops, this spiritual presence is increasingly identified as her own self:

Within her was something that stood apart, unpossessed... her spirit was making its own statement, profanely asserting the unattained being that was promising, however, faintly, to be presently the surer for this survival. (IV, 258)

Corresponding to this identification of one's mystical centre as one's self, Richardson's fictional character is similarly far more directly autobiographical than Constance (or other of her characters) was for Underhill, or even Mary Olivier was for Sinclair, though this was nearer. The sense of a spiritual presence has moved towards integration with the self of the character, who has moved closer in identity to the woman writing the fiction. Rather than conjuring an external sense of presence as described by Leuba in the Psychology of Religious Experience, these women writers exploring mysticism have increasingly, though never exclusively, found it within themselves. This creative discovery is often through the experience of loss, as we have seen in Sinclair. Richardson, whose character is not only poor and alone, but independent to a pioneering degree, also makes a startling literary connection with the discovery of her own mystical being.

4

Look after the being and the becoming will look after itself. Look after the becoming and the being will look after itself? Not so certain. Therefore it is certain that becoming depends upon being. (IV, 362)

Miriam chose the path of "being" early in her childhood. Although she does not write of Miriam's early years in Pilgrimage, she does refer to the "dawn" of Miriam's
awareness. A bee hovers near the three-year-old Miriam, precipitating an intense experience of herself placed in context of her surroundings. Trying to remember when the "strange independent joy [Miriam's characteristic emotion] had begun," she recalls toddling in the garden and noticing that "Bees with large bodies were sailing heavily across the path from bed to bed, passing close by her head and making a large humming in the air" (I, 316). The memory resurfaces at moments of intense recollection, such as IV, 177.

Before such a moment, Richardson suggests that identity of self and others were far from clear. For example, in her short story "The Garden", surroundings blur with each other and the very young child observer: "She could see the different smells going up into the sunshine. The sunshine smelt of flowers" (1989: 21). When the child falls, pain is felt as suffusing the gravel as much as her own body.

The "bee moment" was a decisive event for Miriam, and for mysticism in women's writing as a whole. As Radford notes: "the 'bee moment' signals the existence of the subject as a separate being" (1991: 119). Instead of remaining unaware of distinctions between self and surroundings, the bee moment interconnects the sense of self with all other things: the self is not what surrounds it; it is defined by its difference from its surroundings, synaesthesia recedes, but a more profound connection, involving a permanent sense of the personal, emerges. There is an obvious connection here with the thought of Saussure, Richardson's contemporary, whose Cours de linguistique générale was first published in 1916. Indeed, critical theory now acknowledges how, in accordance with Saussure's thought, "in Modernist literature one can observe the shift by which both poetry and the novel become less directly mimetic, less concerned with the representation of recognisable objects and scenes, and more interested in effects of juxtaposition, where relational values - relations between words or among various types of discourse - become the primary constituents of the work of art" (Culler, 1976: 130).

Richardson's depiction of the recognition of Miriam's self not only corresponds to contemporary linguistic discoveries. It also anticipates to some extent the stage of self-identification which Lacan was later to term the mirror-stage: "We have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely the transformation that takes place in the subject
when he assumes an image" (Ecrits, 1987: 2). The difference is that Miriam's image is an internal one: she becomes aware of her own existence, and simultaneously of the mystery of this existence. She comes to a realisation of her own being through connecting with, yet differentiating herself from, all that is around her. The bee in her childhood path initiated the process.

Miriam does not, in fact, look much in the mirror. However she is intensely visually aware, and particularly sensitive to light, as we have seen. But Richardson does describe a vivid incident in Revolving Lights, where Miriam examines, in a moving private moment, the mirror image of her own eyes:

She hunted out her handglass and consulted her unknown eyes....What a number of strange live colours, warmly asserting themselves; independently. But only at close quarters. (III, 337)

Miriam's responses to her own reflection are at once characteristic and original. Abandoning the conventional self-regarding perspective of a woman gazing in the mirror, she focuses on a chromatic multiplicity within her eyes which is only detectable "at close quarters". Miriam's relationship to her "eyes" is profoundly significant for the developments Richardson makes in the fictional exploration of mystical experience. While there is no supernatural extrapolation of the mysticism she finds within her self, Miriam's immanent spirituality is expressed with both visual and linguistic innovation. This also began with the "bee moment."

In her study of Pilgrimage, Radford ignores the symbolic pun of the be(e); however its ludic wordplay complements Richardson's choice of name for her heroine, a name which, corresponding to the multiplicity of colours Miriam finds in her "eyes", itself embodies the opportunity for a resonant pun which Radford does illustrate: Miriam's "myr-iad 'I ams' ":

the subject is presented as multiple, bisexual, contradictory..."I suppose I'm a new woman"(I,436), I'm as much a man as a woman (III, 221), "I'm a Tory-Anarchist"(IV,179); or "It's I who am your husband"(I,456) and "If anything I am my mother's son"(III,220)... "which self?"(IV,318),(1991: 118)

Richardson is consistent in wide use of the "I". If Woolf's The Waves was described by its author as a "mystical eyeless book" Miriam's stance is that of seeing through her own I/ eye, which is rich with multiplicity.
Richardson's explorations of the eye as the primary channel for the "I" of Miriam was not only a literary project. Richardson herself was plagued throughout her life by difficulties with her sight. Richardson, and Miriam, were myopic, the condition aggravated, it is suggested to Miriam, by constant study (too much for a woman?). Richardson invested time and research into caring for her eyes, and often advocated a holistic approach to her correspondents. She is keen to restore a balance between the physical eyes and the self which sees through them:

It is important not to get, so to speak, up into the eyes, but to see through rather than with the eyes. Anyway, creative contemplation is one of the ways of tackling rigidity of the central nervous system. (to John Austen, 1945)

Similarly, the "I" with which Miriam sees is not the egotistical "I", the overuse of which would naturally cause some strain, but the deeper sense of self, able to experience mystical Illumination. Richardson's insistence on the reader "seeing through the eyes" of Miriam illustrates her belief in an egoism which is open and creative, rather than closed and unresponsive. For Miriam, "egoism", i.e., her own being, is her spiritual centre:

The only sureness in things is the action of one's own spirit. Egoism? But egoism carried far enough...Insufficient egoism keeps people plaintive...Egoism must be huge. Free from self. (III, 465)

Miriam's perception of herself as a centre of mysticism - however unselfish her egoism is - is considerably more liberated than the concentration upon loss and mortification to which female mystics of the past were inclined. If she does have a literary or spiritual precedent, it is in the work of Emerson, whose writings Miriam is apt to carry around with her. In her study of the transcendentalist, Anita Kermode explains how Emerson:

recorded the drama of a consciousness striving to realise itself, literally to create itself, out of its own momentary and divided impulses. (1983: 75)

We have seen (in chapter one) how Emerson felt a spiritual presence within himself, through which he was connected to a pre-Jungian collective unconscious, the Oversoul. His ideas are certainly an inspiration to Miriam. However, Miriam also feels a lack in Emerson's thought:
an essential something missing from Emerson’s scheme, whose absence left one alone with serenely burning intellectual luminosities in a universe whose centre was forever invisible and inaccessible. (IV, 420)

For Miriam, the emotional, intellectual and spiritual centre she finds within her self is both more detailed and more personal. Both Richardson and Miriam embark upon a creative project which is simultaneously fictional, autobiographical, and spiritually experimental.

5 What is the role of storytelling in Richardson's narrative? While Hypo Wilson (a character based on H.G. Wells) extols a succinct and catchy narrative style, Richardson, and her fictional alter-ego, Miriam, develop their own method. Although it has been said (Humphrey 1954, Beech 1960) that Miriam remains within the threshold of her own mind, ignorant of and uninterested in exterior events, she (and Richardson) was, with the course of her own life, making social history as Tate explains.

Women like Richardson moved to London to work in badly paid and dull, lower-middle-class jobs. Their reward was a particular kind of freedom - these "New Women" lived in bedsitters and boarding houses and enjoyed a new kind of social freedom. Many wrote novels... Pilgrimage ...stands as an important document of women's history of the modernist period, (Tate, 1989: xii)

The main "problem" of "lack of history" in the text of Pilgrimage is that through the persona of Miriam, Richardson records her own "history" apparently without a novelistic structure (such as that Underhill adhered to) or historical framework (to which Sinclair often referred, e.g., in her novels concerning the War). Yet Richardson is indeed living in historically resonant times. In Pilgrimage, issues such as female suffrage and Fabianism, and new innovations such as the cinema and the bicycle, capture Miriam's interest. But not necessarily more than do aspects of her own daily life. While Miriam makes key discoveries about herself through fresh perception of the everyday world about her (bees in the garden, her own eyes in the mirror), for Richardson, time itself is transcendable by the ordinary stimuli of life:

it [a familiar sound- in this case that of the Sunday milk-cart] sends one further, sends one out beyond phenomena, out and out to the magnetic
meridian... quite certain absence of disturbance from the outside world... so that
time becomes timelessness. (to Cowper Powys, 1945)

Rather than exploring mysticism in conventional narrative, Richardson experiences
and expresses her spirituality by this fresh perspective on the ordinary, and its
connection with herself (what Sinclair described, in her famous article as "just life
going on and on")

This is not entirely unconnected with the women's fiction writing
we have already examined. We have seen that both Underhill and Sinclair are
interested in metaphysical speculations about the world which sometimes verge on
the paranormal (more explicitly in Underhill's fiction than Sinclair's). The most
comparable scene to Richardson's 'transportation' (in the above letter-extract) in
Underhill's fiction is that in The Lost Word, where Paul is transported out of this
world by a Masonic ritual; in Sinclair's writing, similar experiences are primarily
evoked during episodes of pain and loss, such as Sinclair's own tending of the war
wounded in A Journal of Impressions in Belgium, where she reports being transported
to "a clear blank darkness where your will vibrates" (1915: 255). If this tendency to
describe paranormal experience stemming from dramatic liturgy or loss is less
obvious in Richardson's work, her fascination for other ways of perceiving time and
space is similar to theirs, connected, as theirs is, to a mysticism which transcends
dimensions.

For Underhill, an exploration of mysticism included an interest in "the astral
plane", which the occult tradition "regarded as constituting the 'Cosmic Memory,'
where the images of all beings and events are preserved, as they are preserved in the
memory of man" (1993: 155). However, Underhill remains removed from the
phenomena, which she regards as tainted with the inadequate vocabulary of the occult
and abnormal:

the reader who feels his brain to be whirling amidst this medley of solemn
statement and unproven fairy tale must remember that the dogmatic part of the
occult tradition can only represent the attempt of an extended or otherwise
abnormal consciousness to find an explanation of its own experiences (1993:
155)

7 "The Novels of Dorothy Richardson", The Egoist 5 April 1918. Scott 1991:
With Richardson, the distance between her autobiographical commentary and these
tonings of eternity have all but disappeared. Writing to Cowper Powys, Richardson
suggests that she knows from her own experience how time is transcended, rather
than merely nostalgically recalled, through a kind of psychic connection to all that is:

Youthful confusion of brevity with disappearance. For these moments
announce, even as they pass, their immortality. Pass into consciousness, never
into nothingness. (June 28, 1948)

Richardson did not feel comfortable with the literal notion of reincarnation, although
she had connections (in the Cornish Village of Padstow) to spiritualist believers, and
felt that Alan Odle, her husband, was still present for some time after his unexpected
death ("He is alive, and free", she writes in a letter of 1948). However, Richardson
was not primarily concerned with seeing paranormal visions, or colourful dreams. Her
mystic intuitions of unity were more subtle. In a review of Mrs H.A. Forster's Studies
in Dreams, Richardson decries Mrs. Forster's attempts to master the art of lucid
dreaming, suspicious of "permanently conscious thought, toned and strong and
exclusive". Instead, she recalls her own "revelation" which stemmed from deep,
dreamless sleep:

one occasion I awoke undisturbed from the midmost of sleep...busily alive in
the past, and at the same time onlooker at myself living... I had an inquisitorial
view both backwards and ahead. (Adelphi, vol. 2, no. 5, 1924: 424)

Richardson concludes that she had woken up in the centre of a visionary matrix which
was far more profound and inclusive than the most surreal of dreams. This matrix is
woven with "strands" of all time and experience, and she who is startled awake still
retains some of this supernatural centrality of vision:

I cannot escape the idea that I had caught myself...at...a direct consideration of
things as they are, undisturbed by the sense of time and place, and sometimes
of an undisturbed consideration of all that we are. Not a review... but a current
possession, from a single point of consciousness, of our whole experience
intact, and a consequent arrangement of the immediate future. (ibid)

For Richardson then, the concept of the "astral plane" was real and personally
experienced, though it did not provoke episodes of the uncanny or paranormal. While
Underhill depicted one character as literally reincarnated, and another who witnesses,
in a vision, a symbolically ideal cathedral, and Sinclair described telepathy between characters which united them over time and space, Richardson's single fictional character experiences a supernatural unity which bypasses the paranormal, but instead manifests as clarity and certainty within herself, just as Richardson experienced in the conditions related above. More than a Proustian unravelling of memory, Richardson's perception of the transcending of time and space look back to earlier attempts to explore different dimensions, and forward to feminist reconceptions of time and space. This, rather than conventional story-telling, is the basis of her creative project in *Pilgrimage*.

In fact, Miriam's "eye/I" is so sensitive that often a very small amount of information will suffice for a great deal of reflection. Miriam advocates taking life in "homeopathically", absorbing the resonance of minutiae (IV, 238). Similarly, Richardson writes of her memories all "imprinted somewhere, unforgettably," ready to be reawakened by a single (admittedly Proustian) sensation: "I have only to lower my eyelids and there it all is; and to close my outer ears, and there are all the sounds. ...a hint is enough" (to "Tomatino", 1931). Contemplation of small details has its precedent in both mystical and philosophical literature. Julian of Norwich's contemplation of a hazelnut is an outstanding example of the first, although Richardson's exact contemporary, the French Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, became renowned for her yearning for eternity expressed through "littleness"; attention to detail and perception of the spiritual in the mundane. Regarding literary and philosophical precedent, Emerson was again an undoubted influence upon Richardson. In one of his essays, Emerson seizes upon the roses outside his window for an image, a metaphor of original being: "There is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence" (Heath, 1983:76). While we may be reminded of Gertrude Stein's "a rose is a rose is a rose", Richardson's Miriam also perceives in the rose an intimation of eternity, transcending the perfection that even Emerson attributed to them:

> Roses, roses, roses...all the morning there they had stood, making the morning's work happy... They would go on being perfect - to the end of life. (Il,181)
Miriam relishes their joyful presentness, but also sees beyond their temporal existence to their future life in her memory. This "eternal" perception is dependent upon the worth Miriam sees as intrinsic to their "being" in the first place; again, this informs Richardson's fictional project. As Kaplan writes, "It is her special sense of wonder at the presentness[being] of everything which diffuses all objects with importance" (1986: 43). This perennial attitude of Richardson's ("the astonishingness of there being anything anywhere", IV, 333) is a further development of that integration which Underhill and Sinclair saw as the "new" aspect of the mysticism inspiring their writing.

6 Miriam's consciousness of her gender plays a large part in her experience of mystical Illumination. But Richardson is no more an ardent political feminist than were Underhill or Sinclair. She entertains the notion of a fundamental bisexuality within the self, highlighted, rather than diminished, by artistic expression: "The whole question, as between men and women, is complex to the limit of the term...not only artists, but many others in the multitude are bi-sexual" (to Robert Owen, November, 1949). In her manuscript article "Nicolas Berdyaev in dilemma" 8, Richardson quotes Berdyaev's own proposal that "Each individual man or woman is in different degrees bisexual and it is just this fact which makes the whole of life so complex". In her art and in life she is drawn to spiritual and artistic personalities who contain elements of masculine and feminine. Miriam feels an affinity for Quaker men because of the femininity in their emotional and spiritual make up, and Richardson deprecates an ignorant segregation of the sexes:

most Englishmen dislike women. Know nothing about them, or, at any rate, less than any other males in the world...Vast numbers of our Englishmen are, so to say, spiritually homosexual. (to Robert Owen, November 1949)

Richardson's ideal, expressed in Miriam's words, is for a balancing of the two genders. In Deadlock, Miriam declares her own bisexuality: "I'm as much a man as a woman. That's why I can't help seeing things" (III, 221). But in the same passage, she also suggests that she has a spiritual precedent for emphasising her femininity: "Christ was the first man to see women as individuals" (III, 221). As Pilgrimage progresses, it

8 Beinecke collection, no date
becomes obvious that Richardson's concerns are inextricably connected with the feminine perception of being, which extends the concerns of mysticism and gender discussed in the previous chapters.

As we have seen, Underhill's central characters are male in two out of her three novels. With Sinclair, there is a distinct though not exclusive emphasis upon the female experience of mysticism. In Pilgrimage, the woman's perspective is exclusive, in the person of Miriam, whose creator, though still unwilling to support political feminism, does declare women's superiority in the realm of spiritual perception and creativity, particularly regarding the "matrix" of eternity which is intrinsic to her mystical self.

In "Women and the Future", Richardson describes how the Mona Lisa illustrates woman's profound knowledge of existence:

the deepest layer of her being, her woman's enchanted domestication within the sheer marvel of existing, came forth and shone through the mobile mask of her face...on a gleeful cosmic holiday. (Vanity Fair, Vol 22, no. 2, April 1924) Richardson explains how the "womanly woman" is able to see all the more by her naturally eirenic, though still self-centred, perspective.

the womanly woman lives, all her life, in the deep current of eternity, an individual, self-centred. Because she is one with life, past, present and future are together in her, unbroken...Only completely self-centred consciousness can attain to unselfishness- the celebrated unselfishness of the womanly woman. (ibid)

Miriam's musing on the necessity for a "huge" egoism, "free from self" is echoed here. Richardson, however, makes the masculine deficiency more explicit in her article: "It is man's incomplete individuality that leaves him at the memory of that subtle form of despair which is called ambition, and accounts for his apparent selfishness"(ibid). Even Nietzsche, Richardson notes, was "constrained to place [woman] ahead of man," who is lost in a desert of agnosticism. Woman will agree with, or imitate, man's speculations, in order to encourage him along the path of spiritual perception, on which she is far ahead. The "intelligent woman" is, in other words, the woman who condescends to be "intelligible to men" (ibid).
Richardson is quite certain that women are above the dogmatic and linguistic qualifications employed by men. She is suspicious of those who would see women "driven out among the practical affairs of our world," seeing women as natural political pacifists, unintended for divisive opinionating:

her gift of imaginative sympathy, her capacity of vicarious living, for being simultaneously in all the warring camps, should tend to make her within the council of nations what the Quaker is within the council of religions. (ibid)

In Pilgrimage Miriam comments to Hypo during one of their arguments that she would like to have the vote and not use it - to be a "Tory-Anarchist". She envisages being an individual who accepts all politics, favouring none. In her knowledge of underlying unity, the womanly woman finds herself at the centre of a universe in which (masculine) prisoners of argumentative thought are trapped:

Views and opinions are masculine things. Women are indifferent to them...they see the relations of things which don't change, more than things which are always changing...But behind it all their own lives are untouched. (III, 259)

Miriam expresses a totally inclusive vision; an ability to see all sides of - and usually beyond - an argument, just as Richardson, after her deep sleep, felt connected to all that is. Of course this quality is not supernatural, though it may seem somewhat superhuman. And Miriam knows that her ideal of womanly equilibrium can be disturbed by social interaction:

Momentary experiments had proved that the things that were about her in solitude could be there all the time. But ... most people brought their worlds with them, their opinions, and the set of things they believed in...(III, 241)

Richardson was aware of the Jungian implications of her sense of being. In a 1929 article on Jung, Richardson links her own ideas with the Jungian "persona" and "anima", maintaining that the feminine psyche possesses a "shapeless shapeliness," meaning "its power to do what the shapely mentalities of men appear incapable of doing for themselves, to act as a focus for divergent points of view" (Kaplan 1975: 15). Kaplan points out that her psychological, as well as her spiritual project, was one of women possessing a quality of perception which was inclusive to a far wider degree than conventional masculine consciousness:
It is this capacity for "being all over the place and in all camps at once" which allows women to be able to live completely in the present. In this way Dorothy Richardson was able to make the major distinguishing feature of the feminine consciousness explicit: the ability to perceive both the diversity of experience and its immediacy. (1975: 16)

Although generally eager to absorb all that contemporary life afforded her, Miriam does sometimes place her inner light in opposition to intellectual scenarios: "The surrounding golden glow through which she could always escape into the recovery of certainty, warned her not to return to the lecture" (III, 236). While Richardson concentrates considerably upon women's experience of mysticism, and emphasises the need for a feminine sense of self, she does not explicitly develop the idea of female mysticism into a political or social project, despite Miriam's life of pioneering independence. In fact, Miriam's vision of women's mysticism sometimes seems to be one of increasing social withdrawal:

the women moving, more and more heavily veiled and burdened, towards the heart of life and the men getting further and further away from the living centre. (III, 271)

However, Richardson's belief that women reside at the centre of life suggests that they will have the greater access to an eternal present. During a stay at Padstow, she writes of a local girl who displays strong mediumistic talents. Richardson suggests that:

she is an exceptionally delicately balanced "vehicle". And if one assumes, as all genuine and disinterested investigation combine now to suggest, that everything thought and felt and experienced since the beginning is somehow availably recorded, then, by a sufficiently well "tuned" medium, anything and everything can be registered and reproduced? (to Cowper Powys, August 1944)

Connected with her experience of the "eternal present", Richardson was interested in the gift of prophecy (such as the local girl discussed above possessed), which she also saw as a mystical attribute: "On the whole my feeling is stronger for the prophetic rather than the priestly category: in a word, for the mystics" (to Eleanor Phillips, September 1948). Richardson herself prophesied that a return to the centre would
rectify what she sees as generations of spirituality imbalanced by the masculine overemphasis on dogma and power:

[the masculine influence] has held the Western world back for centuries. Its operation in "religion" has been and still to a large extent is being horribly destructive...From the Jews onwards, the "First Cause" has been measured solely by the masculine yard-stick. Hence "his" (!) appetite for incense, all powerfulness, glory, honour, and all the rest of it. Hence the churches' demand for obedient, unquestioning abject automata. Poor First Cause! (to Cowper Powys, 1944)

Contrasting with this masculine misconception, Richardson has a vision of how a more centred spirituality could be constructed. She points out that religious history had not always been so imbalanced:

Among the first Christians, women preached and propheced. There is, moreover, in the history of the early centuries sound evidence of an ordained and invested female clergy. Taking that history as a whole however, women have been and are still excluded from the councils of the churches. (1914: 71)

She does not advocate that women take on the role of male clerics, however, although she sees an element of feminine insight in them, as in the artist⁹:

Women like ritual and things and they like parsons, some parsons, because they are like women, penetrable to light...and understand women better than most men do. (II, 94)

Instead of suggesting that women become more like parsons, Richardson explains how a Quaker background allows a woman to develop "her natural sense of direct relationship to life" (1914: 78). If Richardson does have a social project, it is along the lines of establishing a spiritual rather than a political community. In *Quakers Past and Present* she declares her longing to see:

an order of lay mystics, held together externally to the same and simple discipline laid down by Fox, and guarded thus from the dangers to which mysticism is perennially open, an order of men and women willing corporally to fulfil, while living in the daily life of the world, the conditions of revelation...a free group of mystics ready to pay the price, ready to travel along artists "who, like parsons are three parts woman" (to Cowper Powys. February 1937)
the way trodden by all their predecessors, by all who have truly yearned for
the unveiled light. (1914: 93)

If Miriam explores any ideal, it is surely this one of being the contemplative in the
world, who, though not political, learns a way to mingle the attachments of
relationship with the creative detachment of a higher calling. We must now examine
how she approaches this project.

7

There is no truth but mine to make me free,
and free I am, since my truth shows me bound.
Being is freedom, moving step by step
To sudden flight and falling,
Falling and flight again. Whatever moves
Is free, and all things move, led by their mystery. (to Robert Owen, 1945)

Like Underhill and Sinclair, Richardson occasionally wrote verse, penning the above
unpublished poem in 1925. However, the concept of freedom followed on from
Richardson's thought on the feminine characteristic of transcending argument, and
informs Miriam's spiritual development in Pilgrimage. This is not to suggest that
Richardson does not sometimes depict Miriam feeling considerable, even irrational
anger, particularly at the men whom she believes she exceeds in her capacity for
tranquility: in an early passage of Pilgrimage, Miriam rails self-righteously against the
"hard angry bones" (1, 438) of men. However, she gradually learns not to harbour
grievances. She relates to many and varied characters during Pilgrimage, both male
and female, but only in her friendship with Jean, towards the end of the text, does she
discover the element of creative detachment which she needs. By depicting Jean as
the maturing Miriam's role model, Richardson juxtaposes the themes of friendship
and detachment within the context of spirituality.

Jean is not the first female friend with whom Miriam has an intense
relationship: there was, particularly, Amabel, who enabled Miriam to see herself and
her relationships in new and affirmative terms. Looking at Miriam's explorations and
discoveries in the area of her female friendships is more fruitful than discussing her
emotional and spiritual development with reference only to her relationships with
men who are potential (marriage) partners only. The language Miriam uses to respond emotionally to her close female companions is verging on the romantic sometimes, but by the time she has met and learnt new dimensions of friendship and spirituality from Jean, her reflection is explicitly more detached, and has recourse to the tenets of religious friendships - friendships within religious orders in fact. Miriam realises the importance of the greater purpose behind the human affinity:

Good that she is gone. Then how right are the Catholics in separating within their orders those who grow too happy in each other. To give oneself, fully, to God-in-Others, one must belong to no-one. (IV, 612)

This final lesson which Miriam learns from Jean echoes the general dynamic of their friendship. Being together, the two women develop an atmosphere of peace and understanding that is incommunicable in words, or at least in spoken language. Miriam finds that Jean is later able to write to her of the essence of her method of "being", of that spiritual forgiveness and detachment about which it would be much more difficult to hold a conversation while physically present: Jean's writing is able to express a level of spirituality or mysticism to which speech cannot attain:

'To love everyone about me.' Jean could not speak these, her inmost secrets. If we were to meet again. They can only be written. Or lived. That's why there must be churches, and dogmas, to formulate and cherish and pass round the things that cannot be mentioned. Jean lives them, gaily. Lives in a world she sees transfigurable. Already, for her, transfigured...Somehow she has mastered the art of incessant prayer? Incessant orientation of her spiritual compass toward the love that is the centre and gaiety of the universe, and the secret, too, of her deep enjoyment of any and every moment. (IV, 575, 579)

The peace and detachment which Miriam gains from Jean is explicitly contrasted with her earlier romantic female friendship with Amabel, for:

To return to Jean is to find oneself at an unchanging centre. Even when, during some of our silences, we reached, travelling independently, different destinations, and returned then to consultations that left for one or other of us a point of view forever modified, the ensuing sense of the flowing away of the time at our disposal surprised me by its painlessness. Again and again l
recalled my helpless woe when Amabel first hinted her desire for fresh people,
her need to pass on, opening a gulf across which I still look back. (IV, 566)

Jean and Miriam's friendship is also pragmatic: "We contemplated whatever had
been summoned to stand before us" (IV, 567). Jean is shown having the ability to
welcome, absorb, and subsequently let go of all experience that comes her way, rather
than feverishly clutching at an ever-increasing gamut of experience, as was Amabel's
project: "Jean knows that nothing can be clutched or held" (IV, 575).

Contemplating the implications of freedom and detachment, Miriam comes to
associate Jean with the concept of forgiveness. It would seem that, for Richardson, a
joining of the feminine capacities of relating, and of giving, result directly in this
creative "social detachment": a letting go as regards the "purpose" of a relationship. A
more "purposeful" friendship would demand a greater development and security
within the relationship, as does, for example, Shatov, with his desire for (traditional
Jewish) marriage, or even Hypo, with his ambition for a physical relationship with
Miriam. So with Jean, Miriam is affirming her path of relating in a more detached and
spiritually centred way: able to receive as well as respond (rather than just giving with
no hope of response, which was often the female predicament in Underhill's, and even
Sinclair's fiction), yet retaining a detachment within an ethos of nurturing. Miriam
sees Jean as a "permanent forgiver" (IV, 607).

It is true that Miriam does not find fulfilment in a romantic relationship,
although, Richardson, in later life, does. Interestingly, the independence of character
found in Underhill's Constance, Sinclair's Mary Olivier, and Richardson's Miriam, is a
constant factor in these women's fiction writing. Marriage and family hardly figure
higher for Richardson's Miriam - though she has the choice - than they did for
Underhill's characters. The self and its relationships remain inclusive and
transcendent on a higher level than the ordinary romantic history. The suspicion
remains that: "at marriage, [women] sacramentally renounce individuality" (1914:
71), Richardson warns, in her volume on Quaker spirituality. Her final conclusion,
though, seems to be that relationship is an integral part of spiritual and creative
growth, although women have a stronger potential for intrinsic mystical awareness:

most people, except exceptional people... men alone and women alone rarely
discover this secret [of love], though women are aware of its existence, dimly.
all along the line, by virtue of their relative wholeness. (to Cowper Powys, February 1939)

Accusations that Richardson's creativity was selfish and manipulative in terms of her refusing any personal responsibilities and commitments herself while engineering them for others should be balanced by her non-judgemental, sensitive and perceptive qualities both in writing and friendship. Fruit does come out of this approach, but without the obvious achievements of ownership or engendering, particularly with Miriam's response to Amabel and Michael Shatov's child at the end of Pilgrimage: "the moment of finding the baby Paul lying asleep in his long robe in the sitting room, gathering him up, and being astonished to feel...the complete stilling of every one of my competing urgencies. Freedom." (IV, 658). Ultimately, freedom is the only goal towards which Miriam in any active sense works.

The final flowering of freedom is that of old age: at 65, Richardson wrote the article "Old Age", suggesting that the Illumination following detachment which she explored in Pilgrimage remained true for her, as it did for the fictional character in Vita Sackville-West's All Passion Spent, in later years:

We are learning the artist's detachment ... We hold on nowhere... We are free. We can move everywhere. All our intolerances and exclusions and fixities are gone. In a word, more amazing, more beautiful, than ever were the trailing clouds of glory we dance the lighter footed dance of all. (Undated typescript, Beinecke collection)

Richardson's vision of feminine prophecy grows organically into (re)visionary wisdom.

With her increasing need for contemplation and detachment, is Richardson an advocate of "new mysticism": does Miriam progress along a mystical path such as that delineated by Underhill, and Sinclair? Richardson does not support spiritual passivity for women, despite what may be inferred from the comments discussed above. Writing to Powys, she praises Fox for recognising a spirit of prophecy in women, and criticises Berdyaev for typecasting women as "nothing but the aesthetic soul of the cosmos":

8
He [Berdyaev]...apparently forgets Catherine of Sienna, who not only rescued the Papacy but reinterpreted its doctrines for the Catholic divines of the day who, Pope and all, sat at her feet. (to Cowper Powys, February 1939)

In this letter Richardson seems to be advocating as "new" and active a mysticism, for women as much as men, as that suggested by Underhill at the end of Mysticism, and named as "new mysticism" by Sinclair in her Defence of Idealism. Does Pilgrimage depict a mystical path in accord with the traditional journey marked out by Underhill in 1911?

Previous critics have noticed a possible connection between Underhill's interpretation of the mystical schema and Richardson's literary and life achievement (just as May Sinclair's biographer, Zegger, suggested that Mary Olivier charts a spiritual path which would illustrate Underhill's structure), but differ in how far the pathway as such was adhered to. Rosenberg's analysis examines Miriam's early spiritual struggles (1973: 81-2). Blake proposes that Miriam's spiritual development corresponds closely to Underhill's schema. He traces Miriam's development through the first three volumes of Pilgrimage, to conclude that we must "adjust Underhill's analysis to the simple Quaker belief in affirmation mysticism":

- comprising the idea that "vision" should be the beginning of the mystic's quest, service and action being the values concomitant to achieving an immediate experience of God, which will illuminate the finite self rather than obliterate it.

(1960: 63)

A pattern of illumination stemming from the inner self features strongly in Blake's interpretation:

- vision and reaction as the intuitions of the spiritual consciousness (to some writers, the subconsciousness or subliminal) alternate with the cognitions of the superficial consciousness in the subject's finite life. (1960: 64)

As Blake sees it, it is in Oberland that the transition of "the altered perspective into a larger world of being" is accomplished; the great mountains suggest "a final infinite good that would remain when they were no more seen". Henceforward, Miriam begins to strip herself of worldly position and relationships, the chief of these at the time being that with Hypo, which Blake maintains is an act of Purgation or
detachment. Blake admits his difficulty in tracing the ensuing pattern, but concludes that Miriam's final illumination is with the Quaker community at Dimple Hill:

Their ideal is love, whether in regard to other single individuals or to social method. To Miriam, as she joyously observes them, the Roscorlas succeed in implementing spiritual ideals in conduct and action. (1960: 78)

Blake does not comment on her subsequent departure from the Quakers, concluding only that by this time in volume IV, Miriam:

has achieved illumination, that of the religious mystic, and also that of the mystic-artist who seeks to communicate his vision of the transcendent reality to his fellows. (1960: 80)

In fact, Richardson's vast work is more resistant to any final pattern than Blake would like to admit. However, the shift in Blake's attention towards art - writing - at the end of the extract is important, as this is where the argument over whether Miriam, or indeed Richardson's success must lie.

As we have seen, Underhill believed, in Mysticism, that artists accompany mystics along the initial stage of mysticism, although often no further than a generalised state of illumined inspiration. Richardson voices the same opinion, although her estimation of the artist as mystic is higher:

Being, alone, is fully real, is ageless and immortal, with no division of "past" and present". So the word "future life" becomes meaningless.... All the saints and mystics bring the same message. Only the whole being of man, rather than any one aspect or quality, whether scientific, or artistic or philosophical, is able to investigate the nature of reality. Many modern religious thinkers place the artist next to the mystic as an investigator, because the veil over reality is, for him, almost transparent. (November 1948 to John Austen's family)

However, the opposite conclusion has been reached by feminist critics such as Kaplan who conclude that Richardson's diversion of life into writing has lead to an uncertain sterility:

The femininity [that Miriam achieves] is a femininity of mind, and Miriam does not seem to have it in herself with any great sense of surety. The "feminine consciousness" remains strangely abstract and separated from its

10 Richardson voiced a similar opinion in the passage from Quakers Past and Present examined above.
normal connection with the body - which is the basic source of femininity - and its fullest revelation is to be a state of mystical awareness and communion with God. This is a lonely and asexual achievement of being. (1975: 46)

Not all of this criticism is upheld by Kaplan's contemporaries; Radford, for example, cites plenty of evidence to suggest that Miriam was both aware of and at home in her body. Richardson certainly has an isolationist drive: "In my secret self I should love a prison" (II,336), but this longing for solitude towards the end of Pilgrimage is to enable her to write, which links her, through publication, with the outside world again. It also links her, Richardson suggests, with that "eternal present" which she sees as the arena of feminine mysticism. Just as Dorothy Harrison in Sinclair's Tree Of Heaven experiences, while in her prison cell, a vaster revelation than the political cause for which she was imprisoned, Richardson feels that, in retreat, she experiences intuitions of the infinite nature of the human task, which transcends known dimensions. From certain documents we know that she regarded a human life as too inadequate fully to love:

You, I know, are of those for whom the whole world is not large enough to encompass love. Is the whole cosmos large enough? No...no universe in what we call "space" and "time" can contain it. (to "Tommy", November 1948)

Concentrating upon the particular and present enables Miriam to connect with this spiritual vastness in an undivided way. It also released her creativity. Richardson's short piece, Seen from Paradise, describes a writerly solitude in a cottage. The passage conveys the heightened perception gained from a peaceful solitude:

Fresh realisation, from moment to moment, all the time. Everything available, all past experience seen, while I sat writing, for the first time as near, clear, permanent reality. An empty mind as I sat in the evenings by the fireside doing nothing not needing to read or think, just looking and seeing, taking in afresh the marvellousness of there being anything anywhere. (1989: 94)

Moreover, her literary creativity is a primary spiritual duty: Miriam aligns the need to work - in her case, writing - with the religious need to love, or wonder at, all of creation: her only query is whether the concrete act of "making" is as essential as the more feminine creation of atmosphere- to which her writing is more akin:
To make. To love what is made. If making things is humanity's highest spiritual achievement, then women are secondary and the question for the Fathers should have been, not have they souls but have they spirits? But is making, pictures and bridges, and thumbscrews, humanity's highest spiritual achievement? (IV, 464)

Just as Underhill had warned in Mysticism that the definition of "work" must not be confined solely to "the muscular and wage-earning community", for Miriam, the spiritual kind of creativity to which she is drawn may indeed, in masculine eyes, merely present an emptiness- Hypo detects only vacuity in Miriam's responsiveness: "her silence was what he believed all feminine silences to be: a vacuous waiting" (IV, 222).

Miriam reaps fruitfulness from a project of retirement; in her private room she finds the central strength necessary for the rest of her life:

There must always be a clear cold room to return to. There was no other way of keeping the inward peace. Outside one need do nothing but what was expected of one, asking nothing for oneself but freedom to return, to the centre. (II, 321)

She regards this "cell" as the strength from which her other life - and writing- can grow. This is not to say, however, that silence and solitude guarantee a mystical creativity. In a short story, "Haven" (in Journey to Paradise, 1989), Richardson depicts a male writer who retires to just such a haven of supposed peace, only to find that his internal distractions are far harder to deal with than interruptions from his former landlady and visiting friends. Whether this story is also Richardson's comment on a particularly male inability to locate an inner centre of self is left ambivalent.

Is the silence which Miriam craves and which she associates with creativity, spirituality and with profundity of relationship merely an impasse, or the foundation and final resolution of her quest? There will always be dispute as to the exact value of a life which is predominantly reflective. Richardson certainly regarded herself and the creative work she produced as both pioneering and spiritual. More explicitly than with Underhill or Sinclair, the act - both productive and reflective - of writing for Richardson is the transforming channel for her creative mysticism. And it is a creativity which is both individual and original.
Miriam does not take literary devices for granted. She is not long into her tentative writing career when she realises the intrinsic redundancy of words in conveying the creative joy she feels about her own existence: "I went nearly mad with responsibility and the awfulness of discovering the way words express almost nothing at all" (III, 369). Richardson's general mistrust of language is illustrated by her wariness of metaphor: the dominance of this configuration in written language generates a masculine opacity. Women, she suggests, are left outside the "things" by which life is written; only Illumination enables the (mystic) writer to see through this opacity. In Richardson's notes for an article entitled "The Rampant Metaphor", she pinpoints the linear "objectivity" which metaphorical thought encourages, and how difficult it is to escape from this pattern:

Ministry of metaphors...the strangeness of their freedom to work their will. The thought-life of man if it is to maintain itself alive must go warily along a thread thrown forward across an abyss of metaphors. That is a metaphor. The man who does his thinking casually...makes his way...amongst a fine confusion of unrecognised or mixed metaphors...certain backward paths were...permanently blocked; women were pushed, as it were, into an oblique relationship to current affairs. (undated manuscript, Beinecke collection)

Richardson notes the difficulty women have in accessing language when it consists of metaphorical configurations, rejecting other linguistic channels for emotions and expressions. Radford mentions the concept of catachresis, which Richardson avoids just as she shies away from direct and constant metaphorical language:

Like Nietzsche, Richardson distrusts the cognitive functions of metaphor, suggesting that it leads thought astray, especially where as in catachresis, the "unknown" is rendered in terms of the "known". Catachresis, defined as the appropriation of an existing word to provide a name for something which does not have a name...is a way of naming the world in terms of what is already known. (1991: 123)

Although Miriam cannot totally avoid the technique (her descriptions of light especially seem a metaphoric description of a spiritual feeling), her realisation that words will not stand up to this symbolising project is similar, rather, to the thought of
"apophatic" theology, which holds that mystical experience cannot be described except by an expression of "negative" knowing.

Miriam's estrangement from language has further, more clearly evident levels. as she is increasingly shown to fight against the inadequacies of words and their power to restrict view and expression by false clarity. She associates this with the male practice of self-concealment behind authoritative statement:

Man's life was bandied to and fro...from word to word. Hemmed in by women, fearing their silence, unable to enter its freedom - being himself made of words - cursing the torrents of careless speech with which its portals were defended. (III, 278)

In contrast, we have seen that it is this freedom which is the hallmark of Miriam's life and mysticism, and of Richardson's narrative techniques: "no one can put me in a false position. There is something that is untouched by position" (II, 209). Miriam suggests that adopting an opinionated perspective directly blocks illumination: "One opinion stated made the light go down" (II, 239). While Underhill had sought new, if ritualistic, linguistic expressions of spiritual experience, Richardson develops not only the "stream of consciousness" but also the potential of words within the stream of her narration to explore what cannot be said by the ordinary course of language.

One such literary alternative is punning; a concept we have already come across in Richardson's work. Her subtle use of synonyms, akin to her resonant use of "light", the "bee" and the "eye", operate at moments of intense emotion for which words in their normal usage are not enough. At the recording of the experience of Miriam's uncomfortable sexual encounter with Hypo Wilson, the description is concentrated upon a window "pane" which echoes the emotional and physical "pain" that Miriam is seeking to transcend:

She was up at the high, glimmering window, saw clearly its painted woodwork and the small blemishes upon the pane against which she was pressed; through which, had it been open, she felt she could have escaped into the light that had called her thither. (IV, 257)

Punning, as well as being a key feature in the Freudian interpretation of dreams, a consequence of Freud's theories of hysterical discourse, is an accessible form of humour for young children, and indeed the only joke quoted in the entirety of Pilgrimage is itself
a well-worn schoolroom pun: "why is Luther like a dyspeptic blackbird? Because the diet of worms did not agree with him" (I, 169). Freud writes, in Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, that double meanings are "the most fertile sources for the techniques of jokes" (1991: 70), pointing out that the purpose of jokes is to "yield a pleasure which might not be otherwise available" (1991: 147). So although Miriam was experiencing no immediately identifiable pleasure in her encounter with Hypo, and is apparently quite neutral in recording the incident, unaccountable pleasure is to be detected in her use of language, or, if not pleasure, a means of escape, survival, and articulation. This is a potentially subversive use of language we shall encounter again. Seeing "double" or "multiple" again splits the insistence on argument or linear progress, as voiced by Hypo (Wells) in Pilgrimage.

Richardson's awareness of the hidden depths of language stemmed from her school days; in "Data for a Spanish Publisher" she writes:

> Even so, there was still the fascination of words, of their sturdy roots, their growth and transformation, and the strange drama of the pouring in from every quarter of the globe of alien words assimilated and modified to the rhythm of our own speech, enriching its poetry and making its spelling and pronunciation the joy of those who love it and the despair of all others.

(1989:139)

This is the almost iconic attitude to certain words which enables Miriam to see love in the forms and shapes of Amabel's own name and handwriting, and dispute in the aesthetic properties of the visual shape of the word "Egypt", but also permits her creator to encode punning clues in her central character's name.

If Pilgrimage is not renowned for its crackling humour, we should nevertheless take note of Miriam's own instructions:

> Clear demonstration is at once fooled. All men in explanatory speech about life, have at once either in the face, or in the unconscious rest of them, a look of shame. Because they are not living, but calculating. Women who are not living ought to spend all their time cracking jokes. In a rotten society women grow witty; making a heaven while they wait.(III, 307)

Miriam's happiness is certainly on the verge of the inexplicable. It seems to thrive on nothing: "I shall go on getting happier and happier. Because it takes almost nothing to
make me as happy as I can bear" (III, 470). Whether her attempts to find a means of linguistic expression outside the "clear demonstration" of "explanatory speech" are connected to this happiness of Miriam's is not made explicit, but it certainly seems as if what she contemplates offers her a vision which she has sought to express in alternative creative ways.

Miriam is sensitive to the power of translation, as it seems to bring the mysterious process of verbalisation closer to the surface, and make the metaphorical linguistic statement less total, less monumental: this highlights for Miriam "the wonder of the journey from speech to speech" (II, 344). When something is satisfactorily translated, the joy is great. Miriam (as did Richardson, sensitively translating de Traz's *Silent Hours* about life in a Swiss tuberculose sanatorium) tries her hand at translation before she writes her own pieces:

It was such a glad adventure... to contemplate, plunging thus roughshod from language to language, the strange lights shed in turn upon each, the revelation of mutually enclosed unexpandable meanings, insoluble antagonisms of thought and experience, flowing upon the surface of a stream where both were one; to see, through the shapeless mass the approaching miracle of shape and meaning. (III, 142)

It is this acceptance that language will always be inadequate, yet still malleable for the purposes of expressing (incompletely) an important concept or scene, which gives Miriam the freedom to begin her own writing. Richardson's feeling for words and sentences (Woolf, in her 1923 review of *Revolving Lights*, "Romance and the Heart") credits her with the new creation of "the psychological sentence of the feminine gender") includes an appreciation for the solidity of a phrase. There are moments when words can convey densely lyrical, poetic feeling, as when Miriam has conversation with Miss Prout, "each phrase pearly, catching the light, expanding; expressing a secret joy" (III, 346). And there is always awareness, too, of the multiple meanings of a phrase, inhabiting the penumbra of an apparently straightforward linear meaning. This is, it is implied, more applicable to the presentation of writing rather than oratorical (and again masculine) speech-giving:

11 see Scott, 1990: 396
In speech the straight and narrow way is always either a lie or an exhibition. That is the curse of speech: its inability to express several things simultaneously. All the unexpressed things come round and grin at everything that is said. (IV, 164)

Miriam's response to this ever present threat of the linear "curse of speech" is, in part, similar to her attitude towards relationships and personal space: she expresses an impetus towards withdrawal, which somehow brings her close to the inclusive unity of mystical experience. Miriam concluded the meditation directly above by declaring that "One day I shall become a trappist" (IV, 164).

Once again her reaction is apparently one of withdrawal, yet it again includes a religious resonance which suggests that there is a higher purpose behind her apparent departure from the site of metaphorical dialogue. For like the religious figure she refers to, she wishes instead to ponder the words she comes across in great depth, linking them to a mystical unity she experiences within silence. Insofar as a spiritually-oriented silence creates a greater sensitivity to divine and human relationships, Richardson, through Miriam, is quite explicit that such silence is an actively attentive state, a more complete (and, she suggests, more feminine) language than language itself, which, like the basic function of metaphor, serves to enforce the forging of parallels, and the taking of sides. Miriam declares that "Taking sides simply annihilates me" (III, 394), while silence, when mutual, supplies profundity rather than annihilation:

A man must never be silent with a woman unless he wishes for the quiet development of a relationship from which there is no withdrawing... if ordinary social intercourse cannot be kept up he must fly... in silence a man is an open book and unarmed. In speech with a man a woman is at a disadvantage because they speak with different languages. She may understand his. Hers he will never speak or understand... he has not touched even the fringe of her consciousness. (II, 211)

Silence for Miriam is far more profound, immediately involving the commitment at the heart of human discourse. What may be to man (and to William James) the "fringe of consciousness" from which come mysterious spiritual intimations, is to the women Richardson writes about the basic ground of consciousness. And out of this
quasi-religious silence returns the use of (written) words again, at once translucent and dense with the jouissance of the metaphorically inexpressible. For Miriam, writing and reading grow from her experience of silence and withdrawal to this spiritual consciousness at the centre of her being.

10 As we might expect, Richardson's is not a straightforward approach to reading a text. In a review (Life and Letters, 1939) of the newly published Finnegans Wake, she admits her own preferred reading techniques and likens the texture of Joyce's new work to that of poetry, commenting upon the aleatoric accessibility of each line, without the necessity for prior information, although knowledge of the whole still comprises an effective textual "tapestry":

Opening, just anywhere, its pages, the reader is immediately engrossed. ... the reader does not find himself, as inevitably he would in plunging thus carelessly into the midst of the dramatic novel complete with plot, set scenes, beginning, middle, climax, and curtains completely at sea. He finds himself within a medium whose close texture, like that of poetry, is everywhere significant and although, when the tapestry hangs complete before his eyes, each portion is seen to enhance the rest and the shape and the intention of the whole grows clear, any single strip may be divorced from its fellows without losing everything of its power and of its meaning. (Life and Letters Today, July 1939)

Richardson reflects and enlarges her own tendency to read with immediate concentration on the formulation of words and phrase directly in front of her, by demonstrating a similar preference in Miriam, who, rather like Woolf's Mrs Ramsay in To The Lighthouse:

sat with a book open upon her knee, asking only to be left in communion with a style... She was surprised to find, coming back after the interval of disturbed days, how little she had read. Just the opening pages, again and again, not wanting to go forward... And presently fearing to read further, lest the perfection of satisfaction should cease. (III, 408)

For Miriam, reading in this manner is a gateway to contemplation. While Underhill depicts Constance reading an evocative yet "incomprehensible" passage from an old
magic book, and Sinclair shows her fictional characters who read and write literature attaining a spiritual perspective barred to those who do not exercise a creative gift. Miriam practises a method of reading which is both creative and spiritual, and indicates a feminine alternative to a single masculine drive of meaning in a text.

As well as this distinctly modern attitude to the words and sentences of the texts she contemplates, Miriam sees no real distinction between the established genres of, say, fiction and biography:

It was not only that it was her own perhaps altogether ignorant and lazy and selfish way of reading everything so that she grasped only the sound and the character of the words and the arrangement of the sentences, and only sometimes a long time afterwards, and with once-read books never, anything, except in books on philosophy, of the author's meaning. (Ill, 131)

Unsurprisingly, Miriam's (Richardson's) writing technique takes the same "shapeless shapeliness", and reinforces the different way of accessing both the pleasure and the time that literature affords. She is, however, a pioneer in attempting to translate her consciousness of the necessity for a "close texture...everywhere significant", as Blake pointed out:

Miriam's frequent concern in Pilgrimage over "something" amiss in the novel form is defined to her when she herself attempts to write one and finds no adequate convention for her newly certain vision. (1960: 80)

As if anticipating the alternative time schemes adopted by feminist critics (particularly Kristeva) to come, Richardson's approach to literature resembles her experience of the dreamless profundity of a sleep which plunges her into eternity, as we have seen above. When Miriam writes, she accesses this same matrix of eternity:

Everything vanishes but what I contemplate. The whole of what is called "the past" is with me seen anew, vividly. No, Schiller, the past does not stand "being still". It moves, growing with one's growth. Contemplation is adventure into discovery; reality. (IV,657)

We return to the idea that Richardson's technique is an "alchemical" transformative power, affecting both the past and the present. This technique does have some precedent (particularly in Proust and Joyce, as Richardson herself acknowledges), and interestingly, Joyce's style is discussed by Jung, and compared with an alchemical
process. In "Ulysses: A monologue", in The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature, Jung confesses that he is initially bewildered, even frustrated and enraged by Joyce's slow, circuitous and all-embracing narrative technique. He compares the novel to a vast grey wasteland:

> It is the boredom of nature, the bleak whistling of the wind over the crags of the Hebrides, sunrise and sunset over the wastes of Sahara, the roar of the seaweal Wagnerian "programme music"...and yet eternal repetition. (1984: 114)

Yet by the end of his discussion, Jung sees the transformed gold of the text, and even concludes with praise of Ulysses, explicitly likening the course of the text to a process of alchemical transformation:

> O Ulysses, you are truly a devotional book...You are a spiritual exercise, an ascetic discipline, an agonising ritual, an arcane procedure, eighteen alchemical alembics piled on top of one another, where amid acids, poisonous fumes, and fire and ice, the homunculus of a new, universal consciousness is distilled! (1984: 131-2)

Of course, Richardson's narrative style is not identical to Joyce's. It is far more personal and less flamboyant. The gothic imagery of Jung's comparison is more suited to the complications of Ulysses than the autobiographical material of Pilgrimage. But Jung's comments here do have distinct relevance for Richardson's work, in particular her capacity to transform the mundane and repetitious elements of life into a creative expression of her consciousness which is centred in mysticism.

The fiction which Richardson produces in Pilgrimage is, unsurprisingly, unconcerned with a conventional plot. It is not only regarding conversation that Miriam declares to Hypo: "Argument is no good to anybody, world without end, amen" (III, 253). As with her relationships, her spirituality, and the more practical conditions of her life, Miriam produces her creativity from the centre of her own sense of being; an observer in the midst of events, she is also detached from the arguments and attachments which afflict those around her. Sometimes the feeling of a watcher residing in Miriam's mind, just as it did in Underhill's Constance, comes to the fore:

> Whatever it was that had brought that adventuring forth...seemed at once the inmost essence of her being, and yet was not herself, but something that
through her, and in unaccustomed words, was addressing the self she knew, making her both speaker and listener. (IV, 281)

But, far more than did Underhill, this unknown essence is the feminine self which, having experienced the Illumination of mysticism, seeks (and has sought since James described the "subliminal realm", that haunted "region of the mind") a means to convey her knowledge:

There was a woman, not this thinking self who talked with men in their own language, but one whose words could be spoken only from their heart's knowledge, waiting to be born in her. (IV, 230)

Although there is no overt supernatural happening in Pilgrimage, as there had been in Underhill's and some of Sinclair's fiction, Miriam does receive a psychic prompt from a palm-reader that her vocation lies in writing:

a palmist in a little dark room sitting near a lamp; she looked at nothing but your hands; she kept saying "Whatever you do, write. If you haven't written yet, write, if you don't succeed go on writing." (II, 129)

Miriam is therefore "entrusted" with the task of writing in a similar way that Constance in The Column of Dust was charged, by its mysterious keeper, to accept and guard the Holy Grail.

Although Miriam is right in many ways to proclaim that, for her, "The indirect method's the method," (III, 353), in another way she has identified and creatively expressed the spiritual sensibility Underhill illustrated by laboured metaphysical plots, and achieved the artistic and autobiographical "Unity" that May Sinclair saw as the future of the novel ("The Future of the Novel", 1921, in Scott, 1991: 477).

Abandoning what Sinclair's character Christopher Vivart described as the "position of God Almighty", Richardson writes from the "living stream of consciousness" which Vivart and Sinclair herself spoke about. Sinclair, as we have seen, applied the term to Richardson's early volumes of Pilgrimage, before Mary Olivier, Sinclair's first and largest work experimenting with this style, was published in 1919. Richardson herself, however, was not particularly happy with the label.

Even though she disliked the term, Richardson has not been given the literary recognition she might have deserved as pioneer of this literary style. In 1954, Robert
Humphry refers to Dorothy Richardson in his *Stream of Consciousness In The Modern British Novel* in a few derogatory paragraphs:

it is almost impossible for a reader to be empathetic toward it or to understand the importance of its implications...there is a certain amount of universal interest possible in looking in on how a fairly sensitive but greatly limited mind functions and in discovering how it classifies and rejects... but such an interest is not likely to last throughout 12 volumes. (1954: 111)

However, Richardson's work has gained considerably more interest in recent years, due to certain qualities that many feminist critics, such as Jean Radford, see anticipating women's writing to come:

The same points, the same images occur within the same deliberate conflation of the lyrical with the philosophical. *Pilgrimage* seems like a perfect example of the practice of writing, which Cixous calls *écriture feminine* or which Luce Irigaray calls *le parler femme*: its unboundedness, fluidity, refusal of closure; its pleonastic, metonymic qualities; its orientation towards the concrete, the object, the quotidian; its use of ellipsis, syntactical inversion and its displacement of the sexual from the narrative to the textual level. All these are qualities claimed as characteristic of the writing described, and enacted, in the "Laugh of the Medusa". (1991: 114)

All these qualities we have found to be true of *Pilgrimage*. They were also of interest to Underhill and Sinclair. As Underhill has described the unconscious drives and rhythms of the mystic and automatic writer, and Sinclair had shown Mary Olivier peculiarly sensitive to the rhythms and poetic intensity of poetry and verse drama, Richardson is intensely aware of the mystery of the creative impulse making itself felt as an illumination beyond conventional semantics:

The ripe afternoon light...even outside a hospital...the strange indistinguishable friend, mighty welcome, unutterable happiness. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The light has no end. I know it and it knows me, no misunderstanding, no barrier. I love you- people say things. But nothing that anybody says has any meaning. There is something more than anything that any body says, that comes first, before they speak.(11, 255)
The passage illustrates Miriam's characteristic vision. Discounting linguistic meaning, she anticipates something "more" than can be expressed by spoken language, and resorts to Biblical quotations to express her intuition. Her concept of an unconscious awareness of this illuminative perspective is not the unconscious as it came to be defined by Freud, but it is something which exists in everyone and makes itself known through the rhythms and insights which exist outside a linear linguistic purpose. It is Miriam's pilgrimage to make her consciousness at home in what is generally only an unconscious experience. Like Underhill and Sinclair, Richardson suggests that this illuminative state is not recognised until one has encountered loss - or rather detachment - which Miriam describes here as "remorse":

> It is in everybody, but they won't stop. Maddening. But they know. When people die, they must stop. Then they remember. Remorse must be complete; until it is complete you cannot live...Then the light is there, nothing but the light, and new memory, sweet and bright. (II,255)

Her only concern is that the argumentative imbalance of men may preclude them from attaining this fresh perspective easily: "males, more specialised, less balanced (this is a physiological fact), less integrated than women, less capable, both of suffering and of vicarious living (via the sympathetic imagination) than are women" (to Powys, 1945). In contrast, some of Richardson's many descriptive details echo the spiralling of her own meditations: "the copper candlestick, twisting beautifully up from its stout stem. What made it different from ordinary candlesticks? What? It was like a ...gesture" (II, 112).

Recent interpretations of Richardson's work also spiral around the text of Pilgrimage. Critics have seen in the apparent shapeless shapeliness of Pilgrimage the clever structure of a modern Pilgrim's Progress (Radford), or of a carefully presented female Bildungsroman (Kleinbord Labovitz). However, just as she was not an active participant in the female suffrage movement, nor in any particular religious denomination, Richardson's writing is not ultimately classifiable except perhaps in terms of its holistic or inclusive drives. She herself associates this holism with a monastic setting, describing in a letter the life of a monk who, in the course of producing a text, had a say in all aspects of its production, interweaving the work of
its writing and binding into his life in a way that no writer can do in current society and economics:

For while these old monks could and did spend their lives pacing peacefully from leisurely gilded initial to prayers and from prayer to bed, and the prospect of more leisurely gilding, we their followers must live in the belated last drawing of our forthcoming book over our breakfast. . .[but]... No longer fully sovereign in our craft we must reckon with the dictates of this and that power; we may not weave our letters and our drawings and our bindings into one masterly whole. (to John Austen, March 30, 1939)

Although Richardson's style has developed considerably from that employed by Underhill, many points of comparison remain in their fictional projects, not least of which an abiding perception of writing as a holistic craft, rather than an intellectual activity carried out in sterile isolation from the rest of life. This is a further aspect of the ambition for "Unity" which Sinclair recognised as the hallmark of Richardson's novelistic technique.

The strong simultaneous sense of detachment and personal involvement in her writing brings us back to that peculiarly feminine talent, as pinpointed by Richardson, of being in all camps at once and receptive to all. Even her choice of "pilgrimage" as spiritual discovery shows an ability to inherit this traditionally masculine form of religious allegory as well as realising the feminine ability to mix symbols and genres. Ursula King, in Women and Religion, notes that traditional tropes in mystical texts varied between the two genders of male and female:

male mystics often describe the stages of the mystical path as the ascent of a mountain, as a path towards a summit or goal, whilst female mystics make more use of images of inwardness such as the cave or the rooms or the mansion or a castle (as in Teresa of Avila's The Interior Castle). (1989: 105)

Richardson includes the idea of enclosure - Miriam writes of all travel being a voyage autour de ma chambre - with the more linear suggestions of the traditional pilgrimage. The text suggests that pilgrimages are to be, or can be, seen on the transcendent level as a spiritual discovery and falling into place rather than just travelling in a straight line to get somewhere.

the fifteenth-century Margery Kempe being a notable exception
The sense of achieving a clarification of her vocation (as a writer) assures Miriam she is following the inner illumination she has received. And as she settles into an inner space to write, the quiet but essential light of the lamp focuses her thoughts as they include all that she has experienced in the chromatic capacity of being an individual "eye".

The years that had passed were a single short interval leading to the restoration of that first moment. Everything they contained centred there; her passage through them, the desperate graspings and droppings, had been a coming back. Nothing would matter now that the paper-scattered lamplit circle was established as the centre of life. Everything would be an everlastingly various coming back. Held up by this secret place, drawing her energy from it, any sort of life would do that left this room and its little table free and untouched. (III, 134)

Miriam, reshaping her own memories in the light of her vocation as a contemplative writer, goes beyond Freud's maxim that the hysterical sufferer main from reminiscences. Richardson certainly uses her own life, in uncompromising and vivid detail, but far from acquiescing in the totality of the vision this offers, hers is a more truly mystical illumination, transforming in generous detail the surrendered ground of "being", the authorial "I", as in alchemical symbolism, and striving towards a new creation, just as Underhill's Mysticism and Sinclair's contemporary definition of "New Mysticism" opens the path for an active expression of mystical experience. Writing, for Miriam, is the ultimate transforming ground of this "alchemical" work.
Although it may not appear to be their primary concern, mysticism features constantly in the work of feminist critics, particularly those who explore women's creativity through the approaches of literary criticism and psychoanalysis. But, at first glance, mysticism once more seems condemned to being an unspeakable experience for those in mental, if not physical, anguish. For example, Kristeva writes of the mystic disposition of the depressive in her 1987 work on depression and melancholia, *Black Sun*:

I have assumed depressed persons to be atheistic-deprived of meaning, ...Nevertheless...those in despair are mystics-adhering to the preobject, not believing in Thou, but mute and steadfast devotees of their own inexplicable container. It is to this fringe of strangeness that they devote their tears and jouissance. In the tension of their affects, muscles, mucous membranes, and skin, they experience both their belonging to and distance from an archaic other that still eludes representation and naming, but of whose corporeal emissions, along with their automatism, they still bear the imprint. (1987: 14)

Kristeva stresses the loss which the depressive, the potential mystic, undergoes. The deprivation is so severe that one's sense of identity is shaken- "not believing in Thou"- although evidence of the (distressed) body is still very strong. The "fringe" position which the depressive occupies allows her/him to transgress or see through boundaries, both spiritual and corporal, in order to access the indefinable "archaic other" which Kristeva implies could signify mystical experience of a divine presence or power. Just as in James' writing at the beginning of the century, the concept of mysticism is associated with a transcending of preconceived boundaries and a communication beyond ordinary language. Loss and mystic insight are necessarily interlinked in Kristeva's vision; present, too, is a "fringe of strangeness"- we saw how James suggested a fringe "region of the mind" which was haunted by the mystic communication. However, Kristeva's interest in mysticism, as is that of her contemporary feminist thinkers Cixous and Irigaray, is set not only within a strictly
feminist agenda, but also reflects the developments in women's creative exploration which we have seen take place earlier this century.

Although Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva have individual emphases and experiences of the impact of mysticism on gender and writing, certain common themes appear in their thought. In order to emphasise this commonality of concern and development, I shall examine certain aspects of mysticism which have come to critical prominence in present day feminist thought, just as Underhill, in 1911, compiled a creative exploration of mysticism by illustrating the "mystic path" with reference to the lives of historical mystics¹. The questions which arise are: how far has the creative exploration of mysticism earlier in this century anticipated present day feminist writing practice, and did this developing mysticism, in fact, provide an aetiology of feminist theory and writing practise?

2 A sense of vocation remains evident in the woman writer who attempts to express her inner desires and experiences. We have seen how Underhill felt her writing was tinged with a missionary hue, and how she depicted her fictional characters summoned to mysticism by various supernatural promptings. Sinclair was also interested in both paranormal and psychological aspects of the psyche, and described the calling to write as demanding sacrifice and integrity: "it rewarded supremely the supreme surrender" (The Creators). Even Richardson's Miriam Henderson was also summoned to writing by a specific psychic call: a palm reader declares: "whatever you do, write...if you don't succeed, go on writing". This vocational aspect of the woman writer is echoed in French feminist philosophy and literary criticism. Cixous expresses her call with lyrical urgency:

"Write!" Even though I was only a meagre anonymous mouse, I knew vividly the awful jolt that galvanises the prophet, wakened in mid-life by an order from above. It's a force to make you cross oceans. (1991: 9)

Cixous, whose background is Jewish, alludes to the call of the Old Testament prophet. But in "Coming to Writing", she also describes her call as coming from within herself. Like Underhill's character Constance, a watching spirit breaks in upon the consciousness; the moral imperative (Leuba's phrase) has an inarguable authority.

¹ The major difference is that the feminist critics I discuss here are each other's contemporaries; the charge of wilful ahistoricism should therefore not apply.
But while Underhill depicts her character Constance facing social hostility and ostracism because of her inner spirit, Cixous has shifted the site of adversity to an internalised conflict. Cixous therefore warns that an awakening to the creative drives in a given identity of female passivity are likely to produce self-accusation and confusion:

Who, surprised and horrified by the fantastic tumult of her drives (for she was made to believe that a well-adjusted normal woman has a ... divine composure), hasn't accused herself of being a monster? (Walder 1990: 317)

Cixous describes her own coming across a hysterical text [Freud's Dora] as a compelling initiation into the subject, the passion and intoxication of the writing just as compelling as the book of magic invocations which Constance is entranced by in The Column Of Dust: "I got into the sphere of hysteria because I was drawn...I read that text [Dora] in a sort of dizziness" (Eagleton 1991: 121). For Cixous, the classical text of hysteria is the way into her own creative vocation as a writer. Cixous is more psychoanalytically acute in her description of internal conflicts, yet her method is nonetheless anticipated by Underhill's interest in linguistic and spiritual initiation.

However, Cixous' work often resembles a battle cry of the repressed and exiled rather than a mystic manifesto:

Now women return from afar, from always: from 'without', from the hearth where witches are kept alive; from below, from beyond 'culture'; from their childhood which men have been trying desperately to make them forget, condemning it to 'eternal rest'. (Walder 1990: 318)

"Eternal rest", at least in the sense of an impotent banishment, is far from the immediate goal of Cixous' project. Cixous pictures women as longing to speak out. She approaches her project with energy (rather than passivity, another Jamesian attribute of mysticism), as if embodying within herself the theme of the (mystic or feminist) writer returning from exile. She speaks, obliquely, of finding, as a woman writer, the "Lost Word" which, in 1907, Underhill wrote of in the novel of that name. The "uncanny" call to write is intertwined with the need to return from linguistic exile. Intoxication with a hysterical text- or reading a text hysterically- is indeed a remembrance: Richardson has made her writing one of creative self-reminiscence,
finding in this route the sense of "pilgrimage" home towards her mystical centre which, having gained its freedom, overflows with words.

Cixous' call is far from the domestic quietude of the previous century's "Angel in the House":

what I say has at least two sides and two aims: to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable; to project. (Walder 1990: 316)

Rather than quietism, Cixous here is presenting a messianic mission, eager to change the order of things into a new unknown. Her preference for the prophetic role echoes Richardson's. Cixous' project is also multifaceted, literally "multi-faced", reflecting the mystical "unity in diversity" advocated by Underhill:

I read the face, I saw and contemplated it to the point of losing myself in it.

How many faces to the face? More than one. Three, four, but always the only one, and the only one always more than one. (1991: 2)

Cixous' language is not merely metaphoric; she wishes to stretch it, as in traditional religious language, to the level of the visionary, making its inadequacies for the task of describing her experience obvious, and at the same time trying to give the writing a new life: her senses are inadequate to the task, yet the mystic experience is somatic:

how with my human ears to hear the voice that makes 10,000 voices resound.

I am struck. I am touched. (1991: 44)

No traditional verbal structure can contain or express the desires and experiences of such a writer, who therefore runs the risk of being (seen to be) drawn into the margin of hysteria. But we have seen that certain modernist women writers developed a creative project for representing mysticism in the face of total loss.

3

All those who have felt themselves urged towards the attainment of this transcendental vision, have found that possessions interrupt the view: that claims, desires, attachments become centres of conflicting interest in the mind. (Mysticism, 1993: 210)

Rather than solely advocating empowerment, feminist criticism such as that of Cixous echoes the purgative way of the mystic which Underhill described so vividly in 1911. In Sorties, Cixous considers, as strongly as did Underhill, that a period of
self-stripping is necessary for a deeper knowledge of the self’s spirituality and creativity:

And that is not done without danger, without pain, without loss- of moments of self, of consciousness, of persons one has been, goes beyond, leaves. It doesn’t happen without expense- of sense, time, direction. (Belsey 1989: 106)

In Cixous’ criticism and fiction (such as Angst), rewards are never made explicit. Her drive is neither self-aggrandizing religious, who sees the religious "sacrifice" made in the firm expectation of heavenly reward, nor the "magic" described by Underhill as falling short of mysticism because it is self-seeking. There is a higher spirituality in Cixous’ project:

To be freed from all ties. Isolate yourself in order to accomplish this. Go out at night, barefoot, go down stairs (each step is a wrench- when no-one is on the look out, creep in the dark up to the waste land and fling the past into it, night after night: remains, papers, the contents of your drawers, photos, notebooks, tainted objects) ... The weight of the furniture stopped you breathing. Get rid of it. (Angst, 1985: 169)

The passage is reminiscent of St John of the Cross' poem, "Upon a Lonely Night" in which the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic describes his need to abandon the known.²

Like John of the Cross' poem, Angst ends with a sense of inexplicable triumph, communicable in Cixous' text only through repetition of the word "love". There are no easy romantic connotations in Cixous usage of the term: "how purified, wrung dry". Even religious terminology is abandoned-"God", "faith"- but, as with the Cloud of Unknowing, all intellectual concepts are jettisoned in order to access mystical experience:

I got rid of god. I finally threw up love. Nothing left but the sacred soul. How clean I was, how purified, wrung dry. I had lost sight, body faith; you are saved...There is no-one left ... a twinge of anguish that excites you, that touch of terror that makes the heart start beating again when you have just died. I didn't love any more, I didn't have to love any-body. It was love loving, whom I love. (1985: 219)

² We have seen how Sinclair compared this poem to those of Emily Bronte, whom she deeply admired.
Even the "I" of the narrator is called into question by the end, there is "no-one left", but "love loving", just as Constance in Underhill's novel had an oceanic vision of herself contained within the universe.

Cixous refers to the activity of giving (away) in Sorties, too. She describes fighting for what might be seen as an "abject" position- a powerless and ignorant "state of weakness". The position is beyond sanction ("one has no right to occupy"); the way paradoxically demanding:

Giving isn't sacrificing. The person who transmits has to be able to function on the level of knowledge without knowing...one should be in a state of weakness, as we all are, and that it be evident. That one have the guts to occupy the position one has no right to occupy... I demand that love struggle within the master against the will for power. (Belsey 1991: 114)

Cixous speaks of "rejoicing in the terror", echoing the Nietzschian injunction to "live dangerously". She highlights three symbols of feminine creativity, the trinity of air, ocean, writing: "Take to the air. Take to the open sea. Take to letters". This, if anything, is the way forwards from the law-giving, ego-enslaved Self:

Let yourself go! Let go of everything! Lose everything! Take to the air. Take to the open sea. Take to letters...Give up absolutely everything, do you hear me? All of it! Give up your goods. Done? Don't keep anything; whatever you value, give it up...Search yourself, seek out the shattered, the multiple I, that you will be...shed the old body, shake off the Law. Let it fall with all its weight, and you, take off, don't turn back. (1991: 40)

Cixous' instructions echo the call to apostolic poverty, voiced since the Bible- "get rid of everything, ...give up everything", as well as containing the modern reference to the deconstructed and multiple "I", the "Miriad I ams" we have encountered in Richardson's work, and the "world after world, and mode after mode of perception" Underhill's character Willie Hopkinson envisaged in The Grey World. Writing about her own favourite author, Cixous repeatedly stresses the value of simplicity and even poverty in both writing and subject matter; although not as the characteristics of ignorance:

The imagery which Cixous uses to develop her analyses of the specificity and importance of Lispector's writing stresses themes such as 'simplicity'.
'innocence', and 'poverty'. What is intended here is not, of course, naivety. Innocence is not to be confused with ignorance, nor with moral purity. Instead, it is a sublime state, to be striven for. (Shiach: 1991: 65)

Cixous is not the only critic to use the language of mysticism while describing the process of loss. Irigaray's language also describes the abject position of the female mystic ("La Mystérieuse") who "finds her purity again" only "at the bottom of the pit," in the extremity of loss:

She is pure at last because she has pushed to extremes the repetition of this abjection, this revulsion, this horror to which she has been condemned, to which, mimetically, she had condemned herself...And she has left the others behind...Unable to go and see. (1985: 199)

Two of Irigaray's major themes are mentioned here: mimetic repetition, and the inadequate vision of those who cannot see beyond the normal parameters of the masculine literal or philosophical gaze. Although incomprehensible from this perspective, such self-stripping is connected with Cixous' realm of the "gift"- letting go without knowledge of what one is to receive back:

If there is a 'propriety of woman', it is paradoxically her capacity to depropriate unselfishly, body without end. (Moi 1986: 112)

This is an economy which contrasts that with the abiding "masculine" status quo, the "Proper" which is threatened by the imbalance of power which such giving provokes:

In the Realm of the Proper...the act of giving becomes a subtle means of aggression, of exposing the other to the threat of one's own superiority. The woman, however, gives without a thought of return. (1986: 112).

Giving is a positive word for Purgative mysticism, that stage which, as we have seen, was particularly emphasised for women as one of self-sacrifice and punishment. But Moi notes that Cixous also sounds as essentialist in her conception of the gift as previous writers suggested, however implicitly, a mortificatory stage should be for the woman mystic (such as Menzies, discussed in chapter two). The picture, however positively put, is obviously incomplete without the prospect of femininity embracing a further mystical stage.
4 Underhill's fictional characters are redeemed from their misery by a visionary insight rather than worldly success of any kind, and perhaps in opposition to it. May Sinclair, too, places mystical insight in opposition to worldly success, inexplicable when seen from a worldly viewpoint. Richardson, although she avoids the conventionally dramatic in her fiction, shows Miriam experiencing moments of intense artistic and otherworldly pleasure when she has very little in terms of financial or social goods to call her own, whether she is walking the streets of London alone, or recovering from chronic exhaustion in the Swiss Alps.

When we look at certain feminist critical thinkers, we find the concept of intense or visionary experience is often depicted as a creative revelation experienced from a position from extreme marginalisation. Kristeva connects social marginalism, as well as "despair", with the capacity for jouissance. Lacan, whose outlook for women attempting to find a meaningful place within the masculine-defined Symbolic was bleak, had connected this position of disadvantage with a capacity for indescribable jouissance, or ecstasy. Irigaray, too, suggests that the woman in a position of dereliction has the potential to achieve a unique revelation. An apparently patriarchal Christianity supports her thesis. She sees Christ in his moment of extreme abandonment as the "most feminine of men":

the effort towards male recuperation of mysticism may well backfire: God, even in theology, exceeds all representation; the human incarnation of the son is "the most feminine of all men". (1985: 249).

The medieval mystics were often anchorites or hermits, literally marginalised and confined in a space to the side of the main body of church and people. Now as then, marginalisation has a potential for visionary insight; Kristeva extends the definition of feminine to that of all marginalised or minority groups:

The various forms of marginalism—according to sex, age, religion or ideology—represent in the modern world this refuge for jouissance, a sort of laicised transcendence. (1986: 202)

For critics such as Kristeva, the marginalised in society (and in language) have become even more important than the margin of the mind which James saw as the channel for mystic experience. Women are the obvious example of such a marginalised group. This too is connected to the thought of Lacan. In Sexuality in the
Field of Vision (1986), Jacqueline Rose confirms that, in Lacanian thought, the dis-ease of the feminine position echoes the myth of the virgin, saint, mystic: 

Lacan's writing gives an account of how the status of the phallus in human sexuality enjoins on the woman a definition in which she is simultaneously symptom and myth. (1986: 81)

Is subordination the principal symptom, and mysticism the chief myth? Lacan also points out that woman's derelict situation outside knowledge threatens the conventional concept of knowledge, just as Cixous' concept of the "gift" threatens the "proper" masculine economy:

when Lacan says that women do not know, while at one level he relegates women outside, and against the very mastery of his own statement, he was also recognising the binding, or restricting, of the parameters of knowledge itself...it is from the Other that the phallus seeks authority and is refused. (1986: 74-75)

Cixous agrees with the suggestion. Women are frequently aligned with a standpoint of "no-knowledge" or of a type of knowledge that does not bring mastery with it, but which defines knowledge by its otherness:

I am not saying women are never on the side of knowledge-power. But in the majority of cases in their history, one finds them aligned with no-knowledge or knowledge without power. (Eagleton 1991:116)

This again, if not an essentialist position, is one to which women are disposed. But there are obvious dangers in advocating this position. Moi discusses Irigaray's treatment of the mystical position, warning however that:

if her study of the mystics leads her to take pleasure in the image of woman imitating the sufferings of Christ, is she not caught in a logic that requires her to produce an image of woman that is exactly the same as the specular constructions of femininity in patriarchal logic? (1986: 138)

However, Irigaray's project is not one of mere acquiescence. Her emphasis is one of feminine subversion through the excessive enacting of her role: "on the feminine side it is possible to exceed and disturb this logic" (Moi 1986: 139). Femininity is a necessary position for the experiencing and communicating of such knowledge. Indeed, men are depicted by Irigaray as speaking to or adopting the position of...
women in order to enter the realm of mysticism, in a way reminiscent of Willie Hopkinson having to become "just a little effeminate", when he gives up his career to grow spiritually in Underhill's *The Grey World*, and in Richardson's *Pilgrimage* Miriam suggests that a man must enter into her silence fully to understand woman's knowledge:

> It is for/by woman that man dares to enter the place, to descend into it, condescend to it, even if he gets burned in the attempt. It is in order to speak woman, write to woman, act as preacher and confessor to women, that man usually has gone to such excesses. (1985: 191-2)

A certain amount of feminization, then, which includes loss, seems necessary for mystical experience, which brings with it a transcending knowledge. It also seems to be the case that in certain notable cases, such as that of Judge Schreber, the psychotic or disturbed individual automatically takes the place of a woman in order to yield to the "rays of God" (Kristeva, 1986: 235).

On the other hand, it may not be possible to imitate a gender role which was developed at an early age. Irigaray's analysis of the deficiencies of Freudian analysis suggests that the little girl's reactions to events would be different to the boy's, marking out a feminine way of returning to the child's mother (the child's anthropomorphised God). The little girl, Irigaray claims, does not play the fort-da game but instead adopts a path of mourning, prayer, fasting, marking out her own space for the inscription of her loss. In addition, her language is symbolically evocative, rich with rhythm and creativity:

> It may be bisyllabic, or like a litany, and rather singsong, modulated tonally. This language corresponds to a rhythm and also to a melody. Sometimes it takes the form of tender or angry words addressed to the doll, sometimes it takes the form of silence...the constitution of an initially defensive and subsequently creative territory is frequent among girls and women. (Brennan 1989: 132)

The emphasis is on the construction of a creative territory by means of the girl's "magic" acts, and her acts of mourning. It would be this space in which mysticism is experienced, and Irigaray has suggested that the female will create it more naturally than her male counterpart.
If the mystical way is an intrinsically feminine one, this does not necessarily make its definition any easier. The feminine is defined in negative terms by Lacan, as a state of refusal of the patriarchal order. This could be seen as leading to anarchism or mysticism, or even a combination. Kristeva suggests that the social position of women opens for them the potential of an easier mystical identification:

The ecstatic and the melancholic, two great female archetypes of Christianity, exemplify two ways in which a woman may participate in this symbolic Christian order. (1986: 147)

Whether socially or psychically determined, there does seem to be an affinity between the feminine and access to mysticism. There is a necessary state of loss, but there is also a recognisable role with inexplicable benefits. Recent psychoanalysis has suggested that, in order to find out why this "gender bias" is so, we should look at the earliest human relationship of all.

Is mystical experience and its expression in mystic discourse nothing more than a return to the realm of infant-mother union, a wordless fusion of the baby with its mother which Lacan aligns with the realm of the Female Imaginary, established during the mirror stage before the intrusion of the father, the phallus and language? Mystic language which uses maternal imagery may be seen to reinforce this supposition: God is an omnipresent mother, while the soul is ungendered and dependent upon maternal sustenance, or itself subsumed into the divine maternal plenitude. Kristeva, for example, often associates mysticism with regression to a state of primary narcissism. Women, credited with easier access to the maternal body, are disposed to this "mystic" regression to a preverbal maternal union. Kristeva traces the historical tradition of an alignment of mystical spirituality and the maternal:

the most intense revelation of God, which occurs in mysticism, is given only to a person who assumes himself as 'maternal'. Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Meister Eckhart, to mention but a few... Freedom with respect to the maternal territory then became the pedestal upon which the love of God is erected. (1986: 162 )

We know that in mystical literature, God may sometimes, as in Julian of Norwich's Revelations, appear just as strongly as a mother than as a male divinity. Kristeva also
writes that she can detect "through and against Judaism, a preconscious acknowledgement of a maternal feminine" (1986: 178). Kristeva suggests that what is true for the history of a people and society has a traceable analogy in the history of the individual's consciousness and development of language. Therefore "the maternal body, an undifferentiated space" (Rose 1986: 79) occupies a similarly fundamental position in the linguistic development of the individual; this is suggested by the arguments of Montrelay and Irigaray:

the privileged relationship of women to that origin gives them access to an archaic form of expressivity outside the circuit of linguistic exchange...It is...a refusal of division which gives the woman access to a different strata of language, where words and things are not differentiated, and the real of the maternal body threatens or holds off woman's access to prohibition and the law. (Rose 1986: 79) 

In contrast to the situation described by Levi-Strauss, where the woman was seen as the first tool in language as she was exchanged between parties by the dominant men, the preverbal mother provides women with a fundamental means of expression, underlying all communication. Cixous, more than Kristeva, proposes an essentialist advantage for the woman, comprising a permanent closeness to the mother: "woman is never far from the mother... There is always at least a little good mother milk left in her" (Belsey 1991: 112). Irigaray too, sees potential for greater depth and richness in language when there is "a consciousness yet more consciously pregnant with its relationship with the mother" (1985: 140). Where the individual consciousness is described, it is in female terms of fertility: reimpregnated, pregnant, just as earlier religious writing described the soul in female terms.

Maternity does not necessarily involve sacrifice and subservience. Kristeva suggests that there is a balance to be achieved in maternity which consists of both giving of oneself, and retaining individuality:

In the event of maternity...the slow, difficult and delightful apprenticeship in attentiveness, gentleness, forgetting oneself...to succeed in this path without masochism and without annihilating one's affective, intellectual and

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1 described in Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, 1990: 370-6

4 It should be noted that Rose is criticising Irigaray here
professional personality- such would seem to be the stakes to be won
through-...it then becomes creation in the strong sense of the term. (1986: 206)
The qualities of "attentiveness, gentleness, forgetting oneself" are the traditional
women's- and especially mother's virtues in Christianity, of course, but Kristeva is
concerned with a new balance of these virtues and the self. It is this searching for a
new balance- in Kristeva's "new" maternity as much as in Sinclair's "New Mysticism",
that the feminist critics under discussion here develop an idea which was important to
the mysticism and writing of Underhill, Sinclair and Richardson, who strove to find a
balance between activity and contemplation, and express that balance in their writing.
While a maternal face of mysticism was not obvious in either Sinclair's or
Richardson's work, Underhill's attempts - particularly in The Grey World- suggested
that there was more to be explored in this area. This is carried out by those such as
Kristeva and Cixous who explore maternal imagery and consciousness.

Maternity is not, however, the last word in mysticism. Alternatively, the
maternal is seen as a passageway between heaven and Earth, rather than heaven
itself:

It is the orthodox constituent of Christianity...that sanctioned the transitional
function of the Maternal by calling the Virgin a 'bond', a 'middle' or an
'interval', this opening the door to more or less heretical identifications with
the holy ghost. (1986: 162-3)

There has indeed been a Catholic doctrine ("Mary Mediatrix") stating that all graces
come through the Virgin Mary. Perhaps we should assume that there is no complete
way, at least in metaphorical language, of speaking about what is on the other side of
the "link" that is characterised as the maternal. There is some suggestion that
mysticism transcends even this "primary" stage. Lacan noted that there was
incomplete satisfaction even in the imaginary- the infant was always wanting more,
the infant's fulfilment was in fact "imaginary"- and Kristeva notes that the mystic may
be able to transcend even the "fiction" of a completely satisfactory maternal love, to a
further "unspeakable" concept of love beyond:

It is only 'normal' for a maternal representation to set itself up at the place of
this subdued anguish called love. No one escapes it. Except perhaps the saint,
the mystic or the writer who, through the power of language, nevertheless
succeeds in doing no better than to take apart the fiction of the mother as the mainstay of love, and to identify with love itself and what he is in fact—a fire of tongues, an exit from representation. (1986: 177)

This extract has parallels with the conclusion of Cixous' *Angst* (above), where the narrator abandons hope and identity only to be left with the hermetic conclusion that "it was love loving, whom I love". Here, the commencement of repetition marks the mystic's exit from the language of representation, which marks out a different space for the woman mystic and writer, a space which has been anticipated by Underhill, Sinclair and Richardson as they explored a creative mysticism that transcends even the maternal bond.

Recent feminist criticism has suggested the idea of realms and spaces particularly associated with the feminine. Kristeva writes of the "semiotic" realm of wordless impulses which breaks through conventional adult discourse to make itself heard in a poetic or oblique sense. It is closely related to the "female imaginary", which Cixous says will be released once women learn how to "write the [female] body". The semiotic breaks through in the forms of poetry, *écriture féminine*, and mysticism. Kristeva calls mystical insights "quasacles" (similar to Joycean epiphanies). She extends her exploration of creative discourse into ancient dramatic dialogues, suggesting that the semiotic is the foundation of all poetic language.

In the fiction of the women writers we have examined, the concept of the Other, the realm(s) not penetrated by ordinary consciousness, is constantly present. What may not be directly relatable to the Kristevan semiotic realm, which comprises rhythms and impulses rather than images and coherent (or incoherent) ideas, may be relatable to the Jungian Collective Unconscious, dreams, the (Freudian) unconscious, or the language of hysteria. But since these are all expressions of Otherness in some form they all make use of the semiotic, of its ability to disrupt and deepen ordinary level of communication.

Kristeva compares the semiotic to music, as Underhill had done with mystical experience:

such as the Mennipean, and the carnivalesque (1986: 50-6)
Indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgement, but restrained by a single guarantee: syntax. (1986: 97)

The fusion of coherently organised language and semiotic pulsion constitutes a style that is closer to poetry than any other recognisable literary genre: poetic language is more able to express rhythms, ambiguities, and hidden meanings than straightforward prose. The balance achieved is reminiscent of Miriam’s longing for a “movement that is perfect rest”:

the drives, which are "energy" charges as well as "psychical" marks, articulate what we call a chora: a non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated. (1986: 93)

Again, the stress is on the importance of plurality forming a unity. Kristeva’s language becomes paradoxical as it attempts to stretch to concepts which are beyond the power of ordinary language to express. And one way of stretching language is to stress its physical origins. This is of particular importance to Cixous:

Write yourself; the body must make itself heard. Then the huge resources of your unconscious will burst out. Finally the inexhaustible feminine imaginary is going to be deployed...unquoted values that will change the rule of the old game. (Belsey 1991: 116)

The reference to the body is characteristic of Cixous, who envisages "incorporating" the semiotic in an explicitly physical writing style, but also reminds us of the physical origins of the semiotic, the drives of the infant as it internalises physical stimuli as love or anger. In contrast, the self-important masculine order is described as an "old game". In fact, literature itself is seen as a game by Kristeva, revealing the semiotic in its playfulness:

Is it because literature reveals a certain knowledge and sometimes the truth itself about an otherwise repressed, nocturnal, secret and unconscious universe? Because it thus redoubles the social contract by exposing the unsaid. the uncanny? And because it makes a game, a space of fantasy and pleasure, out of the abstract and frustrating order of social signs, the words of everyday communication? (1986: 207)
The universe which is repressed, nocturnal, secret and unconscious has long been identified with mystical experience, from James onwards. We have seen how women's fiction writing develops towards incorporating the uncanny (rather than dismissing it) into a more consistent and familiar spiritual tenor. Indeed, the concept of the semiotic is both democratic and interactive, allowing all to find a fundamental creativity within themselves. When this is ignored, art becomes elitist and exclusive: if we believe that "an aesthetic realm only belonged to the select few", Kristeva's argument would have us conclude that "only the few are truly human," comments Lechte (1990: 28).

However, it is easy to stereotype the sort of writing that gives prominence to these semiotic qualities. Kristeva warns us:

does one not find the pen of many a female writer being devoted to phantasmic attacks against Language and Sign as the ultimate supports of phallocentric power, in the name of a semi-aphonic corporality whose truth can only be found in that which is 'gestural' or 'tonal'? (1986: 207)

Reminiscent in tone to George Eliot's attack on "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists", Kristeva's text admits that even supposedly avant-garde literature can become a cliché. Alternatively, however, Biblical texts can prominently display the semiotic. Of the Song of Songs, Kristeva writes: "That non-representable love, attributable as it might be to a legislating god, is nonetheless accessible to someone who, like David, utters a loving discourse that is only gesture and voice- sound, cry, music, afloat on primal repression, incantation of primary narcissism" (Tales of Love, 1987: 84). The semiotic breaks through more obviously into language when structures flounder, suggests Kristeva:

It has only been in very recent years or in revolutionary periods that signifying practice has inscribed within the phenotext the plural, heterogeneous and contradictory process of signification encompassing the flow of drives, material discontinuity, political struggle and the pulverisation of language. (1986: 122)

The areas of representation where the "pulverisation" of structured language more readily occur are those such as poetry, which Cixous explains, "involves gaining
strength through the unconscious ... that other limitless country," (Walder 1990: 320), and dreams, as Kristeva notes:

"Dream-work" becomes a theoretical concept that triggers off a new research, one that touches on pre-representative production, and the development of "thinking" before thought. ....the other "scene" of production of meaning prior to meaning. (1986: 83-4)

Rather than confining the search for the semiotic to poetry and dreams, or the dark drives of the Freudian unconscious, however, mysticism, and particularly its development this century, would restore a creative lineage dealing specifically with the insights it offer. Therefore the symbolism employed by the women writers exploring mysticism through critical writing should not be ignored, particularly when it corresponds with that most often used in écriture feminine and allied genres, such as autobiographical and visionary fiction.

There is an abundance of "liquid" imagery in the French feminist critics, finding a precedent in the writings of, among others, Saint Teresa of Avila, who uses the symbolism of water for prayer (famously, watering a garden). She also uses the imagery more personally: "My head sounds just as if it were full of brimming rivers, and then as if all the waters in those rivers came suddenly rushing downward" (1989: 34). Water in particular is associated with the feminine, as well as being a Jungian symbol for the realm of the (collective) unconscious.

Cixous relates water to the realm of the female Imaginary, that realm where creativity is engendered:

water is the feminine element par excellence: the closure of the mythical world contains and reflects the comforting security of the mother's womb. It is within this space that Cixous' speaking subject is free to move from one subject position to another, or to merge oceanically with the world. (Moi 1986: 117)

This watery existence means that it is difficult to extract a coherent theory from Cixous' body of work: "Hopeful feminist analysts of Cixous's "literary theory" might just as well not apply," comments Moi (1986: 103). Better understood on the more subliminal levels of poetry, evading the logic of dry land, the fluid images emphasise the supportive, ever-present nature of "oceanic" movements of life in the water.
She alone dares and wants to know from within where she, the one excluded, has never ceased to hear what-comes-before-language reverberating ... this is the Voice, the mother's milk..."I am spacious singing flesh". (Belsey 1989: 108)

The fluid, whether it is milk, water, or ocean, encompasss the individual being, whether subject or author of a text: "Ourselves in writing like fish in the water" (1991: 58) says Cixous. Kristeva reaches a similar conclusion, linking women to the mysterious communication and healing power of dolphins "The community of women is a community of dolphins" (1986: 181). Dolphins have long been assigned a mystical meaning, benign yet enigmatic, powerful but inexplicably sensitive.

However, water has not featured especially prominently in the women writers we have been discussing, although it echoes the fluidity of psyche and atmosphere that is often mentioned, especially by Sinclair and Underhill. But images of light and dark have been consistently prominent in the fiction we have looked at. It is understood by all the mystics cited by Underhill to be more than a simple metaphor. It is the penultimate stage of the mystic's journey, a time of trial commonly referred to as the Dark Night.

In the mystical tradition, the dark night of the soul is a state of indescribable desolation which the mystic must endure and pass through before attaining the beatific vision. It is one stage further than the Purgative stage which is prior to the plateau of Illumination, and it must precede the final stage of Union, the Unitive way. As well as being a period of acute distress and insecurity, it is therefore an essential part of the journey to "enlightenment". The concept of a period of visual darkness and helplessness leading to a previously hidden beatific vision has parallels with the feminist deconstruction of the objects of the male gaze and the substitution of a different perspective, or way of seeing.

Cixous' passage ensures that the "Dark Night" need not be a surrendering in the sense of giving up hope, but rather a viable, even revolutionary path which would be relevant for the seeking of new perspectives today:

Through the same opening that is her danger, she comes out of herself to go to the other, a traveller in unexplored places, she does not refuse, she
approaches, not to do away with the space between, but to see it, to experience what she is not, what she is, what she can be. (Belsey 1989: 106)

But first, according to Irigaray, there is an unavoidable element of wandering, and, it seems to the "eye" of logicality, of wandering in the dark:

Yet, in this nocturnal wandering, where is the gaze to be fixed? The only possibility is to push onward into the night until it finally becomes a transverberating beam of light, a luminous shadow. Words begin to fail her. She senses something remains to be said that resists all speech, that can at best be stammered out. All the words are weak, worn out, unfit to translate anything sensibly. For it is no longer a matter of longing for some determinable attribute, some mode of essence, some face of presence. (1985: 193)

Irigaray's central portion of her Speculum - "La mystérieque"- adopts language deliberately akin to that of mysticism, as she situates the role of the mystic at the mysterious blind centre of her subversive, specularised overview of Western masculine philosophy. This passage contains some of the most often quoted characteristics of this portion of the mystical journey: the transformation of apparently unending darkness into light, the failure of words to encompass the ensuing mystical enlightenment. Cixous, too, writes to encourage others to explore the dark continent, saying, in line with Irigaray, that we have been led to expect to find ourselves lost if we go down this unlit path, whereas the result will be exactly the opposite- women, or the "feminine space", discover(s) a fund of sexual/spiritual/written potential to be "uncovered" by an exploration of the apparently inaccessible territory.

The Dark Continent is neither dark nor unexplorable - it is still unexplored only because we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be 

Indeed the whole concept of Speculum of the Other Woman is in some way reminiscent of St Teresa's spiritual classic Interior Castle: both are using a pre-established philosophy or spirituality, and a physical object which is used to construct this and their own argument- in Teresa's case, the mansion with seven stages is taken from Jewish cabalistic tradition, but she transforms it with her own perspective just as Irigaray revises patriarchal philosophy of the Western World from the feminine perspective of the speculum (see Greene, God in the Castle, 1989)
explorable... Let the priests tremble, we're going to show them our sexts!

(Walder 1990: 325)

The language of Cixous' novel Angst is even more stark, using an impossible
juxtaposition of absolutes until solitude is finally reached:

I had followed love coming right up against death until I reached absolute
solitude. (1985: 119)

However it is implied that there is a new form of life after this "finality". Even what
seems like a "terminal" turns out to be a transition.

Silence plays an important part of this transition, but even in criticism it is not
the final stage of the process, rather a means to an enlightening end, just as the dark
night - the visual equivalent of silence - is the final trying passage to Illumination, and
ultimately, Union. Susan Sontag writes:

Silence is a strategy for the transvaluation of art, art itself being the herald of
an anticipated radical transvaluation of human values. But the success of the
strategy must mean its eventual abandonment, or at least its significant
modification: silence is a prophecy, one which the artist's actions can be
understood as attempting both to fulfil and reverse. (1969: 18)

Like many of these qualities, silence leads to an artist's paradox: reversing and
fulfilling expectations at the same time, just as in Irigaray's plan to fulfil, but fulfil
subversively and therefore creatively, the role, and the language, available to those
writing from the position of women.

In the centre of the Speculum, Irigaray suggests that what may have been
thought of as a blind spot in thought and language is in fact the way forward into God,
away from the reflections and distortions which the normal "screen" of thought
produces. The blind spot is in fact the vital centre, more vital than the vision
surrounding it. For Irigaray, love and intuition, the supposedly typical feminine
characteristics, are associated with the "rarest" and highest glimpses of the truth,
while the rational thought and language which surround them are not:

...could being be the concentration, extrapolated from everything seen, of the
blind spots by/ in which the eye- and the eye of the soul- reflects and is
reflected without seeing or being seen? Might it be this specularization of
vision of/in the other that man cannot perceive at the moment of its production, or of his production? Holes by/in which he looks...Being does not appear or even appear to appear. It slips away from the mind's grasp, even as it forms the foundation of mind. Is this the mystery- the hysteria- of Being? Hidden in its crypt where no-one, however skilled in philosophy, has glimpsed it? Only at the rarest and highest moments of loving contemplation of the Good- or of the Beautiful?- will the wisest man receive some "intuition" that can barely be put into words. (1985: 150)

When Irigaray writes of this knowledge being hidden in the "crypt", she touches the ongoing dispute over whether such hidden knowledge is a cradle or a grave, a hope for the future or a literal dead end. Typically, there is no clear-cut solution, the answer is not to be seen clearly. For the "Dark Night" is especially connected with the via negativa, the language of apophatic theology, describing something only by what it is not, proclaiming the redundancy of the way we say things, see things, by the "normal" light of day. The mystic vision, as does the feminist vision, necessitates a reassessment of optical perception.

8 The optical system of mysticism is built upon a paradox. Within darkness comes light, as in most basic religious teaching. The stress for the French feminist theorists is on feminine light from within, welling up from the body, the way of immanence rather than transcendence. We have seen how Richardson often speaks of the effects of light, of a transforming perspective coming from a mysterious place associated with her own inner artistic vision. Perspectives are generally different to the accepted literary "sights" (and sites), providing a different focus, and particularly a fresh attention to mundane details.

Cixous, more explicitly than Richardson, associates sight and sensuality, implying that this new feminine light is directly connected with physicality:

Feminine light...radiates, it is a slow, sweet, difficult, absolutely unstoppable, painful rising that reaches and impregnates lands, that filters, that wells up....

(Belsey 1989:109)
In comparison, Irigaray describes how masculine sight, or the masculine gaze, attempts to penetrate the secret of this hidden illumination, but, with its "scientificity of fiction", does not succeed:

Scientific technique will have taken up the condensation properties of the "burning glass", in order to pierce the mystery of woman's sex, in a new distribution of the power of the scientific method and of "nature". A new despecularisation of the maternal and the female? Scientificity of fiction that seeks to exorcise the disasters of desire, that mortifies desire by analysing it from all visual angles, but leaves it also intact. Elsewhere. Burning still.

(1985: 146)

The disasters of desire of which Irigaray speaks here are not clearly defined, but could be language, even the unconscious itself, in the sense that Lacan explains how both are based on desire that can never be satisfied. The feminine answer, or the mystical answer, combines sightlessness ("eyelessness") with the lack or loss of subjecthood-"I-lessness". The "eye of the soul" cannot be traced by the masculine gaze. Irigaray, by her subversive presentation of mystical rapture, or "insight", is challenging the traditional structure and method of the gaze, of "seeing things", therefore also undermining the masculine economy's way of logic, of "seeing things in the right way", "in the right light". There are ambiguities in the section heading for this part of Irigaray's work: " Kore, young virgin pupil of the eye". In classical mythology, Kore goes down to the underworld for half the year. "Pupil" could mean student, schoolgirl, or the dark centre of the eye through which the world is processed and "seen", and which becomes larger and more sensitive the less light there is:

Fire flares up in the inexhaustible abundance of her underground source and is matched with an opposing but congruent flood that sweeps over the "I" in an excess of excess. Yet, burning, flowing along in a wild spate of waters, yearning for even greater abandon, the "I" is empty still, ever more empty, opening wide in rapture of soul...And my eyes have proved sharp enough to look upon that glory without blinking. They would have been seared had they not been that simple eye of the soul that sets fire to what it ad-mires out of its hollow socket. (1985: 197)
Though she is not blind, the mystic Irigaray mimics here sees from a different, unsuspected position, with sharp eyes that gaze on what is inaccessible without both simplicity and desire. This vision has been anticipated by the women writers we have been examining, particularly by Richardson, who explored the mystical implication of both the "I" and the "eye". For Richardson found in her own "impaired" vision a source of revelation which anticipated feminist critical thought to come.

Myopia, or short sight, is traditionally seen as a defect, and used as a metaphor with regard to someone being unable to see things properly, focus on their goals and tasks, be near or short sighted with regard to an activity or attitude. The world is a dangerous place for people who are short sighted, having been designed for those who naturally focus at a certain distance; a tightly conforming standard of vision is set by opticians. The myopic person is "cured" by being prescribed glasses or contact lenses or even subjected to surgery by knife or laser. Meanwhile, alternative practitioners suggest that short sight results from a psychic refusal to see life as it really is, and work towards the healing of this unconsciously self-induced impediment. However, short-sight, or at least the mental and emotional attitudes metaphorically implied by it, should not be dismissed without considering how a condition of myopia might be seen as a "different" level of vision, with a need to come close for details, with the intermingling of colours and objects that a less rigid distance focus gives, and how this leads to a different emphasis, and a lessening of importance for the structured gaze. These implications have not been lost on Cixous.

Cixous declares her own "defect" of short sight, but turns it into a virtue, allying herself explicitly with artists, and implicitly with mystics, by the way she sees things afresh. Cixous pays attention to details, never tiring of the repetitive examination of everyday objects, invisible because of their mundaneity. "Details are my kingdoms" she says, linking her distinctive perspective to her myopia:

I am nearsighted. And even if I have often blamed God for this, I often thank him for it. It's a relief...I write because I am nearsighted: it's also, I think, through nearsightedness, thanks to my nearsightedness, that I love. I am someone who looks at things from very, very close up. Seen through my eyes, little things are very big. Details are my kingdoms. Some people survey. Some people who are far-seeing don't see what is very near. I am someone who sees
the smallest letters of the earth. Flat on my stomach in the garden, I see the ants. I see each of the ants' feet. Insects become my heroes. Am I not a little bit right? Human beings are divine insects.

What is beautiful is that such little creatures can be so big.

Such are the benefits of my nearsightedness. (1991: 109)

The idea that certain small details are significant enough to reveal the "kingdom" in some way date back to the medieval mystics, Julian of Norwich who saw "God in a point" and the secrets of the world revealed to her in a vision of a hazelnut held in the palm of the hand. Where there is apparently "nothing to be seen" great secrets are sometimes revealed to the mystic, who, like Cixous, looks closely, or sees differently.

Fighting odd opacity from deep within...and I see that she looks very closely with this light and she sees the veins and nerves of matter. Which he has no need of. (Belsey 1989:109)

The alliance of myopia and feminism also revises the thought of Freud, who suggests that women are considered automatically to be inferior, because, compared to the body of a man, they exhibit only a void, a nothing-to-be-seen, when viewed from the same distance:

The Freudian theory of sexual difference is based on the visibility of difference: it is the eye that decides what is clearly true and what isn't. ...when he looks at the woman, Freud apparently sees nothing...an absence or negation of the male norm...therefore, in Irigaray's argument, woman is outside representation in our culture: " the feminine...in between signs, between the realised meanings, between the lines". (Moi 1986: 132)

But acceptance of different levels of what the eye sees and the distance from which the eye gazes make all the difference. The preconceived delimitations of optics is more rigid than any other science. While other scientific disciplines break down results and data to formulate new connections and theories, optics, as Lacan points out, works always to produce or structure a cohesive result, without this preliminary breaking down and experimentation:

I cannot urge you too strongly to meditate on the science of optics...peculiar in that it attempts by means of instruments to produce that strange phenomenon
known as *images*, unlike the other sciences which carry out on nature a division, a dissection, or anatomical breakdown. (Rose 1986: 167)

From the rigid position of this optical procedure, the woman or girl would indeed fail to possess a meaningful sign or status, compared to the man, the possessor of the phallus. Without an examination of the prejudice such optics carries with it, as Irigaray puts it:

the little girl, the woman, would have *nothing* to show. She would expose, exhibit the possibility of a *nothing to be seen*. (1985: 53)

Kristeva, too, is interested in the revelations of art and the psychological symptomatology of different levels of sight. She, however, sees unfocused "art" as a more honest recognition of the limitations and failure of human subjectivity, when faced with an absolute, such as infinite perspective, or an absolute concept of God. For Kristeva, the short-sighted "gaze that has no object" is a confession that with our finite visual or intellectual capacities we can never possess the "pure signifier":

The icon of sight and speech returns in the form of "mania". Every "pointillist" or "tachist" working-out of an anality that can no longer be seen is drifting, not towards obsessionality, but towards a manic symptomatology: the failure of the subject faced with the "pure" signifier. It is a desire then, for iconicity, which, in extreme cases, is lost in a gaze that has no object: a blinding field of colour and light. (1986: 231-2)

Elsewhere, Kristeva stresses the need for contemplative artistic exploration, unravelling what is normally taken mistakenly for granted. In her advocating of the examination of "microscopic...minutiae", she agrees with Cixous that the use of near sight, of scrutinising carefully close up, reveals more than a distanced and preconceived perspective:

I feel more and more that a separate place must be set aside for so called artistic discourse. If there is any disavowal, it is introduced in the minutiae of such a practice (in each word, sound, colour, rhythm...) such that these are never pure signifiers but always 'word' and 'flesh' and consequently situate themselves at the very heart of the distinction between these extremes and or their identity to the extent that they are a microscopic exploration of murder as resurrection. (1986: 227)
Kristeva also writes of the early unfocused gaze of the newly born infant: in *Stabat Mater* on the poetic side (literally) of her text, she hints at the unitive bliss the baby experiences, and how the child has no need of "outside" sight. Myopia also imitates this unfocused, nonjudgmental condition:

> the happiness of a faceless head, Narcissus-like touching without eyes, sight dissolving in muscles, hair, deep, smooth, peaceful colour. Mama: anamnesis.

(1986: 166)

The evocation of this blissful childhood blurring generates poetry rather than the precision of prose, as Kristeva echoes in her words what she believes the infant- and herself as mother merging with her child- experiences. But as we have seen with Richardsons' *Pilgrimage*, it is the combination of atmospheric light and unity with the sense of self- multiple, hidden, but still centred in an I/eye- defined by the local clarity of small objects such as the "bee", which creates the woman's, and the mystic's, special perspective. And, as we might expect, dimensions of time and space are equally re-addressed in this unsettling of the status quo of critical and creative experience.

9 In "Coming to Writing" Cixous unsettles the standard structure of writing literature, claiming that the repetitive employment of words and ideas induces in both writer and reader a meditative state, and that these reiterative uses of literary detail should no more be dismissed than are the artistic practises of the Impressionists, especially Manet, who repeats the portrayal of his subject matter until the "sparrows" of insightful moments are achieved:

> I claim the right to repeat the word until it becomes dry orange-skin, or until it becomes fragrance. I want to repeat the words "I love you" until they become spirit. But repetition, in those who write, is very badly received. The painter has the right to repeat until water lilies become divine sparrows [i.e., moments]. (1991: 128)

Repetition of small phrases or single words is an acknowledged technique in Eastern religions (the mantra). For Cixous, it is a prominent way of disrupting the linear argument of patriarchal logic. Meaning is sought elsewhere than the story-line. Just as, in Underhill's third novel, Constance gives herself over to the repetition of an
ancient spell, Cixous suggests that an element of watchful abandonment will prompt a heavenly vision:

To practise abandoning oneself to the water lilies
Perhaps in the end that would give the portrait of God. (1991: 128)

And in the same passage, Cixous declares that the "inner life", that realm inhabited by Constance's "watching spirit", and progressively examined and enlarged by Sinclair and Richardson respectively, reveals the true importance of spiritual and artistic perception:

Painting and writing, they are just that, hoping absolutely, they are what we might call Sunflower Life, to borrow an image from Van Gogh, or Clarice Lispector. Almost all lives are small. What enlarges a life is the inner life, are the thoughts, are the sensations, are the useless hopes. Hope is like a sunflower, which turns aimlessly towards the sun. But it is not 'aimless'. (1991: 128)

Cixous is a great admirer of the work of Clarice Lispector, who imbues the mundane lives and objects of her novelistic world with illuminative resonance. Cixous would surely also appreciate the pioneering work made by Richardson in this style: Richardson, whose fictional alter-ego made more advances in contemporary independence, than Lispector's characters generally do, trapped as they are in poverty and social degradation. Work such as Lispector's, Cixous notes, is not "aimless". Cixous puns on the French verb "aimer" (= to love). We have seen that punning was a technique also employed by Richardson, in her eschewing of conventional narrative.

It is Kristeva who re-evaluates the nature of time in a wider sense, placing in a feminist critical perspective the interest which Underhill, Sinclair and Richardson had in the temporal, and its latent associations with prophecy, repetition, and eternity. The sort of time in which we normally consider ourselves to live is linear time. This is chronological, the time which marks history and marks out the structured, external future, and also allows language to take place. Moi writes that "The time of history...is linear time, (which is also)...that of language considered as the enunciation of sentences" (1986: 192). However, "linear time rests on its own stumbling block, which is also the stumbling block of that enunciation- death. A psychoanalyst would
call this "obsessional time", recognising in the mastery of time the true structure of
the slave." (1986: 192). In order to escape from this slavish structure, other time
concepts (anterior temporal modalities) must be accessed. The contemplative
tendency towards repetition ties in with Kristeva's diagnosis that:

The hysteric (either male or female) who suffers from reminiscences would,
rather, recognise his or her self in the anterior temporal modalities: cyclical or
monumental. This antimony, one perhaps embedded in psychic structures,
becomes, none the less, within a given civilisation, an antimony among social
groups and ideologies in which the radical positions of certain feminists would
rejoin the discourse of marginal groups of spiritual or mystical inspiration and,
strangely enough, rejoin recent scientific preoccupations. (1986: 192)

Kristeva also links female subjectivity to the cyclical course of maternity, stressing
the importance of "conceptualising time from the perspective of motherhood and
reproduction." (1986: 187 Moi's introduction). Moi, introducing Kristeva's text, is
quick to see a threat in this, warning that:

a new generation of feminists...which will have to confront the task of
reconciling maternal time (motherhood) with linear (political and historical)
time. Unless we manage to theorise women's continued desire to have
children, Kristeva argues, we leave the door wide open to religion and
mysticism. (1986: 187-8)

Moi is failing to see the positive side of such an alliance with the marginal discourse
of mysticism. Kristeva, however, is more open to the benefits of recognising such an
alliance.

As well as cyclical time, however, there is what Kristeva refers to as
monumental time, which is reminiscent of the traditional concept of eternity:

there is the massive presence of a monumental temporality...that the very word
temporality hardly fits: all-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space.
(1986: 191)

Beyond and behind the maternal spiral of cyclical time, akin to the transforming
repetition explored by Richardson and advocated by Cixous, monumental time is also
beyond conventional narrative description. But it is surely connected to the certainties
of mysticism which have been conveyed by the women writers discussed above. from
the description of a supernatural "pattern world" in Underhill's Lost Word, to the "matrix" of eternity in which Richardson felt so at home.

Moi's analysis of Irigaray's "mysterique" corresponds to Irigaray's discussion of the little girl creating her own space to enact and mourn for the absence of her mother. Like the "anterior temporal modalities" of Kristeva's project, the nature of the mystic space is paradoxical, existing within the patriarchal system yet "vast" enough to provide relief from it; existing within the self but allowing the self to dissolve in the mystic's expression of pleasure:

The mystic's often self-inflicted abjection paradoxically opens up a space where her own pleasure can unfold. Though still circumscribed by male discourse, this is a space that nevertheless is vast enough for her to feel no longer exiled. (1986: 137)

A supernatural element to this feminine exploration of mysticism is not entirely absent. Transcending spatial boundaries, Kristeva reminds us, is also a privilege of the Virgin Mary, who has the special honour of being assumed bodily into another realm after her death,

In Christianity, the body of the Virgin does not die but moves from one spatiality to another within the same time via dormition (Orthodox) or assumption (Catholic). (1986: 191)

Although this is held out as a hope for all the "faithful", the woman's prerogative to fuse and transcend boundaries of space and time are especially "embodied" in the figure of this female "Godbearer", forever on the margins- or thresholds- of traditional Christian faith. But is the woman writer exploring and expressing the mystic experience doomed to be as passive as this female "role model" is often depicted as being?

10 As Kristeva and Irigaray are well aware, retreat into a preverbal, pre-grammatical mode of existence in which there is nothing but the semiotic, or the language of madness, is a resignation of hope for political and social improvement, or even of communication on any but the most basic level. Thus the woman who stands outside an underground tunnel in Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway murmuring a wordless

7 As explored in Marina Warner's Alone of all her Sex (1976)
song, may have access to her inner semiotic pulsions, but makes no headway in communicating or acting upon her knowledge. However, staying in one's allotted social or linguistic role is to conform depressingly to what Irigaray has condemned as "the inexorable logic of the same". Cixous frequently describes the poetic world as more attractive to her than the political, but even she acknowledges that the two must not be separated. Some integration into the realm of the symbolic must be achieved, if the writer or speaker is not to lapse into total unintelligibility. Is mystical writing a resolution of this impasse or really nothing more than an unproductive passivity?

Modern psychoanalytical theory suggests that language is acquired once the bond of maternal unity has been broken by the father, who brings about both the acquisition of language and the creation of the unconscious. In this way Lacan links the sexual psychic world with the social world- the dimension of language:

The emergent human subject is created within an identity split between its conscious and unconscious. From then on the "masculine" or "feminine" child is inscribed into the empty world of absence and stand-ins of language after the fullness of the imaginary relationship with the ever bodily present mother... we are caught up in a constant search for substitutes (what Lacan calls the object a) with which we try to paper over the cracks, plug the gaps at the core of our being. (Crowley 1992: 193-4)

The substitutes are, on a linguistic level, those replacements for the "Lost Word" of masonry, which Underhill described. But the mystic state can only be traced through the cracks and gaps in the surface fabric of language and literature. As May Sinclair wrote in her Defence of Idealism, such reality is seen by and through the rents in the fabric of ordinary existence. However, when it appears that the whole fabric of being-in-language is torn to shreds, as in severe hysteria, then there is little hope of communicating the needs or visions of the hysteric. In addition, as Irigaray points out, mimicking a prevailing but inadequate way of being, as women do, is also a form of hysteria, but constitutes the only hope of sanity, of saving the feminine subject from being labelled as insane and irrevocably misunderstood. The woman as mimic, Moi suggests, is manifesting a form of hysteria, but there is no other option apart from insane, incomprehensible babble.
For women, however, or those identifying themselves with the marginalised position of the feminine in patriarchal society, the danger is that the realm of the other, suddenly accessed and allowed expression, may overwhelm, fatally, proving incompatible at such torrential velocity with the structure of current language and society. Kristeva mentions that, besides the threat of hysteria, there is even a real danger of suicide for women artists:

With family and history at an impasse, this call troubles the word: it generates hallucinations, voices, "madness". After the superego, the ego founders and sinks. It is a fragile envelope, incapable of staving off the irruption of this conflict, of this love ... which then, like black lava, had lain in wait for her all along the path of her desperate attempts to identify with the symbolic paternal order. (1986: 157)

Kristeva sees an inflaming and positive possibility in this situation, too. Immanence overwhelms transcendence, the light from within outshines that from without, when the woman is reconnected with the underlying currents which the symbolic order will not give due countenance to:

When she is inspired by that which the symbolic order represses, isn't a woman also the most radical atheist, the most committed anarchist? In the eyes of the world, a victim. But elsewhere? (1986: 158)

Kristeva's vocabulary here is the opposite of religious, but, like the mystic, understands those subliminal regions of the mind of which James spoke: what is sought by this woman who writes is the truth within her, the truth behind the representation.

Even monotheistic religion must, Kristeva argues in "About Chinese Women", have a close connection with its Other in spirituality. Again, this anarchic "Other" is associated with the feminine:

without this gap between the sexes, without this localisation of the polymorphic, orgasmic body, desiring and laughing, in the other sex, it would have been impossible, in the symbolic realm, to isolate the principle of One Law- the One, Sublimating, Transcendent Guarantor of the ideal interests of the community. (1986: 141)
The question is whether the two can come more harmoniously together to give the mysticism, the supposedly anarchic or ineffable, and the feminine, their rightful place. Kristeva's answer is that a balance must be found, which will allow full yet safe expression of feminine realms, rhythms and spaces. We have seen the women writers under discussion in this thesis work towards this balance in their writing.

However, it is far from certain that mysticism provides this balance. We have seen Underhill (criticised by Jantzen), Sinclair (by Radford), and Richardson (by Kaplan) criticised for their lack of political and social integration. Both mysticism and fiction writing can be seen as a retreat from political statement; mysticism in its aspect of maternity is sometimes seen by Kristeva too as a shadowy substitute for life and death: "Man overcomes the unthinkable of death by postulating maternal love in its place - in the place and stead of death and thought" (1986: 176).

At the very least, it seems that literary immersion in the female "imaginary" has turned some, like Cixous, away from political imperatives:

I would lie if I said that I am a political woman, not at all. In fact, I have to assemble two words, political and poetic. Not to lie to you, I must confess that I put the accent on the poetic... the political is something cruel and hard and so rigorously real that sometimes I feel like consoling myself by crying and shedding poetic tears. (Moi 1985: 123)

And Irigaray voices the fears aroused by the mystic desire of the marginalised "woman", who wants to appropriate everything into her new way of seeing:

Admittedly, because she is deprived of everything, "she" also wants to take possession of everything. And that has to be prevented, since everything she might thus attract to herself will be reduced to a mere reflection, shadow, fantasy, absence, of what it had been in its natural wholeness. (1985: 167)

Mysticism may also be seen as the result of denial and escapism in a patriarchal society. The "melancholic jouissance" (1986: 148) sometimes associated with the mystic character is associated by Kristeva with the repressive aspects of the law of the Father. This is the mysticism of loss and mortification which we have seen associated with women in the past. Kristeva warns us that mysticism can itself be seen as a further retreat into marginalisation, and that this has to be seen as a failure:
we are forced to become either the most passionate servants of the temporal order and its apparatus of consolidation (the new wave, women ministers), or of subversion (the other new wave, always a little behind the first: the promotion of women in left-wing parties). Or else we will forever remain in a sulk in the face of history, politics and social affairs: symptoms of their failure, but symptoms destined for marginality or for a new mysticism. (1986: 156)

Reducing the problem to the level of the individual, Kristeva suggests that mysticism could be seen as a self defence against the "patriarchal pressures on hysteria and jouissance... hallucination is an artistic elaboration by which a semiotic condensation protects the body from illness" (1986: 230-1).

More than either Cixous or Irigaray, Kristeva looks to female mystic writers of the past to clarify her thoughts on the pitfalls of such work. Once again attention is turned towards Jeanne Guyon, who featured in the thought of both Leuba (hostile) and Underhill (wary but interested). In Tales of Love, Kristeva analyses the impulses of this prolific "quietist" whose reputation remains on the margins of the mystic tradition. At first, Jeanne is shown to have sought a way of resignation which leads to annihilation: "advocating renunciation, annihilation of the self, reached by seeking a childlike state and culminating in the apotheosis of nothingness" (1987: 302). Her quietism ultimately advocated a dumb withdrawal into the void of her own self:

in order to attain a death-for-the-self in the amorous presence of the Loved One, she recommends nonmediated communication, not only outside method and thought but also outside language, reaching its peak in pure silence.

(1987: 302)

There is a blatant paradox in this project of Jeanne's, for she was "carried away by logorrhea", particularly in the arena of writing: "language, for this contemplative of the void, remains a site of pleasure", comments Kristeva. As had Underhill, Kristeva notes that Jeanne's writing took the form of quasi-automatic script: "Repetitive, stereotyped in both form and content... somewhat intoxicated, trance-like, automatic" (1987: 308). Having described Jeanne's style, Kristeva at first appears to condemn it as a phantasmatic escape from both reality and responsibility, just as she had condemned the clichéd responses of some modern feminist writing:
Writing is perhaps the "semblance of willpower" that enables one to do without a practical, moral, or active will... Such a writing of phantasmic consumption and destruction of meaning amounts to something like associative speech set adrift. (1987: 308)

Yet Kristeva does suggest that there is something more in this apparently uncontrolled literary outpouring than the avoidance of social responsibility and of the pain of personal inadequacy. Most importantly, Jeanne, in her non-expectation of any spiritual reward system, seems to anticipate the concept of the feminine realm of the "gift" which Cixous was later to describe. Jeanne's was "a state of love for God with no concern for rewards or punishments", described by Kristeva as an alternative to the prevailing masculine religious structure: "a reaction against the most rational aspects of faith," which instead manifests as a joyous personal credo: "a vitality and a confidence in one knows not what deep wellsprings of subjectivity" (1987: 298).

Again, Jeanne's expectations were both simple and absolute, based on "her marvelously optimistic and jubilatory confidence in the continuous presence of God who would give of himself to those who loved him disinterestedly". Quite obviously, Jeanne's is not the masochistic path which was so common for the female mystics of the past. Rather, her equanimity and optimism, at least as described by Kristeva, is far more akin to that of Richardson's character in Pilgrimage who so influences Miriam by her pragmatic qualities of forgiveness and wonder, which she expressed in writing rather than speech (see previous chapter). Interestingly, this character is called Jean.

Ultimately, Kristeva's analysis of Jeanne Guyon's writing suggests that although such creativity is both self-concerned and rapturous, it points towards a way of exploring the mystical experience that transcends convention and cliché:

It is merely the hysterical fantasy of something on the near side of language, sacrificial harbor of maternal loves, source of symptoms and anguish? Or is she proposing something more, thanks to that "work without work" constituted by orison but also to the fantasmatic hollowing out constituted by writing? Perhaps a possibility of stretching the borders of the nameable beyond the boundaries set by a discourse of methods and ideas... that of a loving subject.

comparison could again be drawn to the medieval mystic Margery Kemp, who acted outside social constraints and expectations.
as array of constant presences and absences, a dialectics of losses and fullnesses. (1987: 312)

It is a project that, although impossible to fulfil in Jeanne's historical period, is of vital concern to the modern feminist critics who are seeking to achieve a communicable vision of mysticism: "Let us read her... with the love that is deserved by those who have been defeated by causes whose future lies before them" (1987: 312-3), concludes Kristeva. Integration of mysticism, writing and life, rather than madness or resignation, is the developing project of those women whose creativity has been built on Jeanne's ambitions.

11 Evelyn Underhill, who felt that her focus was theocentric rather than Christocentric, forged a satisfactory meaning for an "incarnational" mysticism by insisting on the importance of a life which was closely united with the divine or some source of mysticism, and yet was practically active at the same time. She was encouraged by her own spiritual directors to combine writing and meditation with her own charitable work and retreat- and advice-giving. In terms of literature, the same balance is envisaged, especially by Kristeva and Cixous, as a way of imbuing language with "life" rather than enforced metaphorical significance. The way to integration of the mystical, the balancing of prose and poetry in a text is one of "magical" fusion, the unity which is at the end of the mystic's quest.

Rather than exploring the supernatural, as both Underhill and Sinclair had done, Lacan had suggested the concept of an "impossible" moment which gave language a "real" rather than "symbolic" meaning:

The Real can be seen as the impossible point where different structures and paths meet. Lacan termed the order of language the symbolic, that of the ego and its identifications the imaginary... The real was then his term for the moment of impossibility onto which both are grafted, the point of that moment's endless return. (Rose 1986: 54)

The linguistic formula for these acts of integration is the impossible bringing together of symbolic and imaginary realms in the Lacanian concept of the real, or Kristeva's true-real. She likens this to the religious concept of transubstantiation (sign
and reality of Christ becoming one). But because the true-real cannot be achieved without undermining the structure of (symbolic) language, psychosis can also result.

Certain religious themes (such as transubstantiation) were no doubt social ways of calling into play the enunciative true-real of language (to which, in a more marginalised way, psychosis bears witness). (1986: 233)

Kristeva's writings on maternity are another exploration of how the ideas of culture, identity and biology are fused together. Cixous, also interested in such a project, sees the dissolution of these barriers through experimental writing, as both creative and erotic:

This writing practice has a strong poetic impact for it produces a new creative tongue, as dense as a pure poem. It reaches a climax in the very process of dissolving the barrier between the signified and the signifier- and it is an erotic one: "To write: making love to writing". (Defroment, in Wilcox, 1990: 117)

Defroment notices that Cixous expresses distrust of metaphors, just as Richardson had done. While Cixous talks of impossible autobiographical feats, such as "feeding on books", she insists that she is not just speaking metaphorically.

[Cixous] explicitly aims at releasing the literal meaning of the word, not its figurative one, so that, under the congealed expression, the real living word breathes again and can be felt full of flesh. (1990: 117)

The extract describes the same urge towards impossible embodiment of linguistic expression which metaphors are not adequate to supply, but which this tantalising, mystical true-real will, or will provide at least the promise of providing.

Perhaps more "realistically", Kristeva makes the suggestion that we provide space for semiotic, indefinable, non-verbal expressions within the present linguistic structure. It is impossible anyway to do without either, and even if the two cannot be wholly satisfactorily integrated, they should at least be acknowledged:

there are non-verbal signifying systems that are constructed exclusively on the basis of the semiotic (music, for example). But... this exclusivity is relative...because the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either "exclusively" semiotic or
"exclusively symbolic", and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both. (1986: 93)

This is much more in line with the need of feminist and mystic to see unity in diversity. But the vision is still a utopia:

A constant alternation between time and its truth, identity and its loss, history and that which produces it: that which remains extra-phenomenal, outside the sign, beyond time...(however)...it is not certain that anyone here and now is capable of this. (1986: 156)

So even this constant alternation has still to be achieved, as we try to find the right balance between the two "worlds". Kristeva suggests that now is a good time to attempt the project, however, as modern times and criticism have "opened up"—especially with feminism— the possibility of this enterprise:

After the flowering of mysticism, classical rationality, first by embracing Folly with Erasmus, and then by excluding it with Descartes, attempted to enunciate the real as truth by setting limits on Madness; modernity, on the other hand, opens up this enclosure in a search for other forms capable of transforming or rehabilitating the status of truth. (1986: 217)

Truth without judgement implies a new sort of truth which reconciles and encloses opposites, just as the semiotic realm itself contains positive and negative charges without the threat of negation.

Kristeva offers the most ardent as well as the most analytical thought on this subject of language which contains "life" rather than metaphor, or abstracted signification. As in her concept of the semiotic realm, a writing practice which attempts this integration is never set in stone: "Clearly, Kristeva's view of art is not one that is static and fetishized, but one that is above all dynamic: constitutive rather that constituted," (1990: 25) comments Lechte. He presents her project of integrated expression as "a living system that lives only on condition of being open to the other". This system is at once microscopic and cosmic. Attention is to be paid, to the smallest detail, in linguistics as well as in narrative description:

the lyrical meaning is contained in each of the minimal elements of the text, which thus condense, in microcosmic fashion, the totality of the

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message...even a simple invocation, a tonality of speech, are endowed with the semantic power of the whole. (1987: 92)

at the same time, the impossible linguistic phenomena of the true real is attained by the creative state of love, which accesses the logically inaccessible: "the intensity of love comes precisely from that combination of received jouissance and taboo, from a separation that nevertheless unites," which, by its visionary project, transcends the separation of "the body and the name":

The sensitive and the significant, the body and the name, are thus not only placed on the same level but fused in the same logic of undecidable infinitization, semantic polyvalence brewed by the state of love- seat of imagination, source of allegory. (1987: 90)

Regarding the potential in this way of body and name, once again we must return to the concept of the "self" as the primary illustration of unity in multiplicity which writing concerned with mysticism and gender has increasingly explored.

12 We have seen how the concept of the self became problematised by mysticism as well as by psychoanalysis. James suggested that there was a subliminal realm of every individual consciousness. Underhill and Sinclair explored the transgressions of boundaries which ordinarily constituted the "self", through supernatural and telepathic fictional episodes. Richardson, always conscious of her fictional character's "Myriad I am", also shifted her pronouns, sometimes in the middle of a sentence, between "I" and "her" and "you", especially in the later part of Pilgrimage. This is an area which has been further opened up by recent feminist criticism.

Psychoanalytic theory accepts the difficulty of a coherent language entirely representing the individual subject. Lacan, when discussing the unconscious, speaks of a "sliding of the signified beneath the signifier", as a constant dissolving and evaporation of meaning. He stresses that it is impossible to represent the entire being of the actual person who is trying to communicate in language:

Most of what I am spills over like water from an overfilled cup, from the "I" that appears in what I write or speak. Most of what I am can never be expressed in language. (Crowley 1992: 196)
Lacan expresses this by a subversive play on Descartes' infamous logic: "I am not where I think and I think where I am not" (ibid). Far from ensuring stability, Lacanian thought concludes that: "the 'I' with which we speak stands for our identity as subjects in language, but it is the least stable identity in language" (Rose, 1986: 54).

This difficult point of postmodernist criticism elides with one of the crucial and often debated concepts of mysticism, that of the dissolution of the self, the "I" which loses its identity when reaching mystical union with the godhead. The shifting of the subject previously believed to be fixed is a major part of Lacan's linguistic explorations, which also lead him to proclaim the realm of mysticism, to which he also assigns himself a place. Lacan sees woman's position as intrinsically more unstable and liable to a shifting signification of subjecthood. She (although "She" is therefore a far from stable concept) therefore has theoretical access to an unspeakable excess which is connected with sexual and spiritual pleasure, or jouissance. Her position is, he claims, directly relatable to the instability of language in containing her desires and expressing her being:

The concept of jouissance (what escapes in sexuality) and the concept of signification (what shifts within language) are inseparable. (Rose 1986: 76)

Lacan explicitly links the two drives of spirituality and eroticism, for example when discussing Bernini's famous statue of St. Teresa in mystical ecstasy. His main point, Rose suggests, is that represented- or unrepresentable- sexuality makes itself seen and heard through the guise of mysticism:

Lacan's appeal to Saint Teresa, whose statue by Bernini in Rome he took as the model for an-other jouissance- the woman therefore as 'mystical' but, he insisted, this is not 'not political', in so far as mysticism is one of the available forms of expression where such 'otherness' in sexuality utters its most forceful complaint. (1986: 76)

The origins of this suggestion have been discussed above: taking his queue from the quasi-erotic writings of those such as Patmore, Leuba and psychologists like him detected in women's mystical raptures nothing but a repressed sexuality. But we have seen how, though the discourses of spirituality and romance remain, to some extent, intermingled and problematized, writers such as Sinclair have sought to disprove the direct connection between mysticism and sexual repression. Instead, further
examination of the "amorous" text has revealed, rather than an erotic theme, an opening for the expression of multiplicity within the self. Rose points out that St. Teresa's own writings pick up on the shifting of subjecthood in the Biblical Song of Songs, which Kristeva also writes of, drawing attention to the same qualities of its shifting, multiple pronouns and addressing of subject and self, rather than the erotic implication of the text:

not on the level of the sexual content of the song, but on the level of its enunciation, in the instability of its pronouns - a precariousness in language which reveals that neither the subject nor God can be placed ('speaking with one person, asking for peace from another, and then speaking to the person whose presence she is'). (1986: 76-77)

There is a strong connection between the unsettling of fixed meanings and the shifting subject of modern criticism, particularly with regard to the feminist branch of gynesis. Mary Jacobus reminds us that "When the French talk of l'écriture feminine, they do not mean the tradition of women's writing that Woolf and Showalter have laboured to uncover, but a certain mode of writing which unsettles fixed meanings". (Eagleton 1991: 10):

In gynesis belief in the individual as a fully-conscious, rational, secure identity gives way to a "subject" which is unstable and constantly reformed. Kristeva uses the phrase "subject in process" to convey how "our identities in life are constantly called into question, brought to trial, overruled". (Eagleton 1991: 11)

If Woolf and Showalter did not prioritize this project, however, surely Richardson's writing came somewhere near. Yet Richardson also emphasised the experience of her own "being", the "huge egoism" of the "womanly woman". It is this expansion of subjectivity, rather than its extinguishing, which informs the most positive feminist exploration of both identity and sexuality. For example, Cixous writes of the multiplicitly within the individual subject, recognised "because from her within- for a long time her world, she is in a pervasive relationship of desire with every being" (Belsey 1989: 115). For Cixous, "woman" is equipped with the power of "breaking the rigid law of individuation" (Belsey 1989: 114), and this includes, again as for Richardson, the definition of sexuality:
the other bisexuality, the one with which every subject, who is not shut up inside the spurious Phallocentric Performing Theatre, sets up his or her erotic universe...the multiplication of the effects of desire's inscription on every part of the body and the other body. (Belsey 1989: 104)

Rather than focussing solely upon the sexual drives, the writing which we have been studying leads to a more open definition of desire, or love, which contemporary critical writing suggests is the key to understanding, and communication, the experience of mysticism as it has been understood this century.

13 We have already seen how the mystic's way of knowing is paradoxically negative, apophatic, "knowledge without knowing". But that desire of which Cixous and Kristeva write so consistently necessitates a desire to have knowledge of one's own being- however shifting and multiple-, which creatively undermines the patriarchal ideals of mastery and linear logic. In Knowing Women, Minsky concludes from her discussion of Lacan that:

Perhaps feminism could be the first form of knowledge to argue that self-knowledge, insight into our unconscious, is the only way to produce knowledge which is not reducible to the mastery of unbearable emotion and makes no illusory claims to have mastered the world. (Crowley 1992: 205).

Having acknowledged this aspect of desire, it must be said that the expression of mystical ecstasy does appear, in the hands of Irigaray, to be one of erotic self-dissolution: she describes the moment by unpacking a verbal ambiguity: "Mystery, me-hysteria, without determinable end or beginning" (1985: 192). In Irigaray's "Mysterique", God is the amatory force which allows the full expression and experience of the (feminine) self:

Thus "God" will prove to have been her best lover since he separates her from herself only by that space of her jouissance where she finds Him/herself. To infinity perhaps, but in the serenity of the spacing that is thus projected by in her pleasure. (1985: 201)

However, just as Madame Guyon's writing was shown by Kristeva to contain the potential for more than solipsistic passivity, the concept of desire as a new perspective for knowledge of self and other is stretched, particularly in Kristeva's
Tales of Love, to a new evaluation of creativity, and spirituality. Lechte is right to point out that Kristeva is fascinated by Christian art because it illustrates "a power of resurrection in signs" (1990: 38-9). It invites belief and participation in the onlooker as well as in the artist, thus redefining the boundaries of both. The idea of openness to change, even of the microscopic detail or disruption, is integral to this power, which underlines the positive creativity shown by those such as Sinclair and Richardson who have been receptive to literary and spiritual impetus, and were able to develop both by exploration of the self in writing. This is the basis of Kristeva's psychoanalytic vision:

As a psychoanalyst, Kristeva is working against a deformed subjectivity incapable of love...Kristeva proposes that the subject be understood as an "open system", This means that rather than thinking of the outside world of the other as a threat, we should treat it as a stimulus to "change and adaptation". Trauma, crisis, and perturbation similarly should be seen as the sources of an "event" in the life of the subject, something which broadens horizons, and not something to be denied or resisted with a resultant atrophying of psychic space. To the extent that crisis is absorbed into the psychical structure, the latter becomes increasingly more capable of love. The greater the capacity for love, the less the other becomes a threat and becomes, in his or her very individuality, a participant in an identity as "a work in progress" central to "the amorous state". (1990: 33)

We have continually found that the experience of such states is through experimental writing- creative in the every sense. Kristeva advocates this: "writing that is synonymous with the amatory condition- an experience at the limits of the identifiable" (1990: 32), as does Cixous, whose fictional texts "stretch the limits of the novelistic" (Shiach, 1991: 69). These limits, which had once been the borders of natural and supernatural, have now found experimental expression within writing itself. While never suggesting that the "subliminal" region of the mind can be wholly clarified by language, what Kristeva does suggest is that the experiences of the self can be explored, and to some extent, communicated to those who also possess an attentive state of mind. Loss is built into this scheme, as it has been in the traditional mystic scheme: "[should] we interpret love and lament as invocations issued out of the same reverse of incompleteness, failing, call for meaning. Love as
unacknowledged lament? Lament as unsuspected love?” (1987: 88). But, as Richardson's work in particular had anticipated, the position of those in despair can be transformed into the receptiveness of amatory celebration, bypassing the "proper" of masculine economy: "The amorous dialogue is tension and jouissance, repetition and infinity...Song dialogue. Invocation". (1987: 93)

Although this chapter has been concerned with the reception and development of mysticism by feminist critics, we have found that a watertight conclusion is, by its nature, inappropriate:

It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorised, enclosed, coded- which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are the breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate.

(Walder 1990: 323)

This is why the development of fiction writing has been of such importance in exploring and expressing women's experience of mysticism. The criticism examined here has echoed and further developed the trends which we have seen develop earlier this century. As has been suggested (and criticised), this may well produce a feminism that is apparently inapplicable to political action, concentrating instead on perception and "inner" life, but it could be argued that its true manifestation, like that of mysticism, would inevitably involve the political- just as the mysticism developed by these women writers has stressed the need for integration of the shift in perception that it brings. Irigaray's enigmatic conclusion about mysticism in the Speculum is that there is no inevitable split between inner and outer activity:

And if someone were to object that, with the Good thus within her, she no longer needs to receive it, she would reply in her logical way, that, for her, the one doesn't rule out the other. (1985: 202)

The mysticism which "she" epitomises is the "amatory" position of creative perception that has transcended boundaries, and genres, while at the same time illuminating them from within.
CHAPTER SIX

KNITTING PATTERNS: FEMINIST SPIRITUALITIES

We have seen how, through developments in fiction and critical interpretations of feminism, vision and illumination have flourished in the expression of mysticism; how a position of mortification and ineffability have given way to a shift in imaginative experience of the self and the fictional expression of the self's experiences which have enabled women writers to explore and develop mysticism in their writing. But how is the "new", the imaginative and the creative of use to current feminist approaches to theology itself, the discipline which has, traditionally, held the monopoly in speaking about mysticism and the mystical experience?

In Christianity and Feminism in Conversation, Regina Coll writes of the need for vision and imagination in the religious vision:

Imagination is not fantasy. It is a way of thinking, a way of knowing.

Imagination and reason are not enemies and must not be separated. (1994: 23)

Coll pinpoints the importance of imaginative vision(s) to marginalised groups in particular, who cannot easily "see" their place in society. Imagination heals divisions; through it, "we are able to make connections, see disjointures, bridge seemingly unrelated issues, and in the process, develop a new way of seeing" (1994: 23). As with the feminist criticism we have explored, the emphasis is on making connections and on the need to "develop a new way of seeing". Coll also advocates plurality: names (pl) of God rather than one man-made label. In the project of finding new names for God, the individual imagination is necessarily called into play:

Because metaphors both reveal and conceal, it is a kind of idolatry to use only one metaphor for God. To do so implies that we have captured what God is. We have boxed God in, so to speak. We have named God... to multiply metaphors for God is to acknowledge that God is beyond anything we may say. (1994: 41)

Traditional Biblical exegesis involved a pluralist approach to scripture: although paths of interpretation were strictly regulated, beyond the literal level, and in a sustaining relationship to it, was that of the imaginative interpretation. It was a
"region of the mind" which has gained in feminist theological importance again this century.

The gift of prophecy makes use of imaginative envisaging. We have seen how Richardson valued its imaginative potential over the position of the priest, bound by dogma. Cixous, too, writes of wanting to "forsee, to project". Feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether also employs the "prophetic principle" in her drive to liberate those marginalised by past and present religious structure. The principle comprises:

1) God sides with the oppressed; 2) dominant systems of power and powerholders are critiqued; 3) the vision of the coming Reign of God, and 4) the critique of ideologies including religion. (1994: 137)

Historical roots and liberating compassion for those without representation in the power structure of society indicate that imaginative prophecy has a significant place in feminist projects; political, theological and artistically creative.

Where the imagination is gaining importance today is in the realm of therapies: progress towards a wholeness involving the imaginative faculty. Rather than the cultivation of a purely affective dependence (as in Schleiermacher), or the hermetic intellectual system of psychoanalysis, the guided exploration of the imagination generates a plurality and individuality of response which has proved of physical and psychological value. Whereas spiritual traditions such as the Ignation Spiritual Exercises encourage a vivid imaginative response to set scenarios, "New Age" imaginative explorations of the inner self connect more strongly with the creative potential of prophecy.

Like the "impossible" dimensions of the female body in maternity, visualisation creates a paradoxical inner space where individual "reality" is revealed. The accessing of further imaginative reality is, as we have seen, often achieved by a use of language other than the linear. There is more emphasis on autonomy: "we do not want to assume any control over anyone's mind or body" (1992: 24), writes Phyllis Krystal in the aptly-named Cutting the Ties that Bind.

Volumes such as Crystal's, and Shakti Gawain's Creative Visualisation (1984) have accorded the way of the visionary some present-day recognition. This

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1 see Jantzen, 1995: 67-85 "The mystical meaning of Scripture" (Section heading)

2 see Coll, 1994: 137
development can be linked to the activities of female mystics throughout Western spirituality. Jantzen identifies a visionary voice of individual authority for medieval female mystics barred from the structural hierarchy of patriarchal religion:

Their construction of mysticism, their understanding of what spirituality is, was...quite different from that of their male counterparts...it was...an understanding which allowed a good deal of scope for visionary experience, on which female authority could be based. (1995: 155-6)

Creating an inner space, the visions of the medieval women mystics produced a creative voice that has remained with us through writing. The importance of this aspect of spirituality has been recognised by feminist theological thought today, integrating both critical and creative women's writing.

2 How can visionary imagination be connected to the relating of a life-experience which, if it is a female life, is likely to have been curtailed and enclosed, denied opportunities for experience and the means and authority to express that experience? The answer appears to be similar for creative women of all historical periods who have been placed in a position of marginality. Visions were a personal experience, prompted or accessed by marginality, which came in time to be marginalised themselves in mainstream religious tradition precisely because the creative and autobiographical authority they produced were threatening to the masculine status quo of hierarchical and monolithic doctrine. Jantzen further explains this potential paradox:

It was this rootedness in experience which made women mystics different from many theological writers and even many of the male mystics of their time...although there were considerable variations in women's experiences, when a woman wrote a book she based it squarely on her own experience, often of a visionary nature. Her male contemporary, however, was much more sceptical of intense experience and relied on it much less in his writing.

Furthermore, as men became increasingly threatened by the writings of female visionaries, they tried to disqualify visionary experiences as a possible source of religious authority. (1995: 159)
Visionary literature, too, has a long history, associated with the female religious voice:

*Visions literature:* From the twelfth century onwards, mystical texts by women who spent their lives in the seclusion of [German] convents began to gain wider circulation, attracting attention throughout Europe. In particular, Hildegard's [Hildegard of Bingen] texts combine conventional and innovative modes of expression to achieve a "celestial poetry". (Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature, 1992: 1114)

We have seen how the revival of interest in mysticism, together with the new slant of a psychoanalytic "talking cure", generated conditions which allowed women writers to express a visionary aspect of mysticism in the early twentieth century. Of course, tensions between the perception of women's roles and female spirituality are detectable in writers such as Underhill, Sinclair and Richardson, just as they were in earlier women visionaries who were writing in a patriarchal and misogynist society. We have explored these internalised difficulties, and the gradual shift in mystical expression in these women writers, in the preceding chapters. Though hardly persecuted as witches, there does seem to have been an amount of suppression within the critical canon of those who developed such modernist techniques as the stream of consciousness, particularly with its relationship to and possible aetiology in mysticism. But these links are made clearer again by growing feminist strength both in the academy and in spirituality, so that a reappropriation is taking its rightful course. The link to the medieval women mystics is one of unrecognised foundation:

It is one of the ironies of history that whereas by the end of the Middle Ages visionary women were for the most part suppressed, and were in grave danger of being executed as witches, the modern social construction of mysticism is closer to them than to the male mystics who undermined them. (1992: 1114)

Today, the links between autobiographically-inspired storytelling and the powerful visions channelled through the imaginative faculty are emphasised and developed by further reference to feminist theology. For example, Linda Hurcome, in *Dispossessed Daughters of Eve*, discusses the personal angle which is integral to a feminine perspective, and the ensuing tradition of imaginative storytelling:
Like the best of all myth and legend, it [feminist theology] comes from people's stories. You will not need to read very far in the wide-ranging field of feminist writing to discover a great store of wisdom and, more revolutionary still, an exciting store of strength and vision from women, both articulate and tentative, who are learning to tell their stories to each other... One of the women who wrote to us when we first imagined the need for this book said: "... I cannot abstract ideas from my own experience. Perhaps this is what the feminine has to contribute". (1981: 63-64)

Hurcome invokes the power of prayer to provide an imaginative opening, just as the earlier women mystics received their visions as a direct and personal experience of the divine: "Narratives by women are notable for their virtual absence in scripture, so for women in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, where the process is explicitly informed and enlightened by prayer, this emergent quality [of narratives by women] is even more strengthening" (1981: 63).

Fiction writing thus provides a missing element of spirituality, looking to the future as well as to what the past has omitted or suppressed: "The prophet sees what others may not, sees reality from another perspective, sees connections others miss, sees what is easier to ignore" (1994: 185). The active output of the new and "other" perspective fuses with the acknowledged practicality of referring through storytelling to an idea which cannot adequately be conveyed in factual or scientific language:

The idea of God to which Christian orthodoxy binds us is itself a practical idea. The stories of exodus, of conversion, of resistance and suffering belong to its doctrinal expression. The pure idea of God is, in reality, an abbreviation, a shorthand for stories without which there is no Christian truth in this idea of God. (J.B. Metz, in Johnson, 1994: 244)

The equation of stories with autobiographical experience becomes more vivid the more personal detail is put into the "fiction". This was certainly the case with Richardson's Pilgrimage. There is also a complementary strand of spiritual and biographical writing which concentrates upon other women's stories. I have mentioned Baron von Hugel's elucidation of mysticism (1908) through the biographical story of one woman mystic, St Catherine of Sienna. Perhaps even more
famously, the story of Joan of Arc casts the interlinked questions of vision, biography and gender into the arena of women's mysticism and writing.

Joan was a profound influence upon many turn-of-the-century and twentieth-century writers; Shaw, Vita Sackville-West and, later, Marina Warner. Though Joan left no written text herself, she was subject to both visions and voices, both explicit and obscure in their instruction and strategy. Despite the patriotic overtones of her story, reclaimed by modern political propaganda such as the French Nationalist movement, the story of Joan could be re-examined as a paradigm of the female visionary experience. For example, this is Joan's account, as Sackville-West quotes it, of the inception of her life as a visionary:

It was in my thirteenth year when God sent a voice to guide me. At first, I was very much frightened. The voice came towards the hour of noon, in summer, in my father's garden. I had fasted the preceding day. I heard the voice on my right hand, in the direction of the church. I seldom hear it without [seeing] a light. That light always appears on the side from which I hear the voice. (1955: 68: a statement recorded in Joan's trial)

The contents of the testimony which Sackville-West reproduces in her biographical study anticipate a feminist appropriation of the visionary from (or, perhaps, within) the auspices of a male-dominated religion. Joan is "in [her] father's garden", within the perimeters of the paternal property just as she retains the language and symbolism of the patriarchal church. But she perceives a spiritual presence which her father could not sense. Of course, Joan is in a vulnerable state, not only because of her gender, but because she is so young, and has been physically disadvantaged through her fasting. But one thing she is able to do, despite her later ignominy and imprisonment, is tell her story in her own voice, and Sackville-West emphasises the extraordinary power that autobiographical voice possesses:

The wealth of detail which we possess about the voices and apparitions comes to us at first hand from Jeanne herself...Jeanne's own full, unshakeable account given by herself to her judges at her trial tells us everything we want to know...her replies were frank and complete enough to allow us to form a brilliant picture of her experiences during those five secret years. Standing alone, a girl of nineteen, before the formidable array of judges of the
Ecclesiastical Court and the Holy Inquisition, she spoke as her voices had told her to speak,...never deviating from either the basis or the detail of her conviction. (1955: 72)

Sackville-West was one among many women writers at the beginning of the twentieth century who found a particular affinity with and inspiration in mysticism. She had a special interest in the mysticism of the female visionary, writing volumes not only on Joan of Arc (1936) but also on the two Saint Teresas in The Eagle and the Dove (1943). She was able to relate to these female saints so that her biographical studies of them were also a creative product of her own life. Sackville-West produced work in numerous genres, which often drew on spiritual impulses, from ("biographical") fiction such as All Passion Spent (1931) to the mystically atuned long poem The Garden (1946). The ability to relate creatively to visionary experiences of the past formed an important part of her agenda as a woman writer interested in mysticism, and makes explicit the revival of interest both in visionary phenomena and in the tradition of women mystics who endorsed visionary biography and autobiography in the past.

Not all mystics were visionaries, and vice-versa, of course, but the mystic, particularly the woman mystic, often seems to have been open to revelations of a potentially visionary calibre. The visionary of the past has often been female, forced by her gender into a position of marginality which encouraged her visionary life as other routes were closed to her. The visions were intercalated into biographical writings which have survived to inspire modern feminist theology, with its emphasis on the power of the imagination to provide a voice, historical(herstorical) and prophetic, for the oppressed and marginalised, and as an integral quality of theological praxis. An important bridge to this current interest in the visionary were those female writers who were equally drawn to visionary mysticism and the project of writing a (feminine) life, particularly under the explorative auspices of novelistic fiction. Biographical study of earlier female mystics was a natural complement, indicating the revival of interest in women's mystical tradition.

Visions and the power of the imagination, were, as we have seen, often acknowledged as a creative drive existing within the discipline of a religious structure (particularly in the case of Underhill), and if not a religious structure, within the
course of an "uneventful" life, from the conventionally restricted (Mary Olivier) to the newly independent though impoverished (Miriam Henderson). But, just as the medieval visionaries were often accused of witchcraft and magic, there is an undeniable "magical" element which inspired Underhill, Sinclair and Richardson (though with decreasing emphasis) and women writers contemporary to those who have been the main study of this thesis. In a variety of ways, magic, or magical thinking, is experiencing a revival in aspects of feminist spirituality involved in further elucidating the role of imagination in the transformative mystic's vision. This magic, or the female practice of it, is inextricably connected with witchcraft.

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the special powers of wise, older or simply unconventional women have often been associated with sorcery and evil, and such women regarded as witches...The fact that many women turn, as a matter of course, to traditional remedies for problems like infertility, or to hold a man's attention, provides ready evidence for accusations of bewitchment, and places additional inhibitions on women. On the other hand, women with special healing powers are respected and accorded high status. (Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature : 1992: 1141)

Visions and apparitions are associated with the impossible world of magic, and early women mystics who experienced visions were condemned as witches, if the authority of their creative voices became too powerful. Then the accusation of witchcraft crept in, although the definitions of who was a witch and who a female mystic were far from clear-cut. Jantzen explains that at the beginning of the mystical interpretation, scriptural study involved both the intellect and the imagination, and that there was no potentially damaging dichotomy between true and false visions:

Although mystical interpretations were not to contradict the literal meaning of the text, and were not to overstep doctrinal boundaries, the question, "But is it
true?" would not normally be the right question to ask of a proffered mystical interpretation of scripture. (1995: 245)

However the time arrived when, fearful of the implications of the untutored and untamed female visionary,

male mystical writers were increasingly asking... not simply "what might this vision mean?" but also "might this vision be false, or even have a demonic source?"...The increasing emphasis on the question of truth or falsity went along with an increasing preoccupation with the demonic. (1995: 245)

The association is a telling one: imaginative vision, particularly that of spiritual women, became increasingly associated with the false, the fictional, and the "demonic", while the truth was exalted as dogmatically absolute. Women's openness to personal mystical or visionary experience was seen by the witch hunters as wilfulness and weakness:

When a woman thinks alone, she is evil...they are more impressionable than men and more ready to receive the influence of the disembodied spirit...They are feeble both in mind and body...as regards intellect or understanding of spiritual things, they seem to be of a different nature than men... it is a natural vice in them not to be disciplined, but to follow their own impulses without a sense of what is due...She is a liar by nature...(The Malleus Maleficarum, quoted in Starhawk, 1990: 213)

Of course, suitable visionary evidence was appropriated by the hierarchical religious structure, just as witches were alleged to have their own distorted rites and rules. But later women writers had a fundamentally justifiable link and interest in the possibilities of the witch, and the magic that the witch was thought to evoke.

Perhaps the best known example of this sympathy of the modernist woman writers was Sylvia Townsend Warner's first novel Lolly Willowes (1926). It is the story of an unmarried woman, who, reaching middle age and retiring to live by herself in a small village (Great Mop), discovers an affinity with certain locals like herself, and identifies herself as a witch, profoundly attuned to nature and the psychic and physical healing nature offers. "Satan" describes the situation which allegiance to himself can ease and remedy: "Women have such vivid imaginations, and lead such dull lives" (1993: 234).
Townsend Warner's "Satan" character in Lolly Willowes is somewhat stylised, not in fact exhibiting any traditionally demonic qualities such as a delight in orgy or destruction. Interestingly, he is more associated with nature and the restorative powers of the earth, just as medieval witchcraft was originally associated with the nature god Pan, rather than the devil. The revelation of a spiritual presence in nature, does, of course, suggest pantheism, but also to the "indwelling" of the divine emphasised in panentheism, and the more general spiritual concept of immanence (rather than transcendence), both of which I discuss below. These are subjects which concerned Underhill, Sinclair, and Richardson, as well as their contemporaries like Townsend Warner.

The two qualities of imaginative vision and affinity to the earth are of importance not only to those who call themselves witches today, but also in the general tenor of feminist theologies. It is not the case that the two categories of witch and feminist theologian are wholly integrated, however. Although "witches" today are not excluded from academic structures, they are not easily accepted. For example, Starhawk, divinity professor at the University of Chicago, is recognised as a scholar and academic. Her texts are lucid and explanatory, while at the same time stressing the power of the imagination, particularly in bringing about an integrated culture and society. She sees "magic" as a putting into action of these idealistic visions, a praxis of imagination:

Magic has often been thought of as the art of making dreams come true; the art of realising visions. Yet before we can bring to birth the vision of an integrated culture, we have to see it. We have to see new images in the mind's eye, venture forth into a changed landscape, tell new stories. But the stories of estrangement have shaped our minds; how do we break free of them unless a new vision is already there to help us? (1990: 73)

Starhawk is not an idealist in the sense of believing in Platonic values outside the material and visible world. She emphasises a unity with existence beyond and before linguistic symbolism, supporting religious systems that stress the immanence or indwelling of divinity:

When we turn to the religions of immanence, whether we call them Witchcraft or Paganism or polytheism or spirituality...we encounter paradox. We
encounter...the all, the interwoven fabric of being, the dance, the weaver- we say- and the web of connection, the pattern, the spiral. "She,"... But She is before sex; She whose name cannot be spoken because She is the circle- before it is broken by a name that separates-out. (1990: 73)

By her rejection of a Platonic word of ideas, Starhawk attempts to heal the rift between psychological personae and archetypes and the discredited notion of the vision or apparition; it is, she suggests, the language describing such phenomena which is incomplete and liable to splits:

The concept of archetypes is itself a system of estrangement, derived from the Platonic notion that the world itself was not the real, but only a shadow, an imitation of perfect pre-existing forms. To a witch the world itself is what is real. The Goddess, the Gods...are ways of thinking-in-things about real forces, real experiences. (1990: 73)

Starhawk is associated with Matthew Fox, the former Dominican theologian whose "Creation Spirituality", emphasising nature, and an optimistic outlook, has attracted both approval and controversy. If Creation Spirituality does not mention a dark side to witchcraft, it is present in modern literature: Philipa Gregory's Wise Woman (1992), for instance, where herbal healing and questionable cursing exist side by side. This is a dualist perception of the witch, reflected in Nor Hall's study of female archetypes, the Moon and the Virgin:

In Proverbs...her [the old woman's] double nature as a wise one and witch is described in the words of an old man talking to his son: "Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman: that they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger which flattereth with her words". (1980: 213-4)

Of course, it is the male voice, again, which is describing the dichotomy. In contrast, at least one modern female writer casts the role of the witch as one of empowerment, her magic as the imaginative will to discover and create a sense of self. In Sarah Maitland's Book of Spells (1990) a young girl is welcomed into the home of some older women who, unlike her family, respect her ideas and feelings and encourage her to be herself by embracing what they describe as witchcraft. The capacity to hurt to do wrong is not denied but the emphasis is on freedom and acceptance.
'...Nobody can ever make anyone a witch, but you can be one any time you want to... All you need is to remember that you are a witch woman, full of power and strength, and then you can do anything you want. You can make things and break things and call storms and grow plants and heal people and hurt people. It's up to you.' (1990: 161)

When Clare does call upon her inner life as a witch, many years later, her "flight" is, it is implied, (although not unambiguously), a flight into her own imagination enabling her to find both peace of mind and practical resolutions to her problems. Other women writers have used the concept of the magical flight to extricate a heroine from insupportable male dominance: Barbara Comyns in The Vicar's Daughter for instance.

The title of Maitland's volume of short stories points to another aspect of "magic". Imaginative writing has the power to "entrance" and transport the reader, and writer, as much as any purported spell. The question as to whether such a magical activity could be said to come under the auspices of the mystical, could be addressed with Sinclair's definition of "new" mysticism in mind. Such a state, as opposed to Underhill's definition of magic, which is merely self-seeking, or Sinclair's of repressive neurosis, encourages concrete and altruistic activity such as the discipline of craftwork, or the creative expression of a compassionate message. Therefore the title of witch does not necessarily negate or vilify the imaginative vision or physical harmony. As in the earlier times which Jantzen writes of, the distinctions between such definitions as witch and mystic are not clear-cut, and the "new" mysticism of women writing may transcend such dichotomies altogether. However, magic ritual continued to fascinate Underhill, even after she had made a commitment to the Anglican Church, and both Sinclair and Richardson were interested in paranormal states of knowledge and consciousness. It is therefore worth exploring the concept of ritual that both writing and spiritualities have found valuable in order to express this new mysticism.
women...have begun to claim sacred space for themselves, to create rituals which emphasize their loyalty to each other and finally name the powers which men have found "anomalous" (i.e., nameless). (Kay Turner, "Contemporary Feminist Rituals" in The Politics of Women's Spirituality, ed. Spretnak, 1982: 222)

Ritual has been seen as a masculine domain; one that endorses elitism and hierarchy. Traditional Church ritual does not involve the laity except at moments of their own rites of passage; the service is not under their control at all. Liturgy and ritual are not, of course, interchangeable terms, but the two are often connected with a rigidly patriarchal structure. For this reason the woman writer exploring mysticism is often at odds with traditional ritual. Sinclair did not find an affinity with her own religious feelings in church (neither did her characters such as Mary Olivier, and even clergyman's daughter Gwenda Carteret preferred to satisfy her mystic inclinations in nature). Richardson understood the need for a religious discipline but did not support any organised religion except that of the (non-ritualistic) Quakers. Even Underhill had trouble with the organised liturgical aspects of religion at first, as she confessed to von Hugel. She later made a study of the subject, however in her volume, Worship. This late work shows a sensitivity to issues which could be seen as important to feminist theology today, such as lay participation, and respect for both language and silence. We have seen that the woman writer is often sensitive to the non-logical emphasis of linguistic ritual such as that discussed by Otto. Feminist ritual further develops this liberating angle.

A primary quality of feminist ritual practice, is, of course, a vivid use of imagination and creativity in order to experiment with and grow from the ritual practice which has gone before. Because of a need to redress imbalances, ritual is seen, like the magic of the witch, to be an exercise in awakening and empowerment, rather than (as with Schleiermacher), merely cultivating a feeling of vulnerable emotional dependence upon the divine. As Turner puts it:

Feminists are primarily at work revising the male-biased ideological bases of culture; some are now engaged in the creation of rituals to promote and sanction this serious turning away from the old to the new. (Spretnak 1982: 222)
220)... Asserting the right to ritual means as a source of power, vision, and solidarity is the symbolic corollary of equal pay, choice of abortion, domestic freedom, the establishment of women's businesses, etc. Successful and enduring change in the status of women will come only through the parallel transformation of symbols and realities. (1982: 222)

Turner stresses the political emphasis that creation of one's own ritual can provide. This is certainly one aspect of a project of empowerment. Referring to such controversial issues as the right to abortion indicates Turner has assumed that participation in feminist ritual reflects a certain political feminist ideology. However, this may be a divisive assumption. Ritual could be an important way of embracing pluralities of opinion, when the political is tempered by the symbolic and imaginatively poetic. The ultimate value of ritual is that it has the potential to access and enlarge spiritual consciousness prior to political decision, although some conclusions in the political arena will be seen as natural and necessary consequences. Political aspects aside, books of rituals, or the looser form of imaginative meditations for everyday life and for life events are a popular spiritual commodity today, from *Meditations for Women Who Do Too Much* to *Daring to Speak Love's Name*.

Ritual, in contrast to pure liturgy, does take account of sensory and sensual impressions, and feminist ritual in particular encourages its practitioners to celebrate the body as well as the imagination and intellect. Turner also recognises this aspect, suggesting it can empower the marginalised by reconnecting mental and physical.

Feminist ritual offers an imagistic revitalisation for women and a participation in the concrete, bodily expressive creation of new images of the feminine which helps alleviate the stress of liminality. (1982: 220)

Coll, too, notes the connection between feminist ritual practice and the idea of an "incarnate" word, inclusive of the body where patriarchal ritual systems are exclusive. Patriarchal hermeneutics, the hermetic system which has imprisoned feminine creativity, may confine itself to the word; feminist spirituality arguably comes closer to the Christian idea of "incarnate word" by the free use of ritual which pays due heed to physical functions and sensuality. In physicality they find again a sacred space, the space which is lacking in phallocracy. (1994: 175)


The blend of the imaginative and the sensory makes ritual approachable from any
stance which accepts the imaginative resonance of words and actions, from Catholic
dogmatic symbolism, to the "Sea of Faith" emphasis upon a "non-objective reality." The
inclusive nature of ritual, together with its power to access a sense of the spiritual
or mystical, has become available to feminist theology after a century in which
Underhill experimented, as a woman fiction writer, with its pre-ordained and magical
elements, leading to writers such as Richardson developing a "new" ritual of writing
and reading, emphasising detail, poetic resonance, and awe. The "elasticity" of an
original and creative approach to ritual echoes in its attention to detail, and its ability
to encompass physical, intellectual and imaginative experimentation, the "elasticity"
of the "sentence of the feminine gender" with which term Woolf praised Richardson's
Pointed Roofs in 1912. We have seen women writing mystical fiction shift the
emphasis of ritual from a set "threshold" preceding a spiritual experience, to a means
of expressing the mundane and the self as a spiritual experience. This emphasis is
echoed by feminist ritual today.

Acceptance of the physical in the practice of ritual points to the importance of
integrating body and spirit in a successful mysticism as well as a successful writing
practice. The realisation that a divine essence is "indwelling" in the individual soul or
psyche is a necessary concept in the awakening of the creativity of mystic writer. It
also leads towards a more incarnate concept of spirituality. A spiritual presence and a
physical presence are not always or ultimately easily to be differentiated.

The notion of God being immanent in the human spirit has been accepted in
Christianity as far back as Saint Augustine (and beyond): "Deus intimor intimo meo-
'God, more intimate to me than my deepest self' " and is still, Mary Grey suggests
(1989: 19), more pertinent to (particularly feminist) theology today. Divergent
viewpoints have continued throughout the twentieth century in the development of
religious thought. But pure contemplative thought has also centred itself upon an

5 See Cupitt, The Sea of Faith, 1980
6 Karl Barth's neo-orthodoxy, stressing the sinful nature of humanity and the
transcendent nature of the Godhead, John Robinson's emphasis on individual love and
freedom in Honest to God, for instance.
indwelling element of divinity, for example the Carmelite nun Elizabeth of the Trinity, who wrote, in 1902:

You carry heaven within you, you can be a Carmelite already because Jesus recognises a Carmelite by what she is inside, in the depths of her being.

(1986:12)

This spiritual tradition was continued throughout the century by later Carmelites, for example Edith Stein, who left writings explaining how her sense of an inner life and presence was not diminished by an enforced change of outward circumstances during the second World War, including eventual condemnation to the gas chambers.

Where the contemplative life is not followed in its most absolute form, a strong tradition of inward contemplation prior to imaginative expression is common in both feminist spirituality and in women's fiction writing. It also lends itself to the female biological metaphors of conception, gestation, and birth. While Mary in the New Testament "stored these things up in her heart", later visionaries also practised a long process of "brooding", in what Kristeva would describe as maternal space and time, prior to the production of an imaginative and often autobiographical text, born of a combination of life and thought. Early female mystics and visionaries who are particularly popular today also practised prolonged inward meditation before writing or their experiences. Hildegard of Bingen, for example, wrote:

Ever since I was a girl... I had felt in myself the strength and mystery of these secret and marvellous visions. Yet I revealed this to no-one except a very few people and the religious who lived in the same community as I; but right up until the time when God in his grace wished it to be revealed, I suppressed it beneath strict silence. (Scivias, in Hildegard of Bingen, an Anthology, ed. Bowie and Davies, 1990: 68)

Julian of Norwich took the same path of silence: "it required some twenty years before she could work out the full implications of what she had seen" (Pelphrey 1989: 17-19). When it came to the writing of her visions, Hildegard communicated her insights from a space of creative suffering. She emphasises the state of loss and liminality she found herself in when the prompt came for her to put her visions into words:
I refused to write them [her visions] until I fell upon my sickbed, pressed down by the scourge of God. So at last, compelled by manifold infirmities, I set my hands to writing. While I was doing this, I sensed, as I said before, the deep profundity of what was being set forth in these books. Recovering my strength, I raised myself up from sickness and brought that work with difficulty to an end, devouring ten years in the process. (Bowie and Davies, 1990: 68, 70)

Two centuries later, Julian of Norwich experienced vision, illness, a prolonged period of withdrawal (twenty years) followed by the creative relating of her story. And in the present century (1965), a writer of mystical and philosophical inclinations, Simone Weil, wrote to a friend of hers (Joe Bousquet, a poet and crippled veteran of the first world war) delineating his spiritual knowledge and growth in terms of a long gestation followed by transformation and birth:

for twenty years you have been repeating in thought that destiny which seized and then released so many men, but which seized you permanently...you have at least only a thin shell to break before emerging from the darkness inside the egg into the light of truth... When the shell is broken and the being ["Love"] is released, it still has this same world before it. But it is no longer inside. (1986: 65)

It would be wrong to imply that the experience of childbirth is wholly allied with sickness, suffering and prostration. Bousquet, after all, was a man, although his profession as a poet and his physical disability have aligned him with a position of linguistic and social marginality. Nevertheless, a certain level of withdrawal seems to encourage an eventual written account of the visionary experience. So, although Underhill wrote her fiction early in her adult life, gradually processing the inspiration she had obviously felt into a more factual presentation, Dorothy Richardson took some twenty years before finding the silence and peace to write of a far earlier period of her life with spiritual resonance, a similar time span to that taken by Julian to recount her visions. While Underhill had written fiction as an initial exploration of the subject of mysticism, which she then took many years to describe and refine, Richardson's contemplative vision was her fiction which in turn comprised the story of her own life, rather than reference to a plethora of (historical or fictional)
characters; this was a trend that continued. Women's writing had grown closer to the pattern of the woman visionary speaking of her own life after the gestation of contemplative withdrawal.

Richardson, through her autobiographical character Miriam, also noted that a certain relinquishing of "living" was necessary in order to write; she felt the sacrifice but nevertheless needed the space in order to exercise her creativity. Many of Sinclair's characters (particularly in that novel about approaches to the writing process, The Creators), voice the same necessity. Sinclair's writing is something of a bridge between the style and expression of mysticism by Underhill and Richardson respectively, and this is particularly the case with regard to loss: we have seen that Sinclair's work can be examined profitably in terms of the mystical process of purgation, including the loss of stylistic devices of novelistic realism. A feminist theological perspective takes the concept of loss and creation a step further, invoking loss that is part of childbirth. Thus, for instance, Johnson writes: "There is a contraction or concentration or infolding of the divine being in order to clear a space for the world to dwell" (1994: 233). Johnson works her biological image of a creative divinity around two quotations, one from Weil: "Creation is an Abdication," the second from the theologian Jurgen Moltmann: "God withdraws himself into himself" in order to make creation possible (1994: 234). Such a theologoumen, implying that kenosis [emptying out, giving] characterizes the very essence of God, points effectively to generosity rather than divine stinginess at the heart of the world... to be so structured that you have room inside yourself for another to dwell is quintessentially a female experience... So too is the experience of contraction as a condition for bringing others to life in their own integrity. (1994: 234)

Johnson suggests that the reality of internal spiritual or biological processes must be experienced before a communicable creative or spiritual concept can be produced from a place, and an act, of withdrawal. Sometimes, too, the creative process bypasses conscious memory, in which case there appears to be a literal "writing from the body" in the form of automatic script: the alleged automatic writing of Yeats' wife, for instance. The phenomenon is often mentioned in modern fiction (Margaret

Moltmann continues, "This self-restricting life is the beginning of that self-emptying of God which Philippians 2 sees as the divine mystery of the Messiah" (Johnson 1994: 234)
Atwood's *Lady Oracle*, 1976) and feminist critical prose, such as that of Cixous, who frequently describes herself as a channel, possessed by her writing. In order to understand more fully the writing that emerges in such a situation, a feminist theology taking account of the body would say that it is necessary first to be aware of the inner self as a spiritual entity, reflected by and indissolubly linked to the physical. Feminist spirituality makes a profitable use of female biology to this effect, symbolically balancing and deepening the journey of creativity and of life:

Many of the mythic stories and the lives of the "Great Goddesses" that have relevance for the women's mysteries are journeys into the depths. From a strict biological basis, this is no surprise as this function is held within the core of our bodies- to truly know ourselves we must travel within. (Vivienne Vernon-Jones, "The search for the beloved", in *Voices of the Goddess*, ed. Matthews, 1990: 180)

This concept of feminist theology accurately reflects the developments in both women's fiction writing and feminist critical practise which have re-emphasised the importance of a writing connected with the body and the self, and the particular feminine potential of both.

6 How is the experience of mysticism embodied in creativity that is sensitive to a feminist perspective? Powerful feminist myths such as that of an ancient matriarchy can, it is suggested, have the same psychological impact and empowerment as an acknowledged "historical" fact. In this way, the gap between imaginative vision and factual historicity is lessened in importance in the face of the spiritual impetus behind the supposed "event". This approach, fostered by feminist theology today, was anticipated by the experiential interests of William James, who so influenced Underhill and her contemporaries. What James drew from his studies in the varieties of religious experience, was that validity was, to a large extent, to be drawn from the psychological effect which the religious experience had upon the subject. In other words, empirical truth, such as James sought with regard to mysticism, was as likely to have been conceived by a "fiction" as by a fact. Subsequent work by Jung might even suggest that a fiction would have a greater archetypal resonance, therefore contain a more profound truth, than a documented event. Therefore the woman
visionary (mystic or fiction writer) may be in a position to envisage spiritual truths which have not previously been "seen" (by man). Feminist theologies give psychological credit to scenarios which had once been the province of fiction.

The "history" ("herstory"?) of the matriarchies proves this point. Naomi Goldberg notes the importance of internal images and truths in a discussion of witchcraft that stresses the need for validation of this "inner" and embodied spiritual space:

witches consider any thought or fantasy real to the degree that it influences actions in the present. In this sense a remembered fact and an invented fantasy have identical psychological value. The matriarchies, i.e., the times when no woman was a slave of any man, create visions of the pride and power women are working to have in their present lives. ("Feminist Witchcraft: Controlling our own inner space" in The Politics of Women's Spirituality, 1982: 213-4)

Goldberg makes potent use of Wittig's line in Les Guerilleres: "There was a time when you were not a slave, remember... or failing that, invent" (1982: 213):

Goldberg's statement about the "identifiable psychological value" of imaginative myth and historical fact is reminiscent of James' pragmatic approach to religious experience: a religious experience, James says, could be judged to have been true if it has had a psychological effect upon the person who has had the experience. However, if the spiritual path which makes use of psychologically empowering concepts such as the Matriarchy insists on recognising such concepts as firm fact, where no reference to historical veracity is possible, then an untenable fundamentalism arises:

The assertion of a mythic past as history and questioning the goodwill of those who doubt its validity constitutes an attitude that has much in common with the orthodoxy of Freudian psychology, fundamentalist Christianity, and other religions based on blind faith. (Sally Binford, "Myths and Matriarchies" in Spretnak, 1982: 547-9).

Insistence on the validity or invalidity of a resonant imaginative construct is, therefore, somewhat missing the point that our concept of history could be enhanced by accepting the psychological truth of an event which may be embodied first as a

\*\* see above, page 34 \*\*
vision and subsequently as an influence upon individual and collective spirituality. The writing of fact and fiction are, as was the writing of those such as Richardson who mixed autobiographical, and novelistic genres, enlarged by the questioning and transgression of boundaries.

Other (Christian) feminist theologians do not concern themselves so much with a postulated Time of the Matriarchies, but controversy has certainly been caused by imaginative inclusion of a feminine embodiment of Christian tenets in, for example, Edwina Sandy's sculpture of the "Christa", a crucified female Christ figure which was briefly displayed in the Episcopal Cathedral of St John the Divine, New York. The inclusive project of the sculpture was misinterpreted by those who saw only blasphemy:

Using the classic image of suffering, the crucifixion, Sandys presented a nude woman, broken and in agony ... Christa was a statement about the women's suffering and the inclusive nature of redemption. But it was a statement that caused conflict and resulted in accusations that such a portrayal demeaned Christ. (Coll, 1994:56)

Nevertheless, Sandy's imaginative work did also have beneficial results: "it was that redefinition that encouraged many women to new theological and religious insights" (1994: 40). The creative embodiment of spiritual or psychological truth can therefore expand imaginative empathy. This is a suitable direction for feminist theological thought to take, anticipated not only by the visionary writing of earlier women mystics, but also by the fictional explorations of mysticism and gender which women writing earlier in the century developed, substituting creativity for emotional and psychological dependence.

While creativity has become the watchword of feminist spirituality and mysticism, the dependence of emotional piety advocated by Schleiermacher, which heralded the romantic revival in religious philosophy, has also given way to relating and relationship. This feminist theological concept has been informed by linguistic and psychoanalytical thought this century. For some, such as Daphne Hampson, the concept of relating has become the only acceptable definition of divinity. For others, it is the way best able to express their spirituality and mysticism.
We have seen in the previous chapter how difficulties with the authoritarian and masculinist perception and practice of language have been examined, mimicked, and subverted by feminist critics and writers this century. The problem of an unyielding linguistic prejudice is even greater in traditional religious language. Religious exhortation is delivered "in the name of the Father, and of the Son..."; are feminist theologians therefore to conclude that religious language is implacably patriarchal? Moreover, if language in general, the delineation of (religious) experience by words, is inescapably masculine, as philosophers such as Irigaray have suggested, how, apart from the silence of the "mysterique", can a feminist approach to religious language indicate the nature of a mysticism which expresses itself in imaginative creativity and in relationship without an unequal power structure?

The problem becomes no simpler when we remember that relationships themselves often contain an imbalance of power and therefore language, particularly when it is between the sexes. Religious language reflects these imbalances:

it is precisely the fact that men have tended to be associated with that which is above, spiritual and "like God", whereas women have been associated with that which is below, of the earth, sexual and "unlike God" which lies at the heart of the problem. (Hampson 1990: 84)

Therefore, as Sara Maitland discusses, a wish to picture divinity as a completing or complementing of oneself with one's opposite in relationship, however much this is to be desired, may be fraught with overtones of sexism, prejudice, and inferiority:

I have a profound sense that at some deep level it ought to be right for women to describe immanence in terms of themselves and transcendence in terms of the other, the beloved other, in terms of male metaphors. For men, it would work the other way round. God can be imaged as rich and poor, as black and as white, as verb and as noun, as female and as male, according only to what the individual speaker is trying to relate about the relationship at that moment in time. But this cannot happen while either side of the polarities is socially known or experienced as "better", superior to, holier than or conveying power to, more than the other. (Feminist Theology, a Reader, ed. Loades, 1990: 156)

Feminist theologians such as Coll would agree that sexuality is a fundamental part of being able to relate as a whole person to others who are not oneself:
Individual awareness is not the essence of feminist spirituality. Because we are sexual beings, we are capable of relationships, of communication, of community, of communion. Sexuality has to do with our desire for communion, union with another. Our capacity for relationships is dependent upon the development of our sexuality. (1994: 181)

That the sense of self is defined and given value in relation to others in this way, has parallels with the Saussurian explanation of language as a set of signifiers given meaning by their relationship to and, importantly, difference from other signifiers. This wider application of relationship becomes more apparent when a single sexual relationship, or an overemphatic physical aspect of sexuality, is not "of the essence". Coll, in fact, would not quarrel with this suggestion, as the widening of the perception of "sexuality" to one of integration and fulfilment was her aim, rather than its elevation in a crude form to an all-important priority.

Women with a special interest in spirituality often emphasise the importance of relating. Pia Buxton speaks of this "female" quality while addressing a conference of enclosed women religious.

Women tend to relate to everything. If we see something beautiful we relate to it, if we hear of pain we go into relationship with it...we draw life inwards to a mysterious centre...women are tenacious of life, of survival. They can watch while things grow and cling onto a relationship with them. [Man's] energy is more focussed and concentrated; with women, energy is more diffuse...a woman will normally sacrifice achievement to preserve a relationship whereas a man will often put achievement first; women work by intuition, men by logic. (1986: 23)

Buxton's ideas may be better expressed by a substitution of the essentialist terms of "man" and "women" for masculine and feminine; gender as a construct rather than a biological given. There is no doubt, however, that the sentiments expressed here accord with the opinions of Richardson's autobiographical heroine, Miriam Henderson, throughout Pilgrimage, as well as those in much of Sinclair's fiction where her work examines women's ability to empathise and will in union with another. Theologians such as Coll have recognised this process: "Being spiritual is a way of being human. Becoming human depends upon immersion in a community, relating with others; we
do not become human in isolation" (1994: 182). Feminist theology has placed renewed weight upon the importance of relating.

In her article, "The Liberation of Christology from Patriarchy", Rosemay Radford Ruether describes the hierarchical Christianity still prevalent today, limiting both the speaking and writing of language and the numbers of those even given permission to do so:

Christ as the divine Logos is seen as the apex of a hierarchical social order baptised as Christendom. Coming forth from the Father, Christ reigns over the cosmos. He, in turn, is the font of both the ecclesiastical and political hierarchies of Christendom ...Women as subjects, as laity, as wives and as the image of the body, represent that which is to be ruled over by the male Christological principle in all these systems of dominance and submission. (in Loades, 1990: 144)

However, contrasting with this bleak structure, Radford Ruether offers an alternative Christology, one which has much more to offer those seeking a "hidden history" both in language and in the past:

In the mystic and millennialistic Christologies, by contrast, Christ represents a transcendent ground of being ...Christ is either beyond gender (i.e., asexual) or encompasses both sexes on a level transcendent to the split into separate genders and reproductive roles (i.e. is spiritually androgynous). ...All sex hierarchy is thereby overcome, and women may participate equally with men in the leadership of the community of the redeemed. (ibid)

This second kind of Christology is not only of particular relevance in a feminist/feminine theology of relating but itself relates well to the modern theologies which access the themes of equal relationship.

One such theology is that of A.N. Whitehead, which has become known as Process Theology. It does not set up an immutable structure but postulates rather that theological thought is by its very nature always in process, relating to that which has gone before as well as allowing itself to grow by present and future events and philosophical developments. Therefore the aspect of relating to previous and contemporary thought is essential in its make up. As an ongoing process, such a
Theology is non-exclusive and non-dictatorial. As Whitehead himself writes of "Process and Reality": "The world is seen as relational in character, with myriad forms of interconnecting units... myriad forms of interdepending eco-system" (in Grey, 1989: 15). John Robinson's Open Cast Theology suggests a similar outlook. In fact, the practice of "stream of consciousness" writing, which became so prevalent during the modernist period, bears considerable comparison with these theologies; especially in the ongoing, inclusive and receptive facets of such a writing practice. Petroff's comment in Body and Soul that "mysticism is not just one event but a succession of insights and revelations about God that gradually transforms the recipient" (1994:42) also indicates the proximity to such a theology of a mysticism which has developed beyond a transient, ineffable experience (the Jamesian definition) into a sustained, and, though still (auto)biographically experiential phenomena, communicable through creative and psychologically elucidated projects.

As Process theology is a system to be lived rather than logically condensed, hence Daniel Day Williams' proposition "To be actual is to be in Process" (in Grey, 1989: 16). Mary Grey, in Weaving New Connections, suggests that the self is actually defined by feeling and relating, using the Whiteheadian argument, much as Coll came to the same conclusion regarding the purpose of sexuality and relationship:

For there to be thought, Descartes had to presuppose a thinking subject. But in the Whiteheadian process scene the "self" is actually brought to birth, it becomes, by empathic feeling. But not the self as subject, but the self-in becoming; in fact, the many selves. What ensues is a total re-formulation and re-envisioning of what is meant by "self" "ego-identity", "soul and person"...Whitehead expresses the great "withness" rather than the being "overagainst" of God's "withness" to the world, of the "withness" of the body". (1989: 16)

Whitehead's thought stresses the positive and harmonious nature of a theology that emphasises companionship and growth, and minimizes conflict. Daphne Hampson suggests that this outlook may be a re-emphasising of another of William James' idea in the Varieties of Religious Experience, that women tend to retain a "once-born", optimistic outlook in their spirituality (see above, page 30). She links the concept to nurturing as well as to nature:
There is some evidence to suggest that Women's religion is of the "once-born" type, a religion in which life is seen to come from life. Men, by contrast, tend to find natural a religion that speaks of discontinuity— a discontinuity that may reflect the break he experiences when he leaves behind the world of mothers.

("Luther and the Self", in Loades, 1990: 221)

Hampson's thought owes a debt to the psychoanalytical theories of Dinnerstein and Chodorow, which suggest that girlhood involves a continuity between child and mother that is ruptured in boyhood. But the emphasis on empathy and continuity also has its roots in earlier religious thought, particularly the mystical concept of unity among individual souls within a praying community: this quality of mysticism became emphasised by the women writers who examined mysticism and anticipated the writing styles to come. For example, Underhill wrote the following passage in The Golden Sequence (1932):

Thus intercession is an activity of the spirit which is a member of this living society. ... For this membership gives to each unit a special quality, vigour, power; a power only given in order that it may be used and shared. (1932: 188)

The aspect of relating and relationship, then, permeates many levels of religious and theological discussion, and has links to discourses of criticism and philosophy. As a further dimension of this project, some feminist theologians have also examined the concept of relationship and spirituality— "a power...used and shared", in Underhill's words, with regard to divinity itself.

Elizabeth Johnson's text She Who Is contains some eloquent passages on the subject of relatedness within the divinity. Concentrating on the concept of the Trinity, she suggests that it is essentially "a three foldness of personal relation," which, importantly for feminists, "subverts duality into multiplicity". The Trinity offers a model of mutuality which offsets, Johnson suggests, the hierarchichal patrimony of Father and Son:

The relations may be modelled on human analogies ... Mutual relationship of different equals appears as the ultimate paradigm of personal and social life. Relation encompasses and constitutes the web of reality and, when rightly
ordered, forms the matrix for the flourishing of all creatures, both human beings and the earth. (1994: 222-3).

Johnson refers to theologian Anne Carr, who summarises these aspects of the Trinity as upholding especially feminist goals: "The Mystery of God as Trinity, as final and perfect sociality, embodies those qualities of mutuality, reciprocity, co-operation, unity, peace in genuine diversity that are feminist ideals" (1994: 223). For Carr, the triune symbol is a "critical prophecy in the midst of patriarchal rule".

In addition, Johnson points out that although a concept of trinity and relationship seems to offer hope over and against the projection of a monolithic religious being, there is room for relationship even within the language of traditional religious philosophy, which Johnson describes as "the highly specialised scholastic language [which] reflects the disparagement of reciprocal relation characteristic of patriarchy in its social and intellectual expressions" (1994: 225). Johnson quotes Aquinas to illustrate this point:

relation really existing in God is really the same as His essence, and only differs in its mode of intelligibility...in God relation and essence do not differ from each other, but are one and the same. (1994: 227)

The mystical paradox of the fundamental inexpressibility of such things in language (ineffability) returns again here, but encourages an inclusiveness and relationship around and between different terms. It is also a linguistic reflection of the theological concept of *panentheism*, which Johnson describes as "God in the world and the world in God while each remains radically distinct" (1994: 231). Such a belief, although it has echoes of pantheism, does not propose the eventual dissolution of individuals, nor the complete identification of a creator with creation; thereby retaining a sense of relationship within a wider mystical unity. This is a development from the creative thought that prompted writers such as Richardson and Sinclair to propose the identity of the self and a mystical union with a spirituality which surrounds but does not obliterate, or become subsumed within, the individual personality. As Johnson writes, within this scheme of things, "the absolute difference between Creator and creature is encircled by God who is all in all," or in other words;"relation as the principle of self-distinction" (1994: 232).
To understand, as Johnson does, the act of relating as an essence, as synonymous with being, is to push both grammar and concepts of being to new dimensions. Johnson herself admits that the concept of being has not always been helpful to those advancing a feminist project:

to most Western minds today the language of being connotes something static, limited, abstract and impersonal, and thus unfit to signal the dynamic and inherently relational nature of incomprehensible mystery. At first glance it certainly seems of limited usefulness in bringing forth speech about God coherent with feminist reflection. (1994: 236)

Yet the concept of being does have a greater and more positive potential if it is seen as an active rather than a passive state; to which, linguistically, verbs are more applicable than nouns:

Predicated of God, being symbolises sheer livingness...a code word for God as source of the whole universe, past, present, and yet to come, and as power that continuously resists evil. In this light the notion of being has a contribution to make a feminist discourse about God... ... being can be articulated as a *puissance*, a force that empowers resistance to evil and radical suffering. (1994: 236-7)

Where there is a more passive interpretation to this state of "being", it is one of amazement rather than acquiescence:

the notion of being arises from amazement at the world, from wonder that anything exists at all. This wonder assumes the character of a "metaphysical shock" when the possibility that there might have been nothing at all, including the one who is doing the wondering, dawns. (ibid)

This is a state of wonder which Richardson especially captures in *Pilgrimage*, she and Miriam often express amazement at "current existence, the ultimate astonisher," that there should be anything at all, anywhere. In addition, a concept of being which is interpreted in the panentheistic sense prevents referral solely to a transcendental entity above all things; though Johnson sees "being" as enfolding all that is , so the

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10 a concept much used by Julian of Norwich and highlighted by those who write about her visions today, Grace Jantzen, Robert Llewellyn, Sheila Upjohn, for example
linguistic reference to a transcendental signifier is not reinforced by this enlarged interpretation of being:

God who is pure being transcends any genus, any concept, even being itself if that be considered an overarching category. The horizon itself cannot be present within the horizon; the limit by which everything is defined cannot itself be defined by a still more ultimate limit: "God is not in any genus." (1994: 239)

Many theologians, also, prefer to use a predicate nominative "to be", placing an emphasis upon the dynamism of being. Catherine LaCugna translates the Latin term "esse" in this way, as does William Hill; John Macquarrie rephrases God's being as "letting-be". All these approaches avoid reference to an immutable and monolithic noun, allowing for a more dynamic and experimental form of expression:

Since a noun presupposes that we comprehend what we are referring to, cautions Abraham Heschel, we should avoid nouns in speaking of the nature of God. We therefore have no nouns by which to describe the divine essence; we have only adverbs by which to indicate the ways in which God approaches us. (1994: 240)

Other theologians too have emphasised the dynamic and mutual aspects of being which transcends the language which approaches it. Mary Daly, for example, has traced the century's developments in this field of thought and related them to her feminist project: "a dynamic that makes us aware of the Verb which is infinitely personal, who is non-reifiable, present and future in the depths of our present-future I-Thou" (in Spretnak, 1982: 361). The lack of easily articulated communication about these qualities- givenness, wonder, and an underlying unity, leads, as well as individual creative expression, to the apophatic knowledge of religion and, particularly, mysticism which is in itself a paradox: "For the not-knowing that comes at the end of thought pursued to its limits is actually a deeply religious form of knowing" (Johnson 1994: 240). This wonder combines creativity with ineffability.

The implicit lack within language which renders it unable to approach religious thought comprehensively has an analogy in the marginalised position that women and other liminal groups have long been in; lacking a coherent "voice" within a society where they are felt to be lacking, women are, as Irigaray points out, able to
access mysticism, by the very fact of their marginalisation and a language which is inadequate to their needs. The very position of marginality may render the marginalised subject more sensitive to apophatic knowledge, and more able to recognise creative expressions which do not monopolise what is communicated. Of course, this is not to imply an acceptance of political impotence, for, as Nichola Slee explains, the concept of marginalisation must itself be related to wider implications and contexts if it is, as she believes it should, to be retained on some level:

I do not entirely agree with [Daphne Hampson's] conclusion that "the paradigm of the sacrifice of power, of powerlessness, is inappropriate to women" in an absolute sense, but certainly it is a model which requires very careful use and it is one which needs to be set very firmly in the context of a wider network of theologies of the cross, including models which speak of the cross as an act of freedom and justice against exploitation and domination. (1991: 20)

However, one area where marginalisation has allowed a freedom and power of vision to communicate vision and mystical implication is in the realm of creative writing, for as "fiction", marginalised in the masculinist world of fact and history, creative writing, especially that which utilises the feminine spiritual perspective, is and has been able to "embody" mystical concepts, just as earlier women mystics found a voice through the telling of their visions at a time when the doctrinal explorations of spirituality had been exclusively annexed by a male ecclesiastical hierarchy.

When looking at marginalisation within religious language itself, feminist theology turns to the "Holy Spirit", a traditional Christian concept which often seems to go as unmentioned just as the female voice has, within the intellectual tradition, remained unheard:

Faceless, shadowy, anonymous, half-known, homeless, watered down, the poor relation, Cinderella, marginalised by being modelled on women - such is our heritage of language about the Spirit. (Johnson 1994: 131).

The reintegration of the Spirit in traditional theology would, Johnson suggests, encompass all the aspects of relating in theology, such as the ongoing Process of Whitehead's theological thought and, the inclusive yet non-consuming concept of panentheism:
the term's elusive and dynamic qualities enable it to express human experience of God who transcends all things while yet remaining in communion with all of reality in a dialectic of presence and absence that knows no bounds. (ibid)

The result of considering the Spirit, the "She Who Is" of Johnson's title, in terms of language and writing, would also describe that creative exploration of mysticism which is the subject of this thesis: "Such speech is not a creation of rigid, logical rules, but of disciplined theological imagination." (1994: 133).

9 Returning to a more concrete level, it is on a basis and model of friendship that feminist theology has developed a praxis of relating. As Pia Buxton suggested (above), relating is an integral quality of feminine spirituality. Johnson agrees that friendship is of the essence in a feminist theology: "Women typically witness to deep patterns of affiliation and mutuality as constitutive of their existence and indeed of the very grain of existence itself" (1994: 225). The psychological theories of Chodorow and Jean Baker Miller, as well as the sociological examination of women's and men's language of interaction by, for example, Deborah Tannen, have elaborated upon this same theme. When sexual politics are not an issue, friendship becomes an essential form of communication and of definition of the self, as the Benedictine Paula Fairlie writes of her own monastic experience:

The gift of friendship is the greatest any human being can bestow on another, because it is the loving sharing of the most personal and intimate in one's being. But it can never be a total communion, ... love freely given and freely received is the only incentive to constant reaching out; and we need human love to become ourselves. ("Foreshadowings", Dame Paula Fairlie, in Boulding, 1982: 118).

Fairley does not make explicit whether her experience of friendship is exclusively amongst women, but critics such as Irigaray have suggested that single sex groups of women do indeed have a different and more creative method of articulation and communication which does not depend upon the unspoken power structures and struggles of a masculine language. Germaine Greer contextualises this idea from her own experience as a convent school girl:
I'm very fond of women in groups. I want to see women happier in their groups and less apologetic for them...when you're within convent walls or college walls then the women's innate creativity has to come out. (in Bennett, 1991: 88)

This is not to suggest that friendship between women, even in groups where ideas are permitted to flow freely, are always creative and trouble-free. Underhill depicts a group of women in *The Column of Dust*, who are ostensibly involved in metaphysical speculation, but in fact are uninterested in those women (particularly Constance) who do not conform to a strict and culturally encoded moral structure. Too often women in Underhill's fiction are divided into unrealistic categories of good and bad. Hester and Elsa in *The Grey World*, for instance. But implied by and beyond this representation lie the deeper implications of an ethos of friendship; less easy to describe than either a formal group or a male-female relationship, but ongoing and mutual, such as Sinclair's Edie and Anne Majendie in *The Helpmate*, and Miriam's friendships with Amabel and Jean in *Pilgrimage*. However, perhaps more important in the work of these writers and the feminist theology which has subsequently developed is an emphasis upon knowing spirituality itself, a sense of mysticism, as a friend; this is certainly the case for Underhill and Sinclair, and even more for Richardson. It is echoed in theological language by Sally McFague, the theologian who most explicitly describes friendship as a metaphor and model for God. McFague sees friendship as a 'divine companionship' which is able to combat potentially annihilistic xenophobia. This divisive xenophobia is linked with partition of and fear of the "Other". She compares the 'companionship of those who share meals with all' with the mentality promoting, for example, the escalation of nuclear weapons. Such behaviour as this she believes, is "extreme xenophobia, a fear of the stranger, the other, the outsider". (1990: 270)

McFague's thought extends towards spiritual acts of friendship (prayer, which she conceives in terms similar to Sinclair's empathic "willing") and expressions of ecological concern, which encompass and transcend mere appreciation of nature (again more similar to panentheism than pantheism). Given the emphasis upon friendship these projects, she suggests, will have an underlying tenor of optimism rather than obligation, echoing the Cixousian "gift" of friendship and connection,

In fact, rather than despair, the feminist theological response to pessimism is often the expression of anger for the purposes of rebuilding friendship and the capacity of relating:

When anger is a healthy response to the violation of herself, a woman may draw on the energy of that anger to reclaim herself and to develop her ability for intimacy. In the process, she will mourn the diminishment of herself and of her relationships that her anger revealed. (1994: 121)

The subject is also addressed by Carolyn Osiek: "with any repressed anger, the result is ... inability to pray or to relate in a trusting and loving way with anyone" (1994:119) and Beverly Harrison, "Anger is a mode of connectedness to others and it is always a vivid form of caring... the power of anger is the work of love" (1994, 119). These references reinforce the fictional exploration of women such as Sinclair's Harriett Frean, who was unable to relate with her true self because of an unexpressed rage which only became apparent in an anaesthetised hallucinatory rage prior to her death, and of course Anne Majendie in The Helpmate, whose inward-turned rage cut off her capacity for friendship and relationship in a like manner. In contrast, Richardson's Miriam Henderson does express anger as one emotional energy amongst many with which she explores her life and relationships, as does Constance towards the end of Underhill's Column of Dust, who finally vents her rage against a misogynist society before working out her spiritual destiny. "In order to maintain relationships, women have denied their anger or have turned it on themselves. Few women ever asked whether it ought to be transformed" (1994: 120).

Friendship, has a redemptive quality in the thought of both feminist theologians and the writers under consideration in this thesis. The act of writing itself becomes a manifestation of friendship where there is a desire to relate personal vision to a mutually receptive and perceptive readership. A quality often attributed to Julian of Norwich is that she regarded both God and her potential readership as friends: "even-Christians". The metaphysical implications of this outlook results in a positive

from Carolyn Osiek, Beyond Anger, On being a Feminist in the Church. New York, Paulist Press, 1986. 49.
inclusion in the process of writing. Mary Grey explicitly associates a theology of friendship with the "bonding and solidarity of women":

the past is not lost to us. Although in a philosophy of Process there is a "perpetual perishing" yet in the concept of "objective immortality" we can recover and reclaim those strengths of empathy, interrelatedness and interconnection, to which the bonding and solidarity of women have been witnessing...the negative modes of dependent nurturing can now be transformed. (1989: 25)

Therefore writing such as that examined in this thesis is another method of utilising the concept of friendship in order to transcend the negative events of history and the temporal and spatial distance by which friendships should, perhaps, not be bound.

Related to the ethos of friendship extolled by many feminist theologians, is that regard for details, not usually considered important or of the essence in themselves, which the mystic, the writer of ecrirure feminine, and the feminist critic all seem to accord a compassionate attention. We have seen the relevance which details hold for Cixous; with her myopia she sees herself most at home in the "kingdom" of details, and that the writers under discussion in this thesis have a similar affinity for details. A "feminine" eye for details, whether material or emotional, marks out many of the female mystic writers of previous centuries (Julian of Norwich, Thérèse of Lisieux). Such an outlook was echoed in, particularly, May Sinclair's description of a child's viewpoint when she described Mary Olivier attempting to realise everything she sees as "sacred and holy" as a very young girl. Sinclair implies that it is this childlike reverence which grows into a search for metaphysical and spiritual truth. The link between childhood and femininity must obviously not go unquestioned, but the marginalised position of women and children within a masculine society, and the continuity of feminine psychological development from childhood to adult enables a detailed childhood perception to illuminate later feminine spiritual understanding. This is, therefore, a component of that writing by women who explore, in creative vision, the mystical implications of their experience.

Vita Sackville West, in her study of Joan of Arc, noted a tendency to details in the life of this saint and other female visionaries:
her apparitions sometimes came to her in the guise of minute things
(*quantitate minima: sub specie quarumdam rerum minarum; minimus rebus*). Mr. Maclaurin comments, with apologetic cynicism, that he "hates to suggest that these specks before the eyes may have been the result of toxaemia from the intestine induced by confinement and terror". M. Marcel Hebert makes a more interesting contribution to the subject by drawing a comparison between Jeanne's statement and that of Saint Rose of Lima, who saw Jesus in the size of a finger. (1955: 417)

External and miraculous details on a small but cherished level are on a continuum with the acceptance and attendance to the experience of the marginalised characters such as Clare in Sara Maitland's "Let us now praise unknown women and our mothers who begat us," who, as a child, is used to having her observations ignored. These who do listen to her are the "witches" who give her the confidence to trust to her own imagination and spiritual vision: "she told them lots of things that she had never told anyone else, and they listened and discussed them and were interested, but not pushy." (Maitland, 1990: 182) The care with which such events and experiences are related also have, in their mystical and inclusive drive, something akin to the state of "being in love", as Dame Paula Fairlie suggests; a state where the insignificant and the commonplace have illuminatory resonance: "when one's senses are sharpened and the commonplace becomes full of glory"[11](in Boulding, 1982: 105).

11 A final facet of relating, which has also become of great significance in feminist theology, is that of relationship to the earth. "Sacramentality celebrated the ability of things of this world to make God present, or at least to make us aware of that presence," (1994: 184) writes Coll, voicing an ecological concern which theologians such as Radford Ruether have made a primary concern:

The material substances of our bodies live on in plants and animals, just as our own bodies are composed from minute to minute of substances that once were parts of animals and plants, stretching back through time to prehistoric ferns and reptiles, to ancient biota that floated in the primal stages of the earth...[Our kinship with all earth creatures] spans the ages, linking our

Underhill, too, refers to this phenomenon in *Mysticism* e.g., 1993: 258
material substance with all the beings that have gone before us on Earth and even to the dust of the exploding stars. (Gaia and God, an Ecofeminist theory of Earth Healing in Coll 1994: 183)

More alternative spiritualities such as that of the Findhorn Community, inspired by Eileen Caddy, herself a visionary, which pays an extreme attention to the spiritual qualities of the Earth. Sally Gearhart, by contrast, perceives a re-sourcement of energy, on all levels, as essential to the recovery of power within individual (women) who have been cut off from their own potential, just as the ecological energy sources have been neglected or depleted by a dislocated and imbalanced human power structure:

there is a source or kind of power qualitatively different from the one we have been taught to accept and to operate with...In a world where every nook and cranny has been filled with superficialized and competitivized external energy, it is no wonder that any internally sourced power has had trouble being expressed- much less valued. ("Energy Re-sourcement", Sally Gearheart, in Spretnak, 1982:196-7)

An appreciation of the earth, and of nature, is present in the writings of Underhill, Sinclair and Richardson. This is not an unusual sensibility, of course, but where the emphasis of feminist spirituality does stress a connection with the earth, there is a connection in a broader context of an acceptance of physical "embodiment" and a web of creation out of which , or out of the body of which, creative writing finds its voice, rather than from a linear edifice which does not acknowledge the all-encompassing power of natural and spiritual "creativity".

12 There is a paradox at the heart of the connections between relationship and creativity, especially creative writing. Writing necessitates a certain amount of individuality and withdrawal, however strongly the language used refers to the importance of relationship of word, phrase, and character within a text. Feminist explorations of the state of autonomous celibacy, or being a "spinster" also have a place in this context.
Much has been made of psychological investigations into the development of identity deriving from separation (male) or unbroken connection (female) with the mother and all subsequent relationships. Eric Ericson also describes how: as far as men are concerned, an identity based on separation and independence precedes intimacy, whereas for women intimacy goes along with identity...men's identity forged in relation to the world and female identity aroused by relationships with others. (Cline, 1994: 114)

Cline, in Women, Celibacy and Passion, explains that even the definition of autonomy can be divided between a masculine and feminine interpretation; the feminine perception implies a much greater sense of "connected" autonomy, i.e., a strong definition of the self through a process of relationship with others, whereas a masculine view would require far more of a total abstention from intimacy, and a consequent substitution of power over others:

The male understanding of autonomy which is seen as taking control of one's life, or gaining control over other people, a method of achieving power or status, is seen as normative. The female interpretation of autonomy, of prioritising oneself within a context of intimate relationships, is seen as departing from the norm. It is only a small step from men and women's understanding being seen as different, to women's interpretations being seen as deficient. (1994: 114)

Such a model of "connected", feminine autonomy is not only close to twentieth-century theories of language (Saussurian signification), but to the mystical ideal of illumination and union through the initial stages of loss (of structures which imprison rather than define the self) which writers such as Underhill, Sinclair and Richardson attempt to convey through a similar project of redefinition and reconnection.

Cline's book is not fundamentally a theological work, but she admits the long-standing connection between spirituality and celibacy. Rather than investigating the spirit of tradition Christian religious orders, she draws attention to other religious groups who have upheld an ideal of celibacy for an explicit purpose both of living a spiritual/mystical life and upholding sexual equality. Such a group were the Shakers, whom Cline describes in detail. Their primary aim, she suggests, was to create an
alternative social structure to that of the nuclear family, which was felt to be unfair and biased against women. The opportunities for spiritual growth afforded by such an organisation were similar to those explored by the writers under discussion in this thesis, particularly Richardson, who drew close to and incorporated into her writing the Quaker community where she began her life as a creative writer. Although Underhill and Sinclair do not explore such an idea specifically, the spiritual "connected autonomy" (Cline's phrase) of Underhill's Cathedral-building community in *The Lost Word*, and Sinclair's autobiographical and fictional depiction of working in an ambulance team during the war, capture and explore something of the same ideal of expressing creativity and spirituality away from the normal power structures of society. The writings which describe these experiences echo their discoveries of the possibility of mutuality and individuality. Such investigations are in turn continuing in feminist approaches towards more democratic approaches to theology and theological structures (as in the work of AN Whitehead and Sally McFague).

13 Before concluding, we should examine the potential dangers of a feminist embracing of the prophetic and creative imagination. The first of these is a failure to be heard in a patriarchal society which affords power to dogmatic ideologies but marginalises the "Other" of the imagination. Feminist theologians are aware of this disadvantage; Linda Hurcome likens the fate of such a feminine spirituality to that of Cassandra, destined to speak prophetic truth but never to be acknowledged, due to her "failure" to fulfil the economic, and self-injurious transaction of the masculine society within which she lived and spoke:

Apollo, God of light and of rational thought (in fact, one of his other names is Loxias- the Word) is said to have appeared to the Trojan princess Cassandra and promised her his gift of prophecy if she would lie with him. Cassandra accepted Apollo's gift and promised her body to him. When the time came for her to fulfil that promise, she was terrified of Apollo's great heat and light and went back on the bargain. Apollo, angered, took away not his gift of prophecy, but Cassandra's credibility, condemning her, until her death, always to see the
truth and tell it, but ensuring that no-one would ever believe what she prophesied. (1981: 1)

For Hurcome, Cassandra is a literary forerunner and a symbol of those women visionaries who, it is deemed, speak too much, or who have no chance to speak at all: Cassandra is our sister and our symbol. Poised somewhere between the age-old figure of the nagging woman and the more tragi-romantic descriptions of female obscurity - the many flowers "born to blush unseen" - she serves as a parable of women's absence from cult and history-making. (1981: 1)

We have seen that through the medium of fiction writing, women have found a voice that has been successfully heard in a marginalised genre which does not pose an overt challenge to masculine spiritual authority. However, the drawbacks of Cassandra's life are liable to be internalised, with the result that an imbalance can be created in the woman visionary which does not facilitate communication of her vision.

In the Second Sex, for example, the woman mystic is shown by Simone de Beauvoir to have externalised her psychological position of marginalisation and dependency into a passive relationship with a perceived deity, which, de Beauvoir explains, is merely another pattern of the dependency upon an unreal masculine omnipotence. By adhering to this model of spirituality, women deny themselves their own intrinsic vision and prophetic voice:

Love has been assigned to woman as her supreme vocation, and when she directs it towards a man, she is seeking god in him; but if human love is denied her by circumstances, if she is disappointed or over particular, she may choose to adore divinity in the person of God Himself.... Woman is habituated to living on her knees; ordinarily she expects her salvation to come down from the heaven where the males sit enthroned... it is a matter of the salvation of the loving woman's contingent existence through her union with the Whole embodied in a supreme Person. (1960: 361-2)

For de Beauvoir, the direction of women's liberation and identity lies in unmitigated social and political activity: "There is only one way to employ her liberty authentically, and that is to project it through positive action into human society" (1960: 369). However, this may be to lose the visionary powers of Cassandra altogether. But imagination must not be allowed to reign without reference to a world
of social and political activity, if only to acknowledge their existence and influence upon language and imagery. The pitfalls of an unbridled imagination are, Sian Miles suggests, a lack of expression and connection to the outer world of limits:

The imagination tends to consecrate, sanctify and privatise experience... Left unbridled, the imagination leads away from truth. It brings out old thoughts, old grievances to mull over or new fantasies to play with and in returning to them, desires to dominate them. (1986: 56)

Miles' words are taken from the introduction to an anthology of the work of Simone Weil. Weil is well known for her powerful intellect and her spiritual insights, restoring a philosophical discipline to the imaginative power that Miles pointed out would benefit from contact with a logical and coherent structure. However, Weil herself could be seen as demonstrating shortcomings in the integration of her human qualities with the redoubtable excellence of her intellect. Investigating the metaphors of consumption and of light in Weil's life and writing, Judith van Herik suggests that Weil's inability or unwillingness to address the problem of physical consumption of energy, or of total participation in a religious discipline (Catholicism, which is based upon a sacramental consumption of the divinity), and, ultimately, the individual potential of her own biological life, lead to her own death; the self-destruction of another Cassandra. "Looking is Weil's sensory image of renunciatory salvation and eating of destructive satisfaction," writes Van Herik:

Light, unlike food, is not harmed when we receive it, for we cannot grasp or change it. We can only let it pass through or obstruct it, let it enter our eyes or turn them away. Weil examines relationships between light, eyes, the sun, and food with minute care... The remedy for the human desire to devour anything edible is to find a mediator analogous to chlorophyll, which confers "the faculty of feeding on light". She takes this further: "There is only one fault: incapacity to feed on light." "Grace represents our chlorophyll". When one refuses to eat, looks and waits, grace comes from above like light to feed the soul. (in Atkinson, 1987: 273)

Weil died because she denied her need to consume, refusing more food than would be allowed to her compatriots during the Nazi Occupation (it could be argued that this gesture was neither narcissistic or power-seeking). The refusal to accept her
own physical processes and limits, was just as deadly in curtailing the spiritual vision which Weil tempered and articulated through her intellect. Indeed previous centuries have revealed a consistent link between feminine spirituality and the denial of the need, especially the need for nutritional consumption: Holy Anorexia, in Carolyn Bynums' words. The fundamental problem with prophetic and visionary imbalance, is, therefore, the lack of integration and discipline which a theology of relating to the embodiment of the spiritual life in physicality and intellect, would address. The resulting "connected autonomy" of such a theology allows for a creative processing of spirituality through the medium of writing, rather than the pitfalls of either duality or denial.

The purpose of this thesis has been to establish connections between mysticism, feminine spirituality, and the style and content of women's fiction, particularly that of the early twentieth century. I have found that in this fiction there are definite resonances of the traditional path of mysticism, and of the psychoanalytical emphasis upon the individual voice which reinforced the creative space where it was possible to express spirituality through new relationships with language, the body, and the self. These explorations anticipate and are developed further in feminist theologies today, and indeed the feminist theologian Carol Christ has herself seen a mystical journey evident in women's fiction which allows the exploration of gender and relationship. As with the mystical journey outlined by Underhill, the first stage of spiritual exploration in women's writing encompasses the concept of loss, or Purgation:

Women's spiritual quest takes a distinctive form in the fiction and poetry of women writers. It often begins in an experience of nothingness. Women experience emptiness in their own lives- in self-hatred, in self-negation, and in being a victim; in relationships with men; and in the values that have shaped their lives. Experiencing nothingness, women reject conventional solutions and question the meaning of their lives, thus opening themselves to the revelation of deeper sources of power and value. (in Spretnak, 1982: 330) Christ goes on to explain that, in the face of abject loss, a conversion experience occurs which necessitates a reordering of values; this is analogous with the traditional
mystical path of Illumination. Proceeding from this there is, Christ explains, a sense of union with creation which heals dualities, facilitated by women's traditional and biological access to the importance of the body and of maternity, and leads to a new naming, a new perception of language and creativity:

Awakening occurs through mystical identification, which women's traditional attunement to the body and mothering processes have prepared them for. Women's mystical experiences often occur in nature or in community with other women... Women's new naming of self and world often reflect wholeness, a movement toward overcoming the dualisms of self and world, body and soul, nature and spirit, rational and emotional, which have plagued Western consciousness. (ibid)

However, Christ also emphasis the non-necessity for a purely linear path of spiritual progress. (Underhill would not disagree). Rather she sees the traditional components of mysticism- purgation, illumination, union, as occurring, in women's fiction, in a spiral of circular growth: "a process in which experiences of nothingness, awakenings, insights, and namings form a spiral of ever-deepening but never final understanding" (ibid).

The discovery of designs and metaphors which are particularly apposite for women's spiritual experiences form an important part of feminist theological language, and help to heal the dualities of an over-linear masculine logic, which is re-examined and reinterpreted by feminine fiction. The Spiral is one long-standing metaphor (used by Hildegard of Bingen, among others) which has been profitably revived and reappropriated by the feminist spiritual movement (Starhawk uses the concept as the title of her book The Spiral Dance). Another concept is that of the spinner and her "web" of spun produce, prevalent since the story of Penelope in the Odyssey, the concept of spinning, or knitting, was given a profound spiritual impetus by Julian of Norwich, for whom the metaphor of things "knit together" was integral to her spiritual vision. Spinning became an important metaphor for feminist writer Mary Daly, who envisages a community of "Sparking Hags" spinning their vision in a pattern which again learns from and leans upon mystical paths:

[having established, a room of her own, the "Sparking Hag"] can begin to weave the tapestries of her own creation... The Voyager who does not spin is in
mortal danger. She may become trapped in one of the blind alleys of the maze which has been uncovered in The Second Passage [Daly's term for parts of the feminine spiritual journey]. Gyn/Ecology is weaving the way past the dead past and the dry places, weaving our world tapestry [Daly's Third Passage] out of genesis and demise. ("Gyn/Ecology: Spinning New Time/Space" in Spretnak, 1982: 212)

An essential component of both spiralling and Daly's spinning is an inner centre, which generates the power to weave or knit together a matrix of connections and relationships. Feminist spirituality increasingly, but not exclusively, tends towards an immanent knowledge, which is the mystical aspect of this inner centre, rather than the handed-down transcendent dogma of patriarchy. This is illustrated by the idea of the inner core or detail of a circular visionary meditation, such as that described by Susan Dowell and Linda Hurcombe in *Dispossessed Daughters of Eve*:

> We envisage this characteristic as a pinwheel spinning outwards from a strong centre, radiating ever outwards, circles within circles. Unlike the pyramidal structure of Hebrew, Pauline and Platonic thought, where God... is on top,... the circular model reflects the inner authority and language of mysticism itself as well as being the hallmark of liberation theology. The language of the strong still centre is universally acknowledged and loved, whether it comes to us in the Fourth Gospel, Blake's grain of sand, the Mandala of Jungian thought or the small secret hazelnut beloved of Mother Julian - "all that is made, made by love". (1981: 60-61)

This inclusive drive which is connected to a spiritual centre generates the concept of a matrix of creative theology, which other theologians such as Daphne Hampson considers of great importance in the practise of feminism in general:

> Feminism has in many ways been a deeply spiritual matrix. Feminists have been concerned with the concept of care for one another, for the earth on which we live, for the resolution of conflict and the nature of peace. Indeed something which is striking about some of the more radical material...is the new synthesis of ethics, politics and a certain spirituality in the women's movement. Spiritual values are clearly woven in to this. (1990: 120)
Although Hampson now espouses what she terms a post-Christian position in the arena of feminist theological debate, Elizabeth Johnson, who aligns herself more comfortably with a traditional Christian position, also emphasises the idea of a creative "matrix" of spirituality to which feminist theology and spirituality illuminate:

Far from a dead weight abstraction, the notion of God as being signifies ultimate reality as pure aliveness in relation ... It refers us to the creative ground of all that is and the recreative ground of the energy to resist nonbeing toward the good that may be, the future promised but unknown. (1994: 240)

Nor is the notion of transcendence entirely jettisoned in favour of an immanent God: for Johnson, God is a panentheistic "transcendent matrix who underlies and supports all existence and potential for new being" (ibid). For her, however, there is a note of exuberance and excess in the act of creation which underlies the matrix of relationships. It is akin to the concept of "jouissance" that Lacan ascribes to femininity and a joy in creativity which is impossible to convey within (man-made) language:

Since, however, God creates creatures not necessarily but in an exuberance of divine freedom, then relationship to a world is not "real" but rather in the order of personal intention (relatio rationis) is language that upholds divine freedom and the gift-character of creation. (1994: 226)

Again, logical reality is tempered by the vision of the creative drive, which more nearly approaches an essence of divinity than a linear theological or scientific argument.

It was not always the case that imaginative writing and religious insight were separate disciplines. At the time of Augustine, the two were seen to be connected:

Images in the mind and images in books, St. Augustine claims, are coextensive, and are described as "spiritual vision"...Literature [between ideal thought and materialism] itself a mimesis of spiritual vision, is consequently also an account of the human pilgrimage in time, directed towards heavenly ideals, but trammelled by the corporeal condition of a fallen nature. Augustine therefore supposes that words, by enabling an understanding of the material world, turn the beholder's gaze heavenwards, in contemplation. This sense of continuity between mental images and the realms of material/spiritual
substance constitutes the essential difference between his view of reality and that of Locke ...this..helped to set along separate paths the modern areas of science, theology and literature. (Grant: 1979: 5)

Throughout this thesis it has been my intention to explore how, through the process of feminine creative writing, women writers can attempt to heal the division between intellect and imagination, history and herstory; ultimately, perhaps, fact and fiction. The mystical drive is always towards unity, and achieves this spiritual connectedness only through a process of loss prior to reconciliatory illumination and union. I have suggested that theories of loss and lack inherent in language may be of help in this discursive exploration of mysticism, and that the visionary capacity which the feminine position has helped to empower and enhance may illuminate it further, by enabling a creative "other" voice to speak from a marginalised and non-hierarchical position. In this way the writings of Underhill, Sinclair and Richardson, who have explored mysticism through the voice of their own creativity, may have provided a way of healing the division which, according to P. Grant, occurred at a time (post-Augustinian) when intellect and imagination ceased to have the synthesising spiritual illumination they were once accorded.

Through their development of genre, contents, and writing style, women writers such as Underhill, Sinclair and Richardson have been progressively able to access and incorporate through their creative vision, a voice for speaking of spirituality, femininity, and the artistic and psychological truth which the craft of fiction writing has brought together in and through marginality. Their writing has been enhanced and inspired by the lively and liberating praxis of a new mysticism, which is reflected, not only in much feminist critical thought, but also in feminist theology and spirituality today.


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