

Thesis  
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**A Class Apart:  
The Servant Question in English Fiction,  
1920-1950**

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## Abstract

In the reading of the servants in examples from the period 1920-1950, the servant question is invoked to expose the workings of class. The servants in these narratives of Bowen, Green, Taylor, Waugh, Mansfield and Panter-Downes, lady's maids, housekeepers, nannies, a butler and a chauffeur, are in thrall to the collective structures of societal ordering, and reluctant with respect to social mobility. Class was not fully being negotiated in this period, in fact little change was visible. For example intimacy, such as that between the lady's maid and her mistress, meant that class confrontation was unlikely. The nanny showed that culturally constructed mechanisms such as nostalgia could be employed to discourage the desire for change. In terms of the socio-historical context any transformation in the make-up of domestic life – that is, the move towards homes without servants - was a fairly gradual business. But, there was a widespread belief in a change that had not really taken place – and that certainly had not taken place within domestic service. Any transformation of society was superficial; the governing ranks would not permit their disempowerment through genuine class change. I contend that the literature supports this perspective. Servants desire subservience; they find comfort in the familiarity of the system of household ranking-by-status. In the process, authority itself is portrayed as being less immutable, more malleable and thereby equipped for the future. In this sense the narratives read in this thesis go to make up a literature of resistance, in refutation of the overwhelming narrative of the time, progressing instead the notion that class must persist with its boundaries intact, as its hegemony is desirable and necessary for the smooth, successful operation of society.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my brother, Dr Terry Fenge.

He was always my inspiration.

I wish he had stayed to see it.

Jura, and Barnhill beckon.

Davie, Jess, Alfie and Fergus, this is also for you:

thank you for always believing in me more than I did.

And for my fantastic Mum – the real reader in the family.

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Adrian Hunter saw it through. Your calmness, kindness, and consistency have finally brought me to this point. You are a true teacher, and I can't thank you enough for what you have taught me.

## **Contents**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
1. Class Context 1920-1950 – Social, Political and Cultural Contexts	<b>7</b>
2. What was the servant question and what had it to do with the class debate?	<b>15</b>
3. What is the role of the servant question in the <i>fiction</i> of this period?	<b>24</b>
4. Rationale and Selection	<b>34</b>
<b>Chapter One: The Lady's Maid – intimacy bought</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Chapter Two: The Housekeeper – trust and trespass</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Chapter Three: The Nanny – serving on</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>Chapter Four: The Manservant – social and technological progress</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>Conclusion: A Class Apart</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>217</b>



## Introduction

Class is debated continuously throughout our society, and is depicted in all manner of cultural products, with a multitude of fictional expressions diverging from the mundane to the magnificent. The writers selected for this study warrant particular attention because they explore class through a fascinating and under-explored route – the servant question. This study will examine how they go about this, and articulate what this reveals about their work that is otherwise obscured. It is my contention that through their focus on the servant question these writers – Elizabeth Bowen, Daphne du Maurier, Katherine Mansfield, Elizabeth Taylor, Henry Green, Evelyn Waugh and Mollie Panter-Downes – who all take up the contemporary topic of domestic service, variously interrogate the wider debate on class.

Cultural reportage between 1920 and 1950 declared a transformation of social structures.<sup>1</sup> Belief in social mobility prevailed, which indicated improvement in the conditions of the working class, as well as the erosion or renegotiation of the boundaries between social classes, all of which fed into the argument that ultimately the determinants of class might cease

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<sup>1</sup> See Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Pimlico, 1994).

to dominate socially. Interrogating the engagement of these writers with the servant question reveals their ideology with respect to class. My further contention is that criticism on these writers has not adequately accounted for the importance in their work of the servant question and its relationship to the wider class debate. Analysis of this relationship – the means by which these writers use the servant question to cross-examine ideas about class - reveals a persistence of the ‘exchange relationship’ and the desire for the maintenance of the status quo, despite the broader utopian social claims about a renegotiation of class identity and boundaries. The exchange relationship endures, for ‘as long as the wage-labourer remains a wage-labourer, his lot is dependent upon capital.’<sup>2</sup> I use this term, as per Marx, to mean the exchange of capital for labour, money for work. The central tenet in this theory is that the holder of capital increases the capital value of the labour and keeps that added value for himself. Domestic service is a singular industry, because once ‘consumed’ the product of the servant’s work is invisible, i.e. there is no product that can accrue monetary value. Similarly to the subsistence that the wage-labourer is able to buy with his wages, the ‘product’ of domestic service is intangible.

A dialectic can be revealed between class change and continuity, which is visible in these texts once the representations of domestic servants are read in the light of the servant question. Through such an analysis it becomes clear that these writers may be working to author a literature of resistance, in which they address the conflict between comfortable class continuity and social negotiation and transformation. Their concerns operate to contradict the overwhelming cultural narrative of the 1930s, which avowed allegiance to renovating hierarchy and transfiguring structures of social status. This

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *Wage Labour and Capital*, available at [https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx\\_Wage\\_Labour\\_and\\_Capital.pdf](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Wage_Labour_and_Capital.pdf)

means that their writing is essentially a literature of class but by another formerly unrecognized or unspecified form.

In what follows I describe the social environment in Britain in the period 1920-1950, before going on to define the servant question and its significance within that period. The introduction continues with a brief account of each of the writers included in this thesis, offering a rationale for their inclusion in the project, and concludes with an outline of each chapter and a short statement outlining what it will contribute to the discussion. To confer structural clarity and support the logical development of the thesis, the introduction is therefore presented in the following sections: 1. Class Context 1920-1950: Social, Political and Cultural Contexts; 2. What was the servant question and what had it to do with the class debate?; 3. What is the role of the servant question in *fiction* of this period?; and 4. Rationale and selection.

## **1. Class Context 1920-1950 – Social, Political and Cultural Contexts**

Class may be defined as ‘a division or order of society according to status; a rank or grade of society’.<sup>3</sup> In this meaning the word entered common use during the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, at what was a decisive moment in the history of capitalism, linked to the move from a feudal system with a predominantly agricultural economy towards a capitalist economy largely based on manufacturing. This schema suggests that the older ‘order’ and the system of status resulted in a harmonious society, whilst class emerged as an expression of social conflict.<sup>4</sup> David Cannadine depicts the struggle to delineate class, and describes the varying alternative means by which society might be ordered, from Disraeli’s two

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<sup>3</sup> OED online.

<sup>4</sup> Gary Day, *Class* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 6.

nations, progressing to the Marxist notion of capital versus labour; the hierarchical; the tripartite upper-middle-lower; and the polarization of 'us and them'.<sup>5</sup> Although his work on class is detailed and instructive, his interest in servants ironically limits them to a walk-on part in *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*.<sup>6</sup> Tellingly for the purposes of this thesis, Cannadine finally argues principally for the continuation of the dichotomy of capital versus labour in the interwar years,<sup>7</sup> whilst a more recent commentary from Selina Todd makes a powerful argument, perhaps reading against the grain, for polarization and the reinforcement of social boundaries during the Second World War.<sup>8</sup>

Demographic stability, in terms of UK population size, was evident by around 1920.<sup>9</sup> The 1921 Census showed Great Britain had a population of 42.7 million in 1921, an increase of 4.7% over 1911, with approximately 2 million more women than men.<sup>10</sup> That population would rise to 53 million by mid-1951, far more slowly than in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> Following the desolation of the First World War, David Thomson suggests of the economic aspirations of the 1920s that 'perhaps that brighter world could be recaptured, or at any rate rebuilt, without its disadvantages. Hopes for the future were cast very

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<sup>5</sup> See David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> See David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London: Picador, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> See Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, p. 143.

<sup>8</sup> See Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class* (London: John Murray, 2014), pp. 119-148.

<sup>9</sup> One of the indicators of stability in population, the UK birth rate fell from 5.5 in 1871 to 2.4 in 1921. See Julie Jeffries, 'The UK population, past present and future', *Focus on People and Migration* (London: Office for National Statistics, 2005), p. 5. Accessed at [www.ons.gov.uk/.../focus-on-people-and-migration---focus-on-people-and-migration---chapter-1.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/.../focus-on-people-and-migration---focus-on-people-and-migration---chapter-1.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.1921census.org.uk/>

<sup>11</sup> See Jeffries, p. 6.

much in the mould of the past.’<sup>12</sup> The period opens then, with the notion of economic nostalgia, looking back to former prosperity.

Great changes in society from 1920 to 1950 can be mapped through the cultural response. Of particular interest is the spawning of 1930s’ radicalism and its appropriation by one particular section of the literary cognoscenti, for instance in the poetry of the 1930s produced by Auden, Day Lewis, and Spender. Literary criticism played a significant role in establishing the 1930s as a decade of intellectual dissent against conservatism: Samuel Hynes helped to create a mystique that still attaches to this period, with the publication of his influential work *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s*; this followed Robin Skelton’s 1964 introduction to the Penguin selection of *Poetry of the Thirties* (that he had edited), in which Skelton attempted to make a link between the establishment of the welfare state and the poetry he anthologised.<sup>13</sup> Valentine Cunningham discerned the cultural complexities of the interwar period, which was on the one hand influenced by left wing intellectuals who were able to walk away from the proletariat (Orwell) (but not Caudwell who went and lived in the East End) and on the other hand by the right wing ‘old’ modernists like Eliot (*Criterion*). He opined that it became the ‘most mythologised decade’;<sup>14</sup> Bernard Bergonzi meanwhile observed

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<sup>12</sup> David Thomson, *England in the Twentieth Century* (London: Pelican, 1991), p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> In a 1988 review of Cunningham’s book, Samuel Hynes referred to the decade thus, see the book review in *The Sunday Times*, London (31 January, 1988). Also see Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), here Hynes prefaces his book with a statement that ‘In the Myth of the Thirties, for example, the Left plays a powerful role.’ p. 12. Robin Skelton, ‘Introduction’ to *Poetry of the Thirties* (London: Penguin, 1964).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37. And see Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

that the 'thirties authors were mythologizing themselves as they lived and wrote.'<sup>15</sup>

Orwell's oeuvre, including *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), gives voice to a powerful narrative dichotomy of us and them, espying but also inculcating a division between the northern and southern populace.<sup>16</sup> With this rise of the left wing intellectual came an increased interest in social realism: the documenting of truth became freshly significant. Sentiments apparent in Orwell's 1936 novel, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, were reprised in *Coming up for Air* (1939),<sup>17</sup> which makes explicit the expression of class fear concerning social change, standing against the 'progress' of the middle class with their suburbs and potted plants.<sup>18</sup> However, as well as sparking debate over his own 'class credentials',<sup>19</sup> Orwell was personally conflicted over class,

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<sup>15</sup> See Bernard Bergonzi, *Reading the Thirties: Texts and Contexts* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 1. Also see Adrian Cesar, *Dividing Lines: Poetry Class and Ideology in the 1930s* (Manchester: Manchester Uni Press, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> This has become a somewhat troubling text, with social historians digging out reports from local people who believed Orwell misrepresented them. Todd suggests that many of the readers of polemical contemporary texts were middle class, and that 'working class readers were sometimes critical of these social surveys and novels, which they thought represented them as ignorant or helpless victims rather than as thinking people with political opinions of their own.' See Todd, *The People*, p. 79. Cunningham also famously takes Orwell up on the subject of the working class smell, which Orwell himself felt was misconstrued by critics. (He asserted that the notion related to the middle class, being brought up to believe that the working class smelled.) See Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*. Christopher Hitchens went on to unpick the topic in his *Why Orwell Matters* (Basic Books, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> In this 1939 somewhat prophetic novel the built (and built-over) environment is spoken of in terms of class change, occupations and even reading matter are portrayed in class terms. For example, George's relationship with Hilda: "I never, then or at any other time, succeeded un looking like a gentleman, but on the other hand you probably wouldn't have taken me for the son of a small shopkeeper in a country town. I could keep my end up in the rather mixed society of a place like Ealing, where the office-employee class overlaps with the middling-professional class. It was at the tennis club that I first met Hilda..." *Coming Up For Air*, p. 137.

<sup>18</sup> John Brannigan posits Orwell to be 'exemplary of the liminal, ambivalent construction of postwar English society and culture as inhabiting the time of the new, and the time of haunting, of the return of the past.' See John Brannigan, *Orwell to the Present: Literature in England 1945-2000* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Marius Hentea expresses this well in pointing out 'that middle class thinking, and not the experience of the proletariat, is the main object of *The Road to Wigan*

labelling himself in class terms as 'lower-upper-middle-class' and accepting that he was a product of class,<sup>20</sup> whilst decrying these rankings.<sup>21</sup> Simultaneously, though English society remained overwhelmingly Christian (and Church of England) in persuasion, the automatic deference of religious observance was losing its paternalistic grip on society.<sup>22</sup> The return to realism revived the prominence of the factual; for instance novel documentary filmmaking flourished in the 1930s, with initiatives such as the GPO film unit which precipitated the crafting of John Grierson's acclaimed *Night Mail* (1936).<sup>23</sup> There emerged a new interest in social lives, which was piqued by a society that perceived a degree of shifting social mobility, as exemplified in Tom Harrison's *Mass Observation*, an important sociological venture in terms of documenting what was reckoned to be the population's 'daily life'; unfortunately interviews were largely carried out by middle class volunteers, who tended to treat the lower orders as 'Other'.<sup>24</sup> Recent analysis of *Mass Observation*'s political stance has led to the questioning of their overwhelming aesthetic.<sup>25</sup> *Mass Observation* also endeavoured to create a new scale for pinpointing class, which it was hoped would clarify whether social strata were changing, and thereby disclose

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*Pier*' which he suggests is 'evident from the text's programmatic language, "the usual exhausted face of the slum girl"' See Marius Hentea, *Henry Green at the Limits of Modernism* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2014), p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> See Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), pp. 52-3.

<sup>21</sup> See Cannadine, *Class in Britain*.

<sup>22</sup> For an excellent account of the rise of secularism in Europe see Larry Siedentop's *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2015), pp. 349-363.

<sup>23</sup> See the British Film Institute website and archive at: <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/530415/>, accessed 29 November 2015.

<sup>24</sup> This can be observed from *Mass Observation*'s file reports, from 1937 to 1951, which can now be accessed through a digital archive at <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Introduction/TheDocuments>.

<sup>25</sup> See Benjamin Kohlmann, 'Questioning *Mass Observation*'s political/aesthetic position': in *Committed Styles: Modernism, Politics and Left-Wing Literature in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

whether social mobility was taking place.<sup>26</sup> The work of Mass Observation persisted through the Second World War and until 1950, both operating for the governing establishment, and critical of it.

Popular socialism was evolving, fostered by the engagement of the populace with intellectual observation on the make-up of their home and locale. For example JB Priestley travelled around the UK, to an extent in an effort to expunge the 'northern versus southern' attitudes that had arisen and were being promulgated by the popular press.<sup>27</sup> However Priestley's patronizing tone and the mediating lens through which he perceived the nation, proved only fleetingly acceptable.<sup>28</sup> Rather it was 'Left' politics that became normalized, in the 'Popular Front' established in 1934, which was promoted by the *Left Review*.<sup>29</sup> Socialists took up membership of the popular Fabian society and other socialist organizations;<sup>30</sup> significant numbers even took it upon themselves to join the International Brigades to fight on the side of the Republic against Fascism (Nationalism)<sup>31</sup> in the Spanish Civil War, resulting in a cast of

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<sup>26</sup> Angus Calder and Dorothy Sheridan, *Speak for Yourself: A Mass-Observation Anthology 1937-49* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), including an article on Mass Observation from *Sunday Graphic and Sunday News*, October 30, 1938, pp. 158-159 for details of the Social Scale that was sent out with questionnaires in 1939.

<sup>27</sup> See Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War*.

<sup>28</sup> Priestley took advantage of the desire for travel that was one of the markers of the era, exemplified the bestselling series of travel titles by HV Morton. His early (1920s) titles started with London, gradually moving further afield, until by the early 1930s he had written about Wales, Scotland and Ireland too. 'What I Saw in the Slums' 1933, Morton's collection of articles on the conditions in cities around England, which was published originally in the *Daily Herald*, and *Our Fellow Men* (London: Methuen, 1936) both pre-date Orwell's *Wigan Pier*.

<sup>29</sup> See Todd, *The People*, p. 78, and for more information on the LBC's influence on the Popular Front see the introduction in Paul Laity, ed., *Left Book Club Anthology* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Included amongst the membership of the Fabian Society was Dorothy Richardson, without whom we wouldn't be where we are right now. For an account of the Fabian Society in this period see Edward Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society* (St Petersburg, Florida: Red and Black Publishers, 2008), pp. 219-239.

<sup>31</sup> Although the revelations of this century belie this.



literary and cultural participants, many of whom paid dearly for their commitment.<sup>32</sup>

The majority of legislative drivers of social change of the early twentieth century, whilst addressing the needs of some industrial workers, in fact did little to impinge on those in domestic service. The most notable example is the National Insurance Act (1911) that was introduced in seven industries, and provided compulsory insurance against unemployment. By 1914 some 2,326,000 workers were insured against such eventualities.<sup>33</sup> Certain legislative change did have a knock-on effect on the servant question, such as the increase in school leaving age precipitated by the Fisher Education Act of 1918 that provided elementary schooling for all children up to the age of 14,<sup>34</sup> thereby depleting the pool of young people from whom servants could be sourced.<sup>35</sup> Light notes that this change in school leaving age took place at just the moment when 'the majority of mistresses wanted cheap young girls'.<sup>36</sup> The Unemployment Insurance Act of 1920, meanwhile, would have no effect on the domestic service industry.<sup>37</sup>

The General Strike of 1926 was one of the most controversial and significant events of the inter-war years.<sup>38</sup> This study finds it persuasive that between the wars the 'widespread

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<sup>32</sup> Ernest Hemingway, George Orwell, Christopher Caudwell, Laurie Lee and Stephen Spender, for example. Caudwell died at Jarama.

<sup>33</sup> See Thomson, *England in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>34</sup> Todd, *The People*, p. 32. Legislation on education would go on to further stimulate the servant supply issue, with the white paper on educational reform and subsequent 1944 Education Act abolishing school fees and raising the school leaving age to 15 from 1 April 1945. This was postponed for two years as the nation was still at war; the school leaving age was finally raised to 15 in 1947. See Rex Pope, *War and Society in Britain 1899-1948* (London: Longman, 1991), pp. 72-3.

<sup>35</sup> For detail on the Fisher Education Act (1918), see Lawrence Andrews, *The Education Act, 1918* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976).

<sup>36</sup> See Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants: The Hidden Heart of Domestic Service* (London: Fig Tree, 2007), p. 138.

<sup>37</sup> See Pope.

<sup>38</sup> Thomson, *England in the Twentieth Century*, p. 108. Thomson explains that the use of the language of class war became commonplace during the General Strike, p. 117.

Insurance regulations.<sup>50</sup> All as result of 'new consensus on national responsibility, on the need for a universal and comprehensive system. Inequities had been reduced and there was an attempt to provide a subsistence level of benefit.'<sup>51</sup>

According to Rex Pope:

The war had established belief in social solidarity and a commitment to social security as a war aim. The nation's ability to meet the prodigious costs of war, albeit with American aid, had undermined the argument that Britain could not afford a comprehensive system of social insurance. The war had forced action on behalf of pensioners and other needy groups; old systems had proved inadequate and something had to be provided to replace them.<sup>52</sup>

Having acknowledged the transformations taking place in British society through the period from 1920 to 1950, and the relevance of these to the working class, it is necessary to turn to the servant question itself, for both a working explanation of the term and to consider its relevance with respect to the class debate. I contend that the servant is in a class apart, that domestic servants are frequently excluded from the working class. I hope that this study will support a reconnection of the two, reinstating the servant question in the context of class. The intention is to do so by problematising the accounts of these writers and class by restoring the servant question to a reading of their work.

## **2. What was the servant question and what had it to do with the class debate?**

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. And note the fictional record offered by Walter Brierley's 1935 novel *Means Test Man*. (Brierley's status as an unemployed Derbyshire miner produced a work of genuine social realism.)

<sup>51</sup> Pope, p. 84.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

Organised religion underwrote the domestic service industry of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The religious response to social issues taken up by significant philanthropists of the late Victorian era,<sup>53</sup> and the practical means that they adopted to address them, had a significant influence on domestic service well into the twentieth century.<sup>54</sup> Institutions saw themselves as fulfilling a Christian role by providing training opportunities, particularly for young women and girls that would set them up for useful employment as servants.<sup>55</sup> One such example, set up in 1874 as a Church of England voluntary organization to train girls for service, was the Girl's Friendly Society.<sup>56</sup> Not only would women be supported to raise themselves from poverty through learning a saleable skill, they would furthermore be turned away from all possibility of sinning themselves. The Metropolitan Association for the Befriending of Young Servants (MABYS) saw to it that 'little charmaids' were 'kept from incalculable temptation and wretchedness.'<sup>57</sup> Another such example is Dr Barnardo, whose organisation undertook to run their own girls' 'Village' in Barkingside, Essex, where young women were educated by

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<sup>53</sup> Charles Booth inspired Seebohm Rowntree's philanthropic efforts, with both concluding that the poor were actually poor through no fault of their own, and that instead low wages were the cause of poverty. See Steven Davidson, *Quakers and Capitalism*, <https://throughtheflamingsword.wordpress.com/quakers-capitalism—the-book/>

<sup>54</sup> Ironically, Seebohm Rowntree identified the 'keeping or not keeping of servants' as a means of delineating between the working class and those of a higher social standing. Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty: a study of town life* (London: Macmillan, 1901), p. 14 and p. 31. This observation is revisited by many commentators, who note that the burgeoning middle class of the first decades of the twentieth century aspired to servant-keeping as a social marker of status. Also see: Lucy Delap, *Knowing their Place: Domestic Service in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> This included Poor Law institutions, which came under local authority governance during the 1920s. Poor Law institutions continued long after the Poor Law was replaced by National Insurance legislation. (Many of the functions of the Poor Law institution were taken up by the Public Assistance Board, with misery experienced by those subjected to means testing.)

<sup>56</sup> Pamela Horn, *Knowing Their Place: Life Below Stairs in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 101.

<sup>57</sup> Mrs Raymond Ritchie, *Upstairs and Downstairs* (London, 1882), p. 200, cited by Lucy Lethbridge, *Servants: A Downstairs View of Twentieth-century Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 91.

volunteer 'mothers' in all aspects of domestic service. These girls left Barnardo's engineered care for specifically selected positions.<sup>58</sup>

The 'servant question' was a term coined to describe the rising concerns, largely voiced by the middle class,<sup>59</sup> over the issues of both the quantity and quality of available servants. Whilst the quantity of servants available for work fluctuated, the general trend in servant numbers was downwards. It had long been the case that female servants greatly outnumbered men; due to the 'Excise duty' payable on male servants from 1777 to 1937,<sup>60</sup> male servants were a greater expense than their female counterparts.<sup>61</sup> Pamela Horn explains that the total number of female servants (in England and Wales) actually rose from 1.1 to 1.3 million in the decade from 1921.<sup>62</sup> It is worth noting, however, that these figures are a significant reduction from the 1890s, when some 1.7 million girls and women were in domestic service.<sup>63</sup> There were five main categories from which female servants were sourced. These were: country girls moving to the town to experience what they saw as the benefits of an urban life and income; the daughters of those already in service; the children of poor urban families; young girls from institutions such as old poor law schools, orphanages and reformatories; and girls from the depressed mining and industrial areas of Wales,

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<sup>58</sup> Lethbridge, pp. 89-90.

<sup>59</sup> *The Daily Mail* and the *Times* printed many letters and articles on the subject. See Todd, *The People*, p.21.

<sup>60</sup> 'Excise duty' was payable on [male servants] from 1777 to 1937', according to Matthew Woollard, *The Classification of Domestic Servants in England and Wales, 1851-1951*, AHDS History, University of Essex,(2002), p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Menservants were a 'luxury' 'emphasised by the fact that until 1937 a 15s a year tax had to be paid by employer for each male employee'. See Horn, *Life Below Stairs*, p. 45.

<sup>62</sup> Horn, *Life Below Stairs*, p. 35. Also see Census of England and Wales, 1921, *Occupation Tables* (London, 1924) Tables 2 and 4; Census of England and Wales 1931, *Occupational Tables* (London, 1934), and for a critical analysis of the nomenclature see Woollard.

<sup>63</sup> Martin Pugh, *We Danced All Night: A Social History of Britain Between the wars* (London: Vintage, 2009), p. 178.

England and Scotland.<sup>64</sup> Changes affecting these five sources resulted in the supply-side issues of 'the servant question'. Social historians are agreed that the First World War was the direct cause of female servants fleeing their positions, with some 400,000 leaving their jobs,<sup>65</sup> largely for work in munitions. However, as well as the issue of supply or 'quantity' of servants available for work, as early as 1911 concerns regarding the 'quality' of servants had exacerbated the servant 'question' into a 'problem'. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* of 1911 defined the 'servant problem' as the difficulty 'of getting and *controlling* servants'.<sup>66</sup> Domestic service was not solely conceived of in economic terms of supply and demand; the peculiar cocktail of bought deference, mutual dependence and intimacy bubbled with potential discord.<sup>67</sup> Deference in itself became profoundly troubling, as Todd points out:

Domestic service highlights the complexities of deference. Servants were generally obedient and compliant, but kindness and generosity on the part of employers were often essential in winning their servants' co-operation.<sup>68</sup>

It could be observed that 'the silence that their employers hoped was deferential was often a mark of dissent.'<sup>69</sup> In the twentieth century legislation was to become a critical tool for government's management of expectations with respect to societal transformation. Because domestic service was not included in legislation for National Insurance, servants were left reliant upon their employers for all aspects of their welfare. When the National Insurance Bill was introduced in 1911 it resulted in great anxiety over the position of those in domestic service,

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<sup>64</sup> Horn, *Life Below Stairs*, pp. 40-45.

<sup>65</sup> Pugh, p. 178.

<sup>66</sup> *My emphasis*. Todd, *The People*, p. 21.

<sup>67</sup> Light, *Mrs Woolf*, p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England*, p. 148.

<sup>69</sup> Todd, *The People*, p.26.

particularly amongst employers.<sup>70</sup> The absolute lack of unionization amongst domestic servants at this time serves to reinforce the difference between servants and working class employees typical of other sectors. In response to the 1911 Bill there was an impetus to encourage employers to enter into informal personal agreements with staff in their service, with both maids and mistresses expected to contribute in order to ensure the servants' welfare and longer term financial security. (Domestic service would not be covered by an unemployment insurance scheme until 1938.<sup>71</sup>) The *Daily Mail* rallied and voiced middle-class employers' protests against the proposals.<sup>72</sup> Curiously and counter-intuitively the backlash included maids, concerned that such arrangements 'belittled the trust on which service was based.'<sup>73</sup> Women who interacted with those of a higher social class, such as servants, were less likely, according to Pugh, 'to be members of trade unions and thus to be influenced by class solidarity.'<sup>74</sup> Domesticity was additionally used as an argument to explain a perceived female 'lack of involvement' in the workforce, which in turn implied that there was no necessity to engage them in unionization.<sup>75</sup> Supporting this retrogressive narrative, employers were opposed to the unionization of their service staff and saw their relationship with them as largely paternalistic, in tune with the generally prevalent domestic ideology.<sup>76</sup> Just as Todd suggests, the middle class suffered from a 'fear of working-class independence.' Consternation was such

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<sup>70</sup> One letter to the *Times* declared that the bill would 'weaken the kindly ties between master and servant'. See *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>71</sup> Gardiner, *The Thirties*, p. 42.

<sup>72</sup> Todd, *The People*, pp. 22-3.

<sup>73</sup> Light, *Mrs Woolf*, p. 61.

<sup>74</sup> Pugh, p. 91.

<sup>75</sup> And unionization might have been instrumental in increasing political awareness and solidarity amongst domestic workers, and even achieving earlier recognition and rights for workers in the industry. See Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family*, p. 146.

<sup>76</sup> Pugh, p. 91.

that governmental committees were tasked with debating and solving the servant question.<sup>77</sup>

Domestic servants were doubly distanced from the class debate: firstly due to their employment in the most specific of the largely unrecognized service industries, and secondly because of their gender. At the beginning of First World War 'women's employment was particularly hard-hit. Many servants were dismissed.'<sup>78</sup> Up to a quarter of female munitions workers in the First World War were former domestic servants,<sup>79</sup> whilst a new trend towards the use of women in offices and shops was accentuated as an attractive alternative to the subservience and lack of independence implicit in a career in domestic service.<sup>80</sup> Between the wars many young women deserted their posts in domestic service for what they perceived to be better conditions, with shorter hours and better wages, in factory work.<sup>81</sup> Then, during the Second World War women took up work in their masses.<sup>82</sup>

The evidence surrounding the causes of the 'servant question' is by no means straightforward. Whilst the issues of

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<sup>77</sup> Todd pinpoints a middle class anxiety over the extension of the franchise to servants, see Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950', p. 195. Governmental committees were unable to solve the servant question, which only served to embed it increasingly as a problem. A prominent example was the 1923 Ministry of Labour Committee on the Supply of Female Servant, which in turn created a number of Women's sub-committees to investigate the issues; see Horn, *Life Below Stairs*, p. 83, p. 150, pp. 170-171. Also see Carol Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family in England 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 107-44.

<sup>78</sup> Pope, p. 21.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>81</sup> Todd, *The People*, p. 105.

<sup>82</sup> 5% transport workers 1939, rising to 20% by 1943. There were 17% local and central government workers in 1939 rising to 46% by 1943. Female trade union membership rose from 970,000 in 1939 to 1,870,000 by 1943. 'However, women's gains were often intended to be limited and temporary. The Civil Service marriage bar was suspended but not abolished. The Extended Employment of Women Agreement (1940), between the engineering employers and the Amalgamated Engineering Union, was only to last until the war ended.' See Pope, p. 49.

supply and of quality were widely accepted to be substantial drivers of the problem, significantly by the end of the 1930s a rising middle class demand for servants was also brought into the reckoning. In 1937 the Ministry of Education stated that 'the shortage of servants must be due to a largely increased demand rather than a decrease in supply'.<sup>83</sup> As middle income households increased, so did their desire for that most precious of commodities, the ultimate signifier of conspicuous consumption, a servant of one's own. Because of the threat that a house unable to secure a servant presented to domestic order, there were numerous cultural responses to the problem. The appearance of non-fiction 'self-help' volumes that dealt specifically with the 'servant question', such as Randall Phillips' *The Servantless House* (1922), indicates the depth of concern amongst the chattering classes. However, the form - the nature of production - of this particular title, is curious. *The Servantless House* is in effect an illustrated self-help title, published by a popular highbrow magazine publisher in what would now be considered a 'coffee table' format. The *Country Life* title demonstrates an ideological response to the servant question. It depicts the tasks around the home, that the householder was now being persuaded to undertake in this 'servantless house', in a romanticized manner. Beginning with a Preface that whimpers over the reduced circumstances of the 'professional classes',<sup>84</sup> Phillips goes on to extol the virtues of painting brass door furniture black and abandoning coal fires in favour of anthracite stoves. Phillips recommends the readers of *Country Life* to spend the equivalent of a maid's wages on technology from the US and Canada, such as vacuum cleaners and even washing machines. The implication is that the servant can be replaced, and the home be transformed into a shrine to new consumer technologies. By

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<sup>83</sup> See Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950', p. 194.

<sup>84</sup> Randall Phillips, *The Servantless House* (London: Country Life, 1922), Preface, p.iv.



further embracing consumerism the middle classes could maintain what were understood to be their intrinsically high standards, and the sanctity of domestic authority would rest unchallenged. The anxieties embodied in the servant question could be addressed and mediated through such non-fiction titles, making these historical documents, so rooted in the context of their production, a source of rich contemporary cultural information.

In tandem with the rising hegemony of bourgeois capitalism, a developing ideology of the domestic emerged, centred on the home - the household - as the locus of the paternalistic family.<sup>85</sup> Three strands of domesticity are underpinned by the servant: structures of domesticity, the domestic nature of the writing of literature,<sup>86</sup> and the physical and intellectual act of writing. Historically, in the nineteenth century structures conferring domestic order and control were vital in the establishment of class and became a theatre in which social station might be established and enacted.<sup>87</sup> The domestic became identifiably of the middle order, and was accompanied by a narrative that enthused on behalf of burgeoning conspicuous consumption.<sup>88</sup> Domesticity became increasingly feminised, whilst yoked to the structures of patriarchy.<sup>89</sup> Servants were central to this structure; critical cultural commentators on the domestic sphere note that:

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<sup>85</sup> Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), and Delap et al..

<sup>86</sup> And its consumption, although this is too off-topic for discussion here.

<sup>87</sup> The influence of social historians Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidson is acknowledged in statements on this subject. See Delap et al., p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> The connection to class of patterns of consumption, and critically with the display of that consumption, was first posited by Thorstein Veblen in *Conspicuous Consumption* (1899). His theory was later taken up by Pierre Bourdieu, with more recent criticism in the same area from Zygmunt Baumann, focusing on the suggestive dichotomy of the seduced and the repressed.

<sup>89</sup> Selina Todd asserts the idea that in this period a middle class woman's household management did not detract from her husband's authority, but complimented it, see Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950', p. 201.

writing situations, arguing that the management of the fleeting female servant representations depicted by these authors is a comment on their own domestic reliance on those servants who supported their status as employer-artists.<sup>102</sup> Whilst the double standards of these iconic feminist modernists are fascinating *per se*, this thesis avoids a biographical focus on authorship, seeking instead to explore the literary representations of servants in the writing of broadly the same era.

We have seen that the servant question articulated worries firstly about the quantity of servants available and whether this supply could meet the developing and increasing demand, and secondly over the quality of domestic help. Furthermore, the servant question was also being asked in a complex socio-historical context that included the refiguring of the domestic. Whilst some elements in the socio-historical context did lead to the isolation of domestic service with respect to the class debate, a key explanation for the social exclusion of the servant lies in the hegemonic restructuring of the domestic. Servants were denied a voice, the employer had control over their work and also their bodies,<sup>103</sup> they were excluded legislatively from equality with workers in other industries, and were then largely doubly excluded on account of their gender: they were in other words very much a class apart.

### **3. What is the role of the servant question in the *fiction* of this period?**

Academics writing in the area of social history, even those writing with a specifically class-confronting agenda, have until

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<sup>102</sup> See Wilson.

<sup>103</sup> The employer provided, and thereby had absolute control over, the servant's clothing and the space and place in which they lived.

recently tended to omit the topic of domestic service from their studies.<sup>104</sup> This conspicuously includes historians such as McKibbin and Cannadine,<sup>105</sup> whilst a number of recent commentators who do include servants in their histories afford them but a slight mention.<sup>106</sup> The question of the omission of servants from accounts of social history is intriguing,<sup>107</sup> because the reasons behind this neglect shed light on those aspects of domestic service that are of the greatest interest to this study. The first reason for the omission of the domestic servant is the implied opinion that servants are of negligible importance to the history of class in the UK in the twentieth century. McBride opines that 'the servant has not interested the social or labour historian concerned with class struggle since servants did not form a true social class.'<sup>108</sup> So, they could be seen as being of no interest to the history of class because they are not a 'true social class' of and in themselves.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, their lack of interest to

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<sup>104</sup> For instance in his influential *Penguin Social History 1945-present*, Marwick agrees that class is a 'topic all-absorbing' between 1945-57, yet he ignores domestic service. See Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945: The Penguin Social History of Britain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990).

<sup>105</sup> See Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). See, notably Cannadine, *Class in Britain*. In his *Decline and Fall* Cannadine gives only a few sentences' worth of consideration to domestic servants. Day's *Class* makes no mention of them. Selina Todd points out that EP Thompson omits servants from his seminal *The Making of the English Working Class*, see Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950', p. 189. Todd goes on to take Thompson's work as a useful starting point in her own 2014 study of the 'making of the English working class': *The People*, into which she inserts a chapter specifically dealing with domestic servants.

<sup>106</sup> Although Gardiner largely omits servants from her discussion, she does place a focus on the gendered dimension of domestic service, pointing out the extent of female unemployment in 1919 (600,000) and noting that the domestic vision of the twentieth century meant unmarried women 'working in other people's homes rather than their own', see Gardiner, *The Thirties*, p. 41. John Benson's *The Working Class in Britain 1850-1939* (London: Tauris, 2003), structures his observations through 'Material Conditions, Family and Community, and Responses'. Servants are excluded by this structure.

<sup>107</sup> One critic who is perturbed by this observation is Teresa McBride, see *The Domestic Revolution: The Modernisation of Household Service in England and France, 1820-1920* (Kent: Croom Helm, 1976).

<sup>108</sup> McBride, p. 9.

<sup>109</sup> For Marx feudal peasants did not constitute class, and class *per se* did not come into play until the advent of bourgeois capitalism in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, as feudal peasants farmed their feudal lord's land and their own. This 'mode of

historians could be related to the fact that they are not designated to be a part of the working class; or that they are considered to be antipathetic to the working class; or even that they have simply allied themselves too closely with the class of their employers.<sup>110</sup> A second reason behind their elision could be that the numbers of servants was small in comparison to those working in other industries. This is undoubtedly the case, as census figures reveal, with domestic servants making up 24% of all female adults occupied, and 0.6% of all adults males occupied in England and Wales in 1931.<sup>111</sup> A further reason for their omission from the history of class would be the opinion that the decline (notably not the *development*) of domestic service has little of interest or significance to offer to the student of twentieth-century culture. This suggests that decisions are being made under the influence of a hierarchy of differing approaches to cultural history. Not only has recent research suggested firstly that a “silence on service” has characterised historical studies of the twentieth century,<sup>112</sup> but furthermore, contrary to received opinion, it has been posited that domestic service in the same period underwent a phase of transition rather than decline.<sup>113</sup> Meanwhile, and persuasively, McBride links the exclusion of servants from historical accounts to the overwhelming discourse of modernisation that has arguably served to marginalize identifiably retrogressive cultural manifestations such as

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production’ rendered them ‘isolated’ from other individuals potentially sharing an identical class identity. See Day *Class*, p. 11 (and Marx 1852 and 1968, p. 170). Similarities resonate between Marx’s denial of class status to feudal peasants, and the situation of domestic servants – occupied also on the property of their master.

<sup>110</sup> These are profoundly problematic arguments, relying as they do upon the disavowal of the servant and thereby the disavowal of the experiences of a marginalized, overwhelmingly female body of workers that experienced a problematic relationship with the trade union movement.

<sup>111</sup> These figures also starkly demonstrate the preponderance of females over males in domestic service. See the Census of England and Wales 1931, *Occupation Tables* (London, 1934) as reproduced in Woollard, Table 10, p. 20.

<sup>66</sup> Delap, *Knowing their Place*.

<sup>113</sup> See Todd, ‘Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950’.

domestic service.<sup>114</sup> Recent critics including Todd and Steedman put forward a particularly pertinent reason for the omission of domestic service from the historical debates over this period.<sup>115</sup> Their separate arguments attest to the view that servants have been devalued because their activities do not result in commodity production: as the economic activity of the servant cannot be measured in terms of output their existence is overlooked, as their lack of production renders them invisible commercially. Those in domestic service were excluded from their contemporary social debate, primarily because that debate was owned by the paternalistic middle class and in addition because the operations of domestic service were not seen either literally or economically. McBride laments the lack of an 'exchange value' for domestic service, and propels this contentious point into 21<sup>st</sup> century debate, stating that 'until these services can be fully commercialized and performed outside the home, domestic service will continue to remain outside the realm of measurable urban economic activities.'<sup>116</sup> It is apparent that the operation of servants within the household is itself an essential element of the contemporary domestic ideology, and thereby critical to the hegemony.

Whilst it is accepted that servants are a crucial element of the domestic make-up, commentators are divided over whether domestic service provided a means of modernisation or, in fact, hindered reform. As a means of modernisation servants enabled the smooth running of the household and made it possible for their mistresses to work.<sup>117</sup> (Along with Judy Giles, Mary Wilson would imply that servants assisted a number of female

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<sup>114</sup> McBride, p. 117.

<sup>115</sup> Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950', p.183 and p.189, and Todd, *The People*. Secondly, see Carolyn Steedman, *Master and Servant, Love and Labour in the English Industrial Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 29-43.

<sup>116</sup> McBride, p. 9.

<sup>117</sup> Judy Giles, 'Authority, Dependence and Power in Domestic Service' in Delap, et al., p. 208.

modernists; the displacement of domestic drudgery enabling the creativity of the mistress.)<sup>118</sup> However, another view pertains here. Certain historians maintain that servants hindered modernisation: for example the existence of a body of cheap household labour meant that Britain lagged behind the US in the take-up of labour-saving devices such as Hoovers and washing machines.<sup>119</sup> Why would a British employer seek to provide an expensive labour-saving device for use by a maid, when that maid might undertake the task herself within her usual duties? McBride suggests that it is this opinion, i.e. that servants were a barrier to modernisation, that has led historians to infer that domestic service has no place in the history of the industrializing British economy.<sup>120</sup> Whilst the topic of domestic reform is not central to this thesis, the complexities around whether domestic servants helped or hindered modernisation, and the counter-intuitive belief that the powers that be might wish to posit the recalcitrance of servants as a branch catching in the wheel of progress, resonate with the servant representations in this study. Eagleton prompts the researcher to remain mindful not only of the historical conditions of the literature, but of the historical conditions of the criticism itself.<sup>121</sup> In this case, the same group – of domestic servants – is excluded from the current socio-historical debate, due to our contemporary fascination with perceived socio-economic value. The primacy that our society affords to socio-economic value continues to operate to exclude domestic service from the debate. An uncomfortable double-standard persists in this situation, exemplified in the fact that the weekly magazine, *The Lady*, carries some 40 adverts for servants

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<sup>118</sup> Wilson considers servants in Woolf, Stein, Larsen and Rhys. She suggests servants are: 'necessary laborers in the creation of modernist domesticity and the conditions of production of modernist fiction' See Wilson, p. 50.

<sup>119</sup> Lethbridge, *Servants*, p. 7.

<sup>120</sup> McBride.

<sup>121</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1976), p.vi. Servants do not figure in Eagleton's analysis however, neither here nor in his equally ground-breaking *Literary Theory*.

in each issue, in their 'Domestic UK' jobs section.<sup>122</sup> Servants remain in their place. As well as seeing the continuation of domestic service, modernized, into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the past decades have witnessed a refreshed contemporary cultural outpouring of popular texts that feature servants of a bygone age.<sup>123</sup> Our current consideration of domestic help from the era of 'the servant question' has crystallized around their marketable status as a whimsical element of English heritage.<sup>124</sup> Identified as originating in the post-war period, the 'heritage industry',<sup>125</sup> with its enthusiasm for the social divisiveness of 'upstairs and downstairs', stands accused of cultural sanitisation and elitism,<sup>126</sup> reinforcing a particular view of the past that encourages contemporary buy-in to values that reify privilege, 'part of a politically conservative backlash to prevent cultural and social change in the present and future'.<sup>127</sup> Heritage as industry bears out the opinion that 'the tradition of all dead

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<sup>122</sup> At the time of writing *The Lady's* online magazine featured positions for live in (predominantly over live out) housekeepers, cooks, ladies' companions and butlers around the UK. A 'traditional' butler in Kensington could expect a salary of between £40,000 and £50,000.

<sup>123</sup> *Downton Abbey* is recorded a fifth series and then a sixth series, with an average of 11.8 million viewers in the UK for the Autumn 2013 airing. The series has been sold to some 100 countries worldwide, having a particularly enthusiastic audience in the US. Simon Schama, meanwhile, recognizes the programme as a 'steaming, silvered tureen of snobbery.' The final episode aired over the festive season in 2015 and according to the *Guardian* achieved an average audience of 8.8 million. See <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/nov/09/downton-abbey-ends-final-series-with-88-million-viewers>. A 'heritage boom' was created in the 1980s through commercial activity sparked by local government cultural enterprises, entrepreneurialism and privatization (see Bella Dicks' 'Heritage, Governance and Marketisation' in *Museum and Society*, 1, 1 (2003), pp. 30-44) the effects of which continue to reverberate through 21<sup>st</sup> century cultural elitism.

<sup>124</sup> Historians focusing on the discourse of commodified 'heritage' note that in whilst visitors are generally encouraged to view and engage in the histories of the 'upstairs' in the country house or stately home on display, that servant quarters are excluded. This renders them invisible and denies them a place in the wider contemporary social context being explored. See Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 127.

<sup>125</sup> Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen, 1987).

<sup>126</sup> Patrick Wright (1985), *On Living in an Old Country* (London: Verso, 1985) and *A Journey Through Ruins – The Last Days of London* (London: Hutchison Radius, 1991).

<sup>127</sup> Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, p. 39.

generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.'<sup>128</sup>

Currently a handful of very contemporary (and notably female) social historians consider a more 'narrow' canvas and focus more on servants and their importance to domestic life in the period (and particularly in the run up to this period). Alison Light works in social history as well as literary criticism, but maintains a focus on the domestic;<sup>129</sup> Horn<sup>130</sup> and Lucy Delap<sup>131</sup> provided significant insight to this thesis, whilst Lucy Lethbridge has completed a recent study that considers servants by their function before and through the period of the servant question.<sup>132</sup> Considering domestic service in the twentieth century, Selina Todd is the first of these commentators to genuinely restore the servant to the discussion of class, in her latest study declaring that they are a 'potentially insurrectionary working class'.<sup>133</sup>

So, having established that servants are largely excised from social histories and labour histories of the period, and identified studies that are more inclusive with respect to domestic servants and might provide contextual insight for this thesis, we turn to examine the role of the servant question in the fiction of the time. I would contend that, whilst many writers working in this era are concerned with class, precious few of them extend those concerns towards servants. This is somewhat

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<sup>128</sup> Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: Cosimo Editions, 2008), p.1.

<sup>129</sup> The breadth of Light's work – which includes social history as well as literary criticism, can be seen from her two texts: Light, *Mrs Woolf, and Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991). Her most recent book is the autobiographical *Common People: The History of an English Family* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2015).

<sup>130</sup> See Horn, *Life Below Stairs*.

<sup>131</sup> Delap, *Knowing their Place*.

<sup>132</sup> Lethbridge, *Servants*.

<sup>133</sup> See Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England*. Her most recent work is the most thorough with respect to servants, see Todd, *The People*.



surprising, as the work of such writers has established an overwhelming narrative that, although contested,<sup>134</sup> largely constructs the literature and cultural hegemony of the period as radical and left wing. The agenda was set by intellectuals such as Victor Gollancz and John Strachey with the 1936 inception of the Left Book Club (LBC), which attracted 40,000 members by the end of its first year, and went on to publish titles including Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) and *Homage to Catalonia*.<sup>135</sup> Aiming to encourage increased politicization across all classes, the LBC held rallies, published a monthly newsletter *Left News*, and commissioned educative titles 'from farming to Freud to air-raid shelters to Indian independence'.<sup>136</sup> But, 'despite its attempts to bring politics and literature to working-class people, its activists were largely privileged men and women.'<sup>137</sup> In this putative moment 'after' modernism,<sup>138</sup> realist fiction was in the ascendancy, encompassing Orwell's tale of George Bowling,<sup>139</sup> and varying from novels of the much-discussed social democratic middle-brow such as Winifred Holtby's *South Riding* (1936),<sup>140</sup> to the phenomenally successful

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<sup>134</sup> See, for example Frank Groversmith on 'writers taking sides', in Frank Groversmith, *Class Culture and Social Change: A new view of the 1930s* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980).

<sup>135</sup> See Todd, *The People*, p. 78. Gollancz, Strachey and Harold Laski selected the titles for publication, see John Lewis, *The Left Book Club: An Historical Record* (Littlehampton: Littlehampton Book Services, 1970).

<sup>136</sup> See Paul Laity's excellent, introduction for fascinating contextual information concerning the LBC. See Laity, p. ix. Notably, the Left Book Club (LBC) was known for its anti-imperialist stance.

<sup>137</sup> <http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/left-book-club>. We recall that this was also the case with Mass Observation. Gollancz was criticized for his 'Café Communism'. Its radicalism was, however, a threat to some, as members of the LBC were expelled from the Labour Party, see Lewis, *The Left Book Club*.

<sup>138</sup> Lawrence Rainey describes the reductive practice of limiting discussion of modernism in terms of its perceived reactionary ideological stance; this area of debate lies out-with the focus of this thesis. See Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 6.

<sup>139</sup> *Coming Up for Air* has been previously discussed. George segues into Gordon Comstock in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*.

<sup>140</sup> The social democratic middle-brow is discussed by John Baxendale and Chris Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties: A Decade in the Making: 1930 to the Present*

'collective' novel of a proletarian community by Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole* (1933).<sup>141</sup> Debate continues to circle concerning the proletarian novel, its relationship with realism and its class contexts, with an emphasis significantly placed on the class status of the writer of the work.<sup>142</sup>

I contend that through an analysis of their representations of the servant question and the light that this sheds on their constructions of class, the writers selected for inclusion in this study operate against this schema rather than alongside it, providing an alternative impetus. These writers toy with class and servants in many complex ways, complicating the dominant class-based narrative of the era. Literary criticism considering Mansfield, Bowen, Green, Panter-Downs, Taylor and Waugh does not dismiss, but neglects or downplays the operation of the servant question. Some critics do discuss the topic of class, although rather than seek this out thematically and posit the work's relevance, as support or as foil to the narrative of literature of class, it places emphasis instead upon the biographical – on the social status of the author – rather than

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(Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996). Nicola Humble focuses on the 'middle-brow' itself, see Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*.

<sup>141</sup> *Love on the Dole* has also been considered a 'collective novel', in which the community is the 'collective hero'. Stephen Constantine considers its reception at the time of its production in his essay 'Love on the Dole and its reception in the 1930s' in *Literature & History*, 8 (Autumn, 1982), pp. 232-247, p. 232. For greater discussion of working class literature see Christopher Hillard, *To Exercise our Talents: The Democratisation of Writing in Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), and John Kirk's *Twentieth Century Writing and the British Working Class* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003). Although Kirk works effectively to reestablish a consideration of class into contemporary literary analysis, the topic of domestic service and servants themselves are notably absent from his study.

<sup>142</sup> Again, this is beyond the scope of this thesis, but for an intriguing read that delves into the changing approach of literary criticism towards working class or proletarian fiction see Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working Class Novel, 1890-1945* (Durham, NCA: Duke University Press, 1994). The identification of Green as a privileged individual writing a proletariat novel will be briefly discussed in the chapter on the manservant.

analysing the function of rank in the writing itself.<sup>143</sup> In the case of Elizabeth Bowen, whose short stories 'Oh, Madam...' and 'The Disinherited' and novel *The Death of the Heart* (all published in the 1930s) make her the most widely discussed writer in this thesis, since the Angus Wilson debate it has been the class status of the writer herself rather than class representations in her writing that has figured more prominently in the critical foci.<sup>144</sup> Critiquing the approach of literary critics towards works of this period, Peter MacDonald agrees that the significance of a reading of the literature itself was often downplayed in favour of a biographical approach, with analysis 'presented in terms of the relation between the writer and society.'<sup>145</sup> Analysing *The Death of the Heart* Maud Ellmann reduces Bowen to a class stereotype in an instant, describing how 'with her peculiar Anglo-Irish brand of snobbery, Bowen looked down on the morality, rather than the immorality, of the lower orders.'<sup>146</sup> Ellmann also passes over the possibilities for analysis offered by the numerous servants who materialize through the author's oeuvre, despite their frequent recurrence and the enlightenment they portend.<sup>147</sup> The accepted reading of Green is through a

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<sup>143</sup> Some exceptions are noted, although the likes of Harold Bloom write extensively on the period and several of these authors, contriving to eschew class in his analysis.

<sup>144</sup> In her book review of *The People's War* (1969) Bowen took offence at Calder's assertion that rather than uniting in a positive, shared experience, the poor suffered excessively in the war. Bowen's point was that he had not been old enough to know. For a helpful account of their dispute see Maroula Joannou, *Women's Writing, Englishness and National and Cultural Identity: The Mobile Woman and the Migrant Voice, 1938-62* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 28.

<sup>145</sup> See Peter McDonald 'Believing in the Thirties', in Keith Williams and Steven Matthews, eds., *Rewriting the Thirties: Modernism and After* (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 71-91, p. 71.

<sup>146</sup> Maud Ellmann, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p.135. Ellmann's omission is all the more surprising, in the light of her investigation of surrogacy in *The Death of the Heart*, which I would argue is relevant to Matchett's position with respect to the Quaynes.

<sup>147</sup> Notable servant inclusion in Bowen's novels include: in *Friends and Relations* (1931) with the patronising, class consciousness of Laurel, who sees servants as doll-like possessions "...and went on to tell Janet how she was a true bride,

biographical lens that focuses upon his aristocratic background, arguing that the author chose to elude his origins so as to bolster the quirky realism of his work.<sup>148</sup> Hentea thankfully complicates this position, although, quoting Joseph Hynes,<sup>149</sup> Hentea also identifies Green's 'lack of context' as a reason for his perceived difficulty and ultimately the paucity of the recognition he has achieved.<sup>150</sup> Until 2010 only two journal articles had actively considered Green's 'treatment' of class rather than his class status.<sup>151</sup> Those writing on Green's class representations typically hone in upon his novel of the Birmingham steel works – *Living* (1929) – arguing over its dialogic authenticity. Beci Carver brings together Green and Waugh in her recent *Granular Modernism*, but is entirely concerned with biographical evidence concerning the two writers and the ambivalence that was a feature of their Eton and Oxford University experience.<sup>152</sup>

Leaving aside Carver's conjoining of Waugh and Green it is fair to say in addition that the writers chosen for this study are not customarily thought to belong to the same literary coterie. It

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terrified of the servants – she had planned years ago servants of hers should wear mob caps and cherry-pink in the mornings, but Simpson and Sylvia (what a name for a cook!) were not to be imposed upon – and changing her new dresses, for very exhilaration, three times a day." p. 35. In *The House in Paris* (1935) (Karen's consciousness, after news of Uncle Bill's death.) 'She thought: Servants are terrible: why should they share one's house?'

<sup>148</sup> See Peter Hitchcock, 'Passing: Henry Green and Working Class Identity', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 40, 1 (1994), pp.1-31, and Michael North in his *Henry Green and the Writing of his Generation* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1984)

<sup>149</sup> Joseph Hynes, 'Fitting: A Note on Henry Green in the Classroom', *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol 29 (1983), pp. 465-70, p. 465.

<sup>150</sup> See Hentea, *Henry Green*. Noting Green's 'lack of context' he is of course referring to the difficulty experienced by critics in their attempts to pigeonhole the author as 'aristocracy', 'bourgeois' or even 'working class'. Green also activated debate when he was misidentified as 'working class writer' by Angus Calder, giving rise to consternation over whether a proletarian novel could be written by an individual who was not of that persuasion himself.

<sup>151</sup> And these too make use of misconceived ideas regarding Green's own status to support their analysis. See the critique offered by Marius Hentea, 'Fictions of Class as a Community in Henry Green's *Living*', *Studies in the Novel*, 42, 3 (2010), pp. 321-339.

<sup>152</sup> See Beci Carver, *Granular Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

would be highly unusual to find them considered together in a literary evaluation of the period, without some routine eschewal: for example, none of them feature in Williams and Matthews' *Rewriting the Thirties*,<sup>153</sup> despite four of Bowen's novels being published during this period;<sup>154</sup> neither do they sit happily together under the banner of Intermodernism;<sup>155</sup> and by virtue of his gender Virginia Smyers and Gillian Hanscombe's feminine para-modernism excludes Henry Green.<sup>156</sup> Nicola Humble's middle-brow treatise usefully offers readings, though minimal, of Ivy Compton Burnett who is discussed in this introduction, Elizabeth Taylor and to a lesser degree Mollie Panter-Downes, yet again her focus is on female writers.<sup>157</sup> Meanwhile, Beci Carver's granular modernists are exclusively male.<sup>158</sup>

#### 4. Rationale and Selection

So why have what appears to be a disparate group of writers been gathered into this analysis? The rationale for the inclusion of the writers here – Bowen, du Maurier, Mansfield, Taylor, Green, Waugh and Panter-Downes – is that they all engage with the issue of class through an exploration of what at the time was

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<sup>153</sup> Probably because of the earlier points made – the overwhelming narrative of the cultural discourse of this period nods towards a left wing agenda. See Williams and Matthews.

<sup>154</sup> *Friends and Relations* (1931), *To the North* (1932), *The House in Paris* (1935) and the novel that features in this study, *The Death of the Heart* (1938). One of her most well received short story collections, *The Cat Jumps and Other Stories* was published in 1934.

<sup>155</sup> Kristin Bluemel's 2009 study, *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain*, includes Bowen, but only seeks to identify Green and Panter Downes as potential Intermodernists, whilst ignoring Elizabeth Taylor. See Kristin Bluemel, *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

<sup>156</sup> See Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers, *Writing for Their Lives: The Modernist Women 1910-1940* (London: Women's Press, 1987).

<sup>157</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*.

<sup>158</sup> The Granular Modernists Carver identifies are Joseph Conrad, William Gerhardie, Evelyn Waugh, Henry Green, T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, and Samuel Beckett. See Carver,.

referred to as the servant question. It is my contention that through this focus on the servant question these writers interrogate the wider debate on class, posing troublesome questions concerning social mobility that challenge the intuited belief that domestic social negotiation was underway. Firstly, the selection of writing identified for analysis extends through a period of the most substantial transformation and concomitant apprehension, if we take into consideration the socio-historical context of the production of the work. Mansfield's 'The Lady's Maid' was written in 1920, the year in which the British Communist Party was founded.<sup>159</sup> Bowen's short stories were published in 1934 ('The Disinherited'), the year that Hitler declared himself 'Führer', and at the crux of the Second World War in 1941, the worst year of the Blitz ('Oh, Madam!'), whilst the novel *Death of the Heart* was issued in 1938. Du Maurier's highly successful *Rebecca* was published in that same year – 1938, the year when gas masks were issued to the general population, and Neville Chamberlain signed the Munich agreement. (Hitchcock's film followed in 1940; the speed of the novel's transformation to filmic gothic romance illustrative of the alacrity of cultural assimilation of the narrative's mores.) Mollie Panter-Downes' short story 'Cut Down the Trees' was first issued in *The New Yorker* in 1943, whilst the novels Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* and Henry Green's *Loving* were published in 1945, the year that saw an end to hostilities in Europe in May and with Japan in the east in September.<sup>160</sup> The novel *Palladian* by Elizabeth Taylor, issued in 1946, marks the chronological end of the study. These writers' work extends through the period of

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<sup>159</sup> Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, p.133. The clear link between class-consciousness and this kind of radical socialism was reiterated famously by Margaret Thatcher when she averred in 1992 that 'Class is a Communist Concept'.

<sup>160</sup> The chosen publication for Panter-Downes' work - the influential US *New Yorker* is fascinating. US attitudes to the UK, US attitudes towards British hierarchy and domestic service is unfortunately beyond the scope of this study, although it offers an intriguing area for further investigation.

the greatest change and anxiety with respect to the negotiation of social status. It is unsurprising then that above all, these writers have been found to uniquely address class through the servant question. Some of the writers chosen address the servant question in works other than those chosen for analysis here: the most telling example, Green's *Partygoing* (1939), sees a group of servants entombed in a fog-bound city station hotel alongside their employers, whilst the masses teem on the platforms below, in an obvious metaphor for a consideration of social ordering in the 1930s. However, it is with Raunce and the entire cast of big-house servants in *Loving* that Green offers a mature retrospective on the servant from an immediate post-war perspective. Now this introduction goes on to comment briefly on the chapters in turn, reflecting on the particular thread of focus in each.

The lady's maids of the first chapter share a revealing quality: each is resistant to change. The term 'resistance' will feature throughout this study, so it is pertinent to dissect and extrapolate the three meanings of the word that may be utilized here. The meanings are: firstly the refusal to accept or comply with something, and secondly the ability not to be affected by something, especially adversely. These two meanings often pertain together with respect to mistresses and servants: the first implies rebelliousness, the second imperviousness. In the sphere of material science 'resistance' is commonly used to denote the impeding or stopping effect exerted by one material thing on another. These complexities and multiple meanings around 'resistance' are useful to the analysis of the three examples of the lady's maids chapter, for whilst all three share an essential immutability, differences expressed in their relationships with their mistresses reveal singular ideologies underpinning them. Mansfield's story about a lady's maid is narrated through the free indirect speech of the maid, whose

voice narrates both her own story and her mistress's imagined responses. Bowen's 1943 story takes up the same stylistic technique, with the voice of the mistress represented in the dashes and ellipses of the form. The capitulation of Mansfield's maid gives way to the maid's anxiety in Bowen's narrative, as she struggles to maintain appearances in a world transformed by the Blitz. The third of the maids is Panter-Downes' creation. Elderly, abandoned with her mistress to struggle with the exigencies of wartime Britain, Dossie resists the environmental changes that her mistress embraces. Any notion that the working class maid was desirous of an end to their life in service, and sought independence outside the mistress-servant dynamic, is firmly rebuffed by the underlying resonance of the servant question in these three stories.

The literary representations of Housekeepers, the focus of chapter three, work to maintain entrenched forms of domestic command and control. Bowen's housekeeper, from her 1938 novel *The Death of the Heart*, seems at first reading to work against the habituated norms of the household, in her denial and disavowal of the mandate of the Quaynes. However, the Quaynes must become better people, learn to overcome their inadequacies, and furthermore accept the responsibilities that adhere to the younger generation. It is my contention that housekeeper Matchett is instrumental in the processes of transformation in the novel, ultimately acting as a lodestone for the maintenance of the current state of affairs. Bowen's novel retains significant hallmarks of modernism, as the housekeeper's crucial journey to bring the young Portia back to the family is abruptly transected by the end of the narrative, leaving a multiplicity of available endings. I argue that a close reading of this section of the novel reveals the housekeeper to be acting in the interests of a long-established and inherited household order, but critically under her own direction rather than that of



her employer. Matchett differs from her counterpart in du Maurier's novel, in which the dominion over the ancestral family home that been assumed by Mrs Danvers must be reclaimed and reasserted by the new mistress. *Rebecca* was also published in 1938, and its reception as a popular novel, gothic romance and thriller has influenced its reception by literary critics. In the absence of adequate supervision the novel's questionable servant, Mrs Danvers, has usurped the power of the employer; her educative function for the new generation of mistress regularizes and revives household arrangements, but results in her own debasement.

I argue that the nannies chosen for analysis are complicated but are finally also the adversaries of transformation: they operate as denial and disavowal of ordering household structures but simultaneously behave to defend the familiar patterns of succession. Nanny Hawkins, the nanny representation in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, resonates with the other texts in this study. A country house setting for the critical interaction between servant and master recalls the similar settings of both Panter-Downs' story and du Maurier's *Rebecca*. The complexity of Waugh's representation of the nanny contrasts with that of Elizabeth Taylor's novel, *Palladian*, for whilst Nanny Hawkins is passive, Taylor's nanny is antagonistic. Here once again the nanny remains in the family's home beyond her years of useful work, however Taylor's nanny is troublesome to her 'betters', challenging and demanding with respect to the employer and the changing servant structures. Counter-intuitively however, her disputatiousness disturbs the narrative of positive post-war social change.

The final substantive 'case study' chapter of this thesis focuses on representations of manservants. The characters discussed work transgressively against and for the continuation of the familiar social system, but within its bounds; their

activities are undertaken for their own benefit but crucially they are underpinned by the prescriptions of the exchange relationship. Technology has a significant presence in each of the examples analysed, its agency linked intriguingly to transgression. Prothero, the murderous, duplicitous chauffeur of Bowen's story 'The Disinherited', hides behind the 'character' provided to him by his stolen reference, but is empowered by his mistress's motorcar. The new position of Green's butler Raunce augments his pecuniary success as thief, falsifier and voyeur; meanwhile his scopophilic tastes are those of the butler reduced to a stereotype, harnessed by the early cinematic technology of the 'What the Butler Saw' and reproduced for the titillation of the masses. Technologies persistently in the hands of the employer class undercut the transgressive power wielded by the servants, and re-cast these manservants as doubly bound by the exchange relationship. Technology does not act as we might hope it would, to support the narrative of servant enablement, ennoblement and freedom from the master-servant slavery. Instead technology, as it remains in the hands, ownership and control of the employer, supports the alternative narrative of these texts – that change is not necessarily something to be embraced by the servant class. Green and Bowen demonstrate the means by which any potential for class transformation is problematized and even negated by the persistence of the exchange relationship, creating a literature that reads against the prevailing narrative of enhanced mobility and the desire for self-determination.

An example of a fictional text that concentrates on the representations of servants, and problematises the class assumptions of the servant question that are associated with them, is *Manservant and Maidservant* (1947) by Ivy Compton Burnett. The presence of history in this text and the extent to which it relays ideology is moot. The novel is set in the late

Victorian/Edwardian period, as are the majority of the author's novels.<sup>161</sup> The inherent historical staggering - the gap in time between the period in which the book was written and published, and the time in which the book is set - offers a useful and illuminating point for analysis, particularly with respect to the servant representations that make up a significant part of the novel. The servants share centre-stage with the family, and as Constance Lewis suggests, by the close of the novel they 'almost have the stage to themselves'.<sup>162</sup> The servant question grew to its most alarming apogee in the gap between the time in which the novel is set and the time when the novel was written. This chronological disjunction signals that it may be possible to discern something of the presence of ideology in this feature of the text.<sup>163</sup> Why does Ivy Compton Burnett choose to present an environment for her novel that existed fifty years prior to the point of writing? This 'gap' would appear to lay open the ideology of that text for closer scrutiny.

*Manservant and Maidservant* may be seen, at least partially, as a critique of the social arrangements of a patriarchal late-Victorian/Edwardian household, which also resonates in the setting of the novel's cultural production. Critical opinion of Compton Burnett seems to hold with this observation, with Elizabeth Maslen noting a 'mirroring of public conflict within families and closed communities' as a 'key aspect of Ivy Compton Burnett's novels'.<sup>164</sup> The novel centres on the relationships both within and between a dysfunctional upper class family and the servants who care for them. Lewis suggests that Compton Burnett 'uses servants to point up indirectly the absurdity or

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<sup>161</sup> Although the specificity of the historical context is never revealed.

<sup>162</sup> See Constance Lewis, "Manservant and Maidservant: A Pivotal Novel", *Twentieth Century Literature*, 25, 2 (1979), p. 224.

<sup>163</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism*.

<sup>164</sup> Elizabeth Maslen, 'Women Writers in World War II', *Literature Compass*, 3, 3 (2006), pp. 625-635.

emptiness of upstairs life.<sup>165</sup> The servants are headed-up by the butler Bullivant, whose adroit understanding of both the family he serves and the servants he leads, singles him out. Bruce Robbins notes his 'perspicacity and sturdy eloquence.'<sup>166</sup>

Bullivant dominates over the servant group, and to some degree over the entire household.<sup>167</sup> Bullivant operates in the space between the servants and his master and mistress, both literally and figuratively. The following example illustrates the servant position with respect to domestic economics. Working as a household servant alongside the butler, although in a more lowly position, is the character George. The issue of George's work, his remuneration for that work, and the comparison of these with his own efforts, prompts Bullivant to challenge his employers on the topic of wages. (Bullivant's voice is heard, discussing George, at the beginning of this quote, followed immediately by the voices of the family, his employers.):

"But we have to think of our wages, sir."

"He takes the rough work off you, doesn't he?" said Mortimer.

"Well, sir, I give him what chance I can," said Bullivant, piling some china on a tray and bearing it to the door on one hand, in illustration of his personal standard.

"It is true that George is underpaid," said Charlotte, "though it is not like Bullivant to refer to it almost aloud. And he has lived down the workhouse stigma by now."

"We knew nothing about the workhouse," said Horace.

"Bullivant knew," said Mortimer, "and kept it in his heart."

"We cannot ask Bullivant about it," said Charlotte, "because he is not paid quite enough himself. Of course we do not dare to pay him much too little. We only oppress the weak."

"From he that hath not, shall be taken away," said Emilia.<sup>168</sup>

Bullivant challenges on the topic of wages without actually mentioning the subject; as Charlotte says, he refers "to it almost aloud." The family acknowledges that they are underpaying their

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<sup>165</sup> See Lewis, p. 228.

<sup>166</sup> Bruce Robbins, *The Servant's Hand: English Fiction from Below* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. xx.

<sup>167</sup> Further and more extensive analysis of the butler role is given in chapter 4.

<sup>168</sup> Ivy Compton Burnett, *Manservant and Maidservant* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1947), p. 14.

staff, but fail to take it seriously as an issue, making light of the topic with a tone of flippancy. Mortimer describes Bullivant using a biblical phrase associated with Mary the mother of Jesus, who “kept it in her heart”. Is the reader to infer that the master thinks of his butler as a maternal figure, caring for his youngest servant-charge George as Mary did for her son Jesus? Compton Burnett wields the most unusual of connotations in her dialogue. The truth that Bullivant ‘kept in his heart’ relates to George’s workhouse origins. The mention of the workhouse indicates specifically, both historically and socially, the context of this servant’s employment. This indicates a point of contrast between the narrative’s historical representation and the contemporary context of the work’s production. A relic of the Poor Law, workhouses were officially abolished in 1930, to be replaced by social welfare that was means tested and overseen by the much-maligned “Public Assistance Boards”.<sup>169</sup> By the time of writing, 1947, the welfare state had been established to address Beveridge’s five ‘giant evils’ of squalor, ignorance, want, idleness and disease.<sup>170</sup> Local authorities frequently converted former workhouses into public assistance institutions. Taking into account the socio-historical setting of the novel, George’s workhouse origins mark him out as one of an underclass made up of the unwanted, demonstrating that he has experienced a poverty that had disappeared from the public’s view in that form by the time of the novel’s production.

The family is aware of their own parsimony. The self-deprecating, ironic assertion that ‘we only oppress the weak’, is both humorous and discordant. Whilst Bullivant appears disinterested, and we hear that ‘he did not concern himself with

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<sup>169</sup> See Todd, *The People*, p 64.

<sup>170</sup> First identified in his paper *Social Insurance and Allied Services* of 1942, with aspirations and promises that helped Labour to General Election victory immediately post-war, and a resulting new social contract between the British people and the state; see Todd, *The People*, pp. 142-5.

the material affairs of the family,'<sup>171</sup> once he is back 'below stairs' with Cook he brings up the topic of George again. In this way the financial conditions of the individual in domestic service are shown to be up for debate by both household groups, the masters and the servants. The domestic servant had no private life. Wages are linked with personal social origins in the observations of the Cook and Bullivant, as the butler 'reports' back downstairs, mediating the conversation and the message from the master and mistress:

"There was talk about our places of birth, and we all made our contribution," said Bullivant, with a note of complacency. "The master and Mr Mortimer and I had spent the major part of our lives under this roof. With George, as we know, it has been otherwise."

"And what was made of it?"

"Nothing much on the surface, Mrs Selden. But I suspect there was consternation beneath. But, as I hinted to the master, wages such as ours can hardly preclude slurs of the venal kind."<sup>172</sup>

Their origins serve to divide the servants – they are seen as a group that is not united in their working status, but is instead divided along lines that resemble those of class. The representation depicts a group that is on one hand enthralled to feudalism, whilst they are simultaneously individually isolated through their difference one from another. This separation renders them unlikely to unite for wages or unionisation. The linking of wages with origins critiques the social determinism of class in the late Victorian/ Edwardian period.

The examination of status and its economic implications persists in the novel, as the low caste servant George joins the debate in the kitchen, and gives voice to what is a politically enlightened narrative. In the following example George is in conversation with Miriam, another lowly servant of the lumpenproletariat, whose origins lie in the orphanage:

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<sup>171</sup> Compton Burnett, *Manservant and Maidservant*, p. 14.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

"I shall always be rough, Miriam."

"Well, a good deal of the work to be done is rough," said Miriam, feeling that George had his place in the scheme of things.

"I should like to rise above it."

"There would be nobody to do it, if everyone rose," said Miriam, who was more articulate with her equals, and saw George as amongst these.

"But he who does high things, has people as much indebted to him as he who does low ones. Wouldn't you like to rise?"<sup>173</sup>

Class delineation and social mobility are evidently the focus of the dialogue. The critic Nicola Humble agrees that Ivy Compton Burnett plays games with class structures.<sup>174</sup> But, Miriam not only seems to lack the desire to 'rise' above her station, but expresses anxiety that her equal, George, should wish to do so. Their language, of 'high', 'low' and 'rising' is that of class, implicitly concerning the unlikelihood and difficulty of social mobility. A 'place in the scheme of things' implies that delineation by virtue of social status is a natural and desirable set of conditions under which to live. George's final response here is a plea for equality, expressed in his observation that those of high and low station have equal responsibilities and are equal in their relationships with others. The servant is asking the question.

The source of Miriam's reluctance to consider an improvement in her station becomes apparent in the following dialogue. The scene is one of a conversation that takes place between Cook (Mrs Selden), Miriam, George and Bullivant, with each discussing their individual plans for Christmas. Whilst Miriam's beginnings in the orphanage are not elaborated upon, her emotional ties to this aspect of her past are apparent:

"Do you frequent any place of worship, Miriam?" said Bullivant.

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-9. Note that the 'rough' was a term used divisively in terms of the work a servant might be tasked with. In Chapter Two we learn that the char was expected to 'do the rough', unlike, the implication sits, a live-in maid. The char is a 'new' variety of servant/non-servant, and living-in and living out mark status – both are areas contested at the time, but in the examples analysed in this thesis they are represented so as to reify past social structures.

<sup>174</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, p. 195.

"I go to the orphanage service, and they have asked me there on Christmas night."

"And you, George? Will you repair to the scenes of your early days?"

"No, I never go near them. I am welcome in private homes."

"I have little bias myself towards institutions," said Cook. "Not that Miriam is not correct to go to hers."

"Nor would it demean George to go and do likewise," said Bullivant, still on a scriptural note.

"That is other people's view," said George, "and our own is best, when it comes to what is for ourselves."<sup>175</sup>

It can be inferred from her desire to return to the orphanage on Christmas night that Miriam remains institutionalized.

Furthermore, this suggests that she does not feel 'at home' in the servants' quarters of the house. Miriam is again contrasted with George, who has moved on from his own origins, stating that he is now 'welcome in private homes'. Cook also expresses her dislike for workhouse and orphanage alike; the private home is desirable, whilst the public institution is deplorable. The quotation ends with George again asserting his individualism. The older servants expect the institutionalized to remain so, in effect for the 'lowly' to recognize their position and stay in it. George however, resists this, reaching instead for the possibility of self-determination as 'our own is best, when it comes to what is for ourselves'. George goes on to offer up criticism of the family of the house. He is not afraid to criticize his employers and, 'betters', to the consternation of the older servants:

"Talking of homes, this house is not much of one," said George, "anyhow to the children of it."

Bullivant and Cook exchanged a glance.

"The gentry follow their own ways more than others do," said Bullivant. "The higher they are, the more is that the case."<sup>176</sup>

Although he is the underservant, George expresses the unspoken truth about the patriarchal misery being doled out to the children of the house. Such dissent is not permissible, and Bullivant counters George with the observation that the upper

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<sup>175</sup> Compton Burnett, *Manservant and Maidservant*, p. 92.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93.



class are not only allowed, but are expected to behave as they wish – their lives are self-determined:

“Is it better to be high up?” said Miriam.

“It is not always better for the people themselves,” said Bullivant. “From royalty downwards that is the trend.”

“We are a good way down from royalty” said George.

“Well, there are intervening steps,” said Cook. But those who are further down still, can hardly estimate the matter. It is for them to do their duty at their point of the scale. And I am not aware that the voicing of opinion is included in it. And there is not much duty being done at the moment, that I can perceive.”

Miriam and George accepted their dismissal, and Bullivant looked at Cook.<sup>177</sup>

Social stratification is presented by Cook, each with the knowledge of their own place in that structure. According to this perspective the lowly are not expected to consider nor comment on this arrangement. Duty must be done and the present situation must endure. The roles that must be played to keep the pyramid of class in place, including those of royalty, are seen as desirable amongst these older, established servants. The old order wishes to preserve the conditions in which it flourishes. At the end of the chapter Bullivant’s point of view concerning George reiterates this:

“His duty and his simple respect will suffice. Opinions and opinions of an adverse nature, are not required. We did not look for this result of ignoring his origin. It is not the expected outcome.”<sup>178</sup>

The younger servant, in contrast, despite his awareness of his position, dares to desire self-determinism – the core of the ‘self-made man’ – so that a new order might flourish that is not in thrall to class. George wishes for an alternative social structure, saying: “There must be other lives. All the world is not a servant.”<sup>179</sup> The contrast between Bullivant and George, old and new order, is most apparent here, when George refutes

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

Bullivant's assertion that the Queen herself is a servant, in that she serves the state. George's quick come-back "But not at the sink," is both humorous and assertive.

This narrative lacuna in the novel works well to expound the idea that servant representations are complex with respect to class and mutability, a position that will be scrutinised throughout this study. George's aspirations mark him out as a self-made or self-determining 'everyman' figure. This aspect of his characterization renders him a jarring presence in the historical context of the novel, offering up what Machery would refer to as literary dissonance.<sup>180</sup> In the context of the novel's 1947 contemporary reception, George's attitude seems less dissonant, with the behaviour and dialogue of the character becoming instead laughably unlikely.<sup>181</sup> *Manservant and Maidservant* works then, as an introductory example of a text produced in the period when the anxious predictions of the 'servant question' were being realized. It presents the ideology of one era, in the produced literary artefact of the next. It is accepted as a given that the production of a physical text always confers its intrinsic participation in the exchange of labour for capital.<sup>182</sup> Finally then, the literary artefact is once again of and

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<sup>180</sup> According to Machery, literary 'dissonance' is capable of revealing ideology. Eagleton explains that: 'The distance which separates the work from ideology embodies itself in the internal distance which, so to speak, separates the work from itself, forces it into a ceaseless difference and division of meanings. In putting ideology to work, the text necessarily illuminates the absences, and begins to 'make speak' the silences, of that ideology. The literary text, far from constituting some unified plenitude of meaning, bears inscribed within it the marks of certain determinant absences which twist its various significations into conflict and contradiction.' Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (NLB, 1976), p. 89.

<sup>181</sup> Compton Burnett's reviewers focussed on her aptitude for the way in which she represented speech – her novels are notoriously dialogue-heavy. Publishing 20 novels in her career, from her first novel in 1911, Compton Burnett fostered a rather incestuous literary coterie, that included her biographer, critic and writer Pamela Hansford Johnson, and most famously, Stevie Smith. Elizabeth Taylor notably imagined herself to be excluded from Ivy's 'set'.

<sup>182</sup> The argument is that 'Literature' enacts aspects of the exchange relationship and, in doing so, reveals how its logic is contradictory. In the absence of a theory

within ideology.<sup>183</sup> It can be inferred that the narrative also operates to critique earlier ideology, and to illuminate areas of the ideology of its sphere of production, and today, of its point of reception. In her commentary on the 'battle of the brows' critic Nicola Humble identifies two contrasting readings of Ivy Compton Burnett, varying from Virginia Woolf's contemporary assessment of her as a highbrow rival, to the more recently suggested 'middlebrow' nomenclature.<sup>184</sup> This can also be interpreted as two readings that differ in the terms of the way they envision the text as ideologically framed and framing. One appraisal is an interpretation that is contemporaneous to Compton Burnett's production and the novel's publication, whilst the other reflects an understanding mediated by a more recent socio-cultural environment. The analysis of Compton Burnett has aimed to introduce and expound the idea that detailed analysis of the representations of servants can offer an additional, revealing twist to the typical reading of those narratives selected in this thesis. Such analysis of literary texts is revealing: it is autonomous, and both depicts and critiques, making evident those lacunae that pertain to meaning. As Macherey explains, 'ideology is made of what it does not mention; it exists because there are things which must not be spoken of.'<sup>185</sup>

This introduction has taken care to consider in detail the class context between 1920 and 1950, looking in turn at social, political and cultural factors and aspects requiring elucidation. My argument then focused in on domestic service, crucially

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of economics, 'literature' itself becomes a means of imagining, negotiating and even institutionalizing the mechanism of exchange. See Day, *Class*, p. 15.

<sup>183</sup> He points out that narrative 'crystallizes out of certain dominant ideological structures, and embodies a set of relations between author and audience.' Day, *Class*, p.26.

<sup>184</sup> Nicola Humble, 'Sitting forward or sitting back: Highbrow versus Middlebrow Reading', *Modernist Cultures*, 6,1 (2011), pp. 41-59, p.42.

<sup>185</sup> Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* (London Routledge, 1978), p. 132.

defining the 'Servant question' before going on to consider narrative responses to this and their relationship, if any, to the class debate. After establishing the social historians' often inadequate analysis of the situation, the lens sharpened again, to bring into view the critical role of the servant question in fiction. Following this, the introduction stated the rationale for the inclusion of the texts examined, explaining that the analysis that will be offered is not one that will focus upon genre, or on a biographical reading of the authors with respect to status, but will work with the representations themselves. A brief exemplar analyses, from Compton Burnett's *Manservant and Maidservant*, was offered in support of this position. In reading these texts, it is my intention to move between the historical context that shaped them – the servant question – and close textual readings, thus elaborating the intersections of content, context and form,<sup>186</sup> to investigate whether these narratives persist in holding the servant up to be 'a class apart'.

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<sup>186</sup> See Wilson, p.6.

## Chapter One: The Lady's Maid – intimacy bought

As we learned in the introduction, the established structure of domestic service was creaking during the period from 1920-1950. Society in transformation meant that the establishment – from the government to the individual household – was beleaguered and sought to negotiate and redefine the secure old hierarchies that had served its interest for so long. This chapter will argue that Mansfield, Bowen and Panter-Downes portray the lady's maid as a figure impervious to a revisionist agenda, and unresponsive to any class-based political discourse advocating manumission. After elaborating on the socio-historical context of the lady's maid, this chapter will proceed to examine three short stories identified as narrative examples of immutability in the servant, Katherine Mansfield's 'The Lady's Maid' (1920), Elizabeth Bowen's 'Oh, Madam...' (1941) and Mollie Panter-Downes's 'Cut Down the Trees' (1943). Challenging the ubiquitous necessity and prevalence of progress and social mobility, these lady's maids both replicate in terms of their concerns, and contrast one with the others.

The lady's maid is the personal servant of the mistress of the house. She serves the personal, sometimes intimate requirements of the mistress, having responsibility for the procurement, laundering and provision of her wardrobe and toiletries, physically dressing her, and sustaining her lady in the daily maintenance of her appearance.<sup>1</sup> In the context of the social environment of the 1920s, historians are agreed that servant-master or mistress affiliation was undergoing a substantial shift, whether through expediency in reaction to the mismatch between servant supply and demand or as a result of social

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<sup>1</sup>See Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950'.

transformation.<sup>2</sup> The lady's maid is of particular importance to this study, because despite these alterations, the querulousness of the servant question persisted for this specific role, arguably due to the intimacy the work entailed:<sup>3</sup> the personal nature of the tasks involved created physical and emotional closeness and dependency in the relationship so that as a consequence the lady's maid would be one of the last servants to be 'let go' by her employer. The affinity is 'fictive' in that it is not a spontaneous association between, say, relatives or friends, but is instead an employer-employee affiliation in which any bond is an imagined one.<sup>4</sup> In the pecking order of the serving household, the function of lady's maid was closest in operation to that of the male valet,<sup>5</sup> who was expected to give his attention solely to the 'close contact' personal, physical needs of the master (dressing and shaving for example). Of all the servants, only the valet and the lady's maid would work so far within the personal precincts of their master or mistress.<sup>6</sup> Within this closeness two contradictory fundamental features play alongside one another. The first of these is the basic requirement that the servant maintains their distance physically from their mistress. Degrees of intimacy between servant and master were carefully managed, in a relationship already highly structured in relation to tactility. A butler, for example, would on occasion find it necessary to touch his employer, perhaps in helping them to take off their outer garments when entering the house. Even for the butler, at the pinnacle of the servant hierarchy, the use of gloves became

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<sup>2</sup> This point is fully elaborated in the Introductory chapter, but see also for example T K Derry and T L Jarman's *Modern Britain: Life and Work through Two Centuries of Change* (London: John Murray, 1979); Ross McKibbin mentions the decline of the domestic servant, although only in passing, in *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> See Pam Taylor, 'Daughters and Mothers — Maids and Mistresses: Domestic Service between the Wars', in Clarke, John, Chas Critcher, and Richard Johnson, eds., *Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> The notion of 'fictive kin' recurs in the chapter on the Nanny.

<sup>5</sup> See Horn, *Life Below Stairs in the Twentieth Century*, p. 76.

In addition it can be observed that the valet is culturally confused with the butler – for example, Wodehouse's most famous character Jeeves possesses facets of both roles. The greater part of the humour of the Jeeves-Wooster tales involves the pair in an intimacy centred on secrets.

<sup>6</sup> See Horn, *Life Below Stairs in the Twentieth Century*, p. 76.

uniform,<sup>7</sup> for they formed a useful barrier that prevented the servant from dirtying the expensive clothing of the upper class, and ultimately from defiling the skin of the employer.<sup>8</sup> Culturally a link has been promulgated between cleanliness and religious piety, the cleansing of the soul, and the spiritual benefits of laundry, which followed by cleaning, and latterly housework has been assimilated into the domestic paternalism.<sup>9</sup> In addition, paraphernalia that served to depersonalize servant-master interaction became established, to designate and control the physical proximity of the servant with respect to their employer. For instance, the use of the salver offered a mediating surface by means of which the servant could pass a letter or card to the master,<sup>10</sup> avoiding the implied desecration of possibly confidential or personal tokens, whilst simultaneously eschewing the insubordination of a direct handover.<sup>11</sup> The second, and contradictory, critical feature that relates to the closeness of the lady's maid with her mistress, is the centrality of touch – literally of physical

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<sup>7</sup> This can be seen particularly in male roles such as butler and footman, for whom gloves were part of a formal livery uniform, see Vincent, S., 'Gloves in the Early Twentieth Century: An Accessory After the Fact', *Journal of Design History*, 25, 2 (2012), pp. 190-205.

<sup>8</sup> Dirtiness was associated with the working class, and carried connotations of poor hygiene and verminousness. The upper class dislike of dirt was founded in fact – studies of working class children in Bromley in 1906 showed that of 1,000 children only 3% were shown to be 'clean', the rest 'dirty'. See Joanna Bourke, *Working Class Culture in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 11. Degrees of cleanliness served to create a hierarchical structure even within the working class itself. Bourke points out that 'the higher in the status hierarchy, the 'cleaner' the individual had to be. Households where people washed in a tin-tub before the fire were inferior to households where the family washed in the scullery and closed the door.' Bourke, p. 131. Unfortunately more in-depth investigation of the hierarchy of cleanliness is beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>9</sup> From the notorious Irish Magdalene Laundries to the Barnardo's Village educational programme that focussed on domestic chores; housework, and in particular cleaning and washing, whilst historically grounded in religious supremacy, are fundamental to the maintenance of capitalist patriarchy. See Caroline Davidson, *A Woman's Work is Never Done: A History of Housework in the British Isles 1650-1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), and not only in the UK: see Phyllis Palmer's challenging *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Domestic Servants in the United States, 1920-1945* (Philadelphia: Pemple University Press, 1990), which somewhat rejects the notion of patriarchy as the primary driver of domestic culture.

<sup>10</sup> The salver persists into the twenty-first century as a butlering trope, with a year-2000 autobiography of modern butler Christopher Allen entitled *A Butler's Life: Scenes from the Other Side of the Silver Salver*.

<sup>11</sup> Diana Crane, *Fashion and its Social Agendas: Class, Gender and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

personal aid – so clearly integral to the role. Touch was not only permitted, but was realistically a requirement of the job. The lady's maid is situated in an ambiguous position, considering these contradictory factors around tactility – simultaneously close to and distanced from her employer in her own unique class covenant.

In 1860 in her influential *Book of Household Management*, the esteemed arbiter of the domestic, Mrs Beeton, describes the duties of the lady's maid:<sup>12</sup> her activities centre upon the bedroom and dressing room of the mistress and the private personal spaces she occupied, out of sight and reach of the remainder of the servant body and similarly segregated from family members. Clearly those tasks the lady's maid was called upon to perform resulted in the special fellowship of this unique association. Beeton goes so far as to recommend that the lady's maid studies 'the fashion-books with attention, so as to be able to aid her mistress's judgment in dressing'.<sup>13</sup> Such a prospect of 'aiding the mistress's judgement' elevates the role above the miserably meagre downstairs routines experienced by other servants. Beeton permits the lady's maid an opinion, as well as the voice and the opportunity to share this with her lady. Notably, however, Beeton also links the self-esteem of the maid with her subservience to her lady, saying that 'the lady's-maid may thus render herself invaluable to her mistress, and increase her own happiness in so doing'.<sup>14</sup> The subservient may attain self-actualization through their debasement in undertaking 'Christian duties', furthermore 'domestic servants found dignity and pride and sometimes an affirmation of their religion in doing their jobs well.'<sup>15</sup> The role was visibly privileged above the other servants, for example

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<sup>12</sup> Typically the literary use of the phrase 'lady's maid' reduces it to its function, to operating as a verb. For example, in Dorothy L Sayers' story 'Clouds of Witness, a character asks 'who has been lady's-maiding my sister, Bunter?', whilst in 1940 in Sadleir's best-selling *Fanny by Gaslight* the servant is again the topic of conversation, where 'Lady Alicia... casually remarked that she supposed I was prepared to lady's-maid her sisters also, as they were temporarily without their personal helps.'

<sup>13</sup> Beeton (1860) *Book of Household Management*, London, available at <http://www.bl.uk/learning/images/texts/cooks/transcript879.html>

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Light, *Mrs Woolf*, p. 7.



the personal maid might become the recipient of the mistress's cast off frocks.<sup>16</sup> So, although she is not at the top of the servant ladder in terms of seniority or responsibility, her position is unique in that she has an intimate relationship, of a kind, with her mistress.

The socio-historical account of the lady's maid has been fairly recently investigated in terms of its political and social impact, by Delap,<sup>17</sup> Horn,<sup>18</sup> Davidoff and Hall,<sup>19</sup> and Todd.<sup>20</sup> Whilst Davidoff and Hall's political perspective on the lady's maid and domestic structures and status is limited to the period 1780-1850, it nonetheless provides a thorough backdrop to the servant question. Critics working in the same area whose work is of a more specifically documentary, socio-historical focus include Horn, Delap, and Lethbridge;<sup>21</sup> studies by these critics have a particular relevance by dint of their historical specificity. Lethbridge surveys the changing role of the servant, and hints at the complexity that closeness affords in a fundamentally financial arrangement.<sup>22</sup> She suggests that this feature of familiarity has led to an inadequate account of domestic service in many socio-historical narratives, because such relationships fit awkwardly into studies of labour history.<sup>23</sup> In their more politically-framed study, Davidoff and Hall seek redress on this point, specifically discussing the class debates that underpin society's continuing predilection for servant-keeping (although their discussion is chronologically limited to the period of 1780-1850). They assert that the middle class separated themselves from the upper class and the working class by laying claim to 'moral and religious authority'.<sup>24</sup> This and other assertions in their paper, reveal an understanding of the ideological

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<sup>16</sup> Delap, *Knowing their Place*. Not all servants enjoyed this as a privilege, see Lethbridge, *Servants*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Horn, *Life Below Stairs*.

<sup>19</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950'; and her most recent work, *The People*.

<sup>21</sup> Lethbridge, *Servants*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> See Davidoff and Hall, which is also cited by Delap, et al., p. 5.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> See Davidoff and Hall, which is also cited by Delap, et al., p. 5.

construct of the servant question. Todd's most recent work attempts to address the invisibility of the servant in social histories, rehabilitating domestic service with a chapter of its own.<sup>25</sup> Firstly, most of these social historians make the point that maids were frequently taken on by employers from institutions, and that they tended to be very young, although the number of 'child' servants did decrease from 1914 onwards.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, historians agree that the number of women employed as lady's maids decreased considerably from the 1910s onwards; however, this is not a symptom of a straightforward reduction in service *per se*, and recent studies by Todd and Steedman suggest that servitude was actually developing rather than disappearing during the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>27</sup> What is for certain is that by 1931 approximately three quarters of the UK's servant-keepers had just one servant.<sup>28</sup> Rather than the tremendous reduction in large servant households that this statistic might infer, however, the figure can be predominantly accounted for by an increase in middle class families looking for a single servant.<sup>29</sup> The rise in middle class households seeking help provided occupation for maids-of-all-work rather than for the specialised lady's maid; salaried professionals preferred the former because 'servants had to cost less than the time and money a middle class woman would have to invest in domestic appliances. And so middle-class households employed a maid-of-all-work for a pittance.'<sup>30</sup> Anecdotally the lady's maid exhibited greater loyalty to her employer, whilst due to the close association of the maid and

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<sup>25</sup> See Todd, *The People*.

<sup>26</sup> The youngest, generally the 'Tweeny' or 'inbetween' maid, was likely to have been 'rescued' in an acts of Christian charity from an orphanage or Poor Law school, see Lethbridge, *Servants*. These children were taken on to act as general dogsbody and even to act as maid to somewhat senior maids within the service hierarchy of larger households, see Horn.

<sup>27</sup> See Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950', and Steedman, p. 29-43.

<sup>28</sup> See Horn, *Life Below Stairs*, p. 42.

<sup>29</sup> As early as 1902 Seebohm Rowntree has identified servant-keeping as the marker that segregated the working class from the remainder of society. See Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (London: Macmillan, 1902). Keeping a servant went on to become a necessity for those seeking to establish their middle class credentials.

<sup>30</sup> The best source on this topic is Todd, *The People*, p. 43.

mistress the lady's maid may have been less inclined to leave her post for the call of the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) or the allure of the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS), Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) or the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) in the Second World War.<sup>31</sup>

There are a number of 'autobiographical' accounts of the lady's maid's supposed day-to-day work and interactions; since the 1980s such narratives have been seized upon by publishers, packaged and popularized in response to the marketing opportunities inherent in a burgeoning heritage industry.<sup>32</sup> The usefulness of these texts in unravelling the complexities of social ordering processes is debatable. One such text is *One Pair of Hands* (1939) by Monica Dickens, the great-granddaughter of Charles Dickens, daughter of a London barrister and former St Paul's Schoolgirl and debutante, who writes of her time as a cook, and as a personal servant. However, Dickens is never truly of the servant class.<sup>33</sup> Her stint as a servant is followed by a series of memoirs charting her progress through a number of 'junior' job roles. This is at odds with the general situation for the majority of young female servants in this period, who could expect little employment mobility even within their immediate servant environment. Similarly, an 'autobiographical' account of a maid is given by Celia Fremlin in *The Seven Chars of Chelsea* (1940) – another narrative produced by an upper middle class young woman. Fremlin was at Somerville College reading classics, and took on servant roles with the specific intention of writing about her experience. Whilst her politics identified mistress and maid as 'fellow-victims,' Fremlin is

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<sup>31</sup> The WVS is the Women's Voluntary Service. The WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air Force) was formed in July 1939. The ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service), the British army's female contingent, ran from 1938, with women in the service seeing action in France in 1939. The WRNS (Women's Royal Naval Service) had been originally set up during the First World War and was formed afresh in 1939.

<sup>32</sup> For an account of the rise of the heritage industry from the 1980s, see Dicks, pp. 30-44.

<sup>33</sup> Her time as a servant was followed sharply by *One Pair of Feet* charting a year's nursing in the Second World War, which led on to *My Turn to Make the Tea* (1951) describing her experiences in the role of junior reporter for a local newspaper.

first and foremost a scholar, not a char.<sup>34</sup> Margaret Powell, writing from a servant's perspective, published the first volume of her autobiography, *Below Stairs*, in 1968: a personal tale genuinely from a working class servant's pen.<sup>35</sup> Attracting widespread recognition, the memoir attests to the popularity of working class narratives in the late 1960s, for the author became a significant celebrity, undertaking tours and signings. Her book was acknowledged as an inspiration for hit TV series *Upstairs Downstairs*.<sup>36</sup> Material from these three 'autobiographical' accounts is recurrently used to exemplify statements in the socio-historical analyses of Light, Lethbridge and Horn, despite the problems inherent in overlooking their textuality when making use of such narratives for the purpose of providing documentary evidence. Autobiographies by these individuals disport the voyeurism of the middle class, appealing to a similar propensity to prurience in their readership. 'Slumming it' - rich girls masquerading as maids to write their account - is manifestly unrepresentative of working class *servant* experiences but exposes the author (and reader) to an indulgence in an aberrant fascination of the upper class for the working class – a fetish for a position of subjugation and subordination; the desire of the superior to subordinate or debase itself. This anomalous fixation of the servant-keeping elite on their own transmogrification into the 'other' is investigated in an earlier period by Seth Koven in his study on late-Victorian 'slumming',<sup>37</sup> where he provides a way of thinking about the nature of middle class involvement with the poor, and questions the impulses that took the rich into an environment where they could safely encounter poverty. Koven explicates the ways in which this odd infatuation of the rich

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<sup>34</sup> Celia Fremlin, *The Seven Chars of Chelsea* (London: Methuen, 1940), p.7.

<sup>35</sup> Margaret Powell, *Below Stairs: The Bestselling Memoirs of a 1920s' Kitchen Maid* (London: Pan Books, 1968).

<sup>36</sup> *Upstairs Downstairs*, and the recent fascination of the mass international audience with *Downton Abbey*, illustrate the media's trick of timeously promulgating texts that stink of hierarchy, in the guise of an interest in capturing and re-presenting 'heritage'. The uptake of the servant question by the heritage industry is brought back into the discussion in the concluding chapter.

<sup>37</sup> See Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

with traversing the East End slums was manifested, seeing how these odd infatuations of the rich on one hand titillated the prurient, and on the other, more disturbingly, satiated those with less savory, sexual motives. Predicated upon that 19<sup>th</sup> century vogue for servant slumming, and seen similarly, the dressing down of the servant-keeping class as servants themselves represents a step into a world which, once experienced, perhaps even as a rite of passage, can be later retreated from in order that their reality and the normalcy of their dominance can be re-established in a reinvigorated form.<sup>38</sup> Delap also ponders the proclivity for class crossing and role reversal amongst some mistresses, and when questioning their motives infers that:

..their work as servants was not intended to capture the experiences of servants, but to construct their own agency and identity, through a recovery of the authority to describe and shape domestic affairs that had been eroded for middle class mistresses confronted with unruly domestic servants.<sup>39</sup>

The implication for Delap is that the difficulty with servants, the servant question, could be quashed by mistresses refashioning and empowering themselves through the experience of 'passing'. As Koven suggests, this type of behaviour in the middle classes directed towards the poor can serve opposing ideologies – i.e. they could get themselves out of the mess they created if they chose to do so, *versus* society being obligated to get them out of the mess that it created.<sup>40</sup> Tellingly the source of both class-conscious ideologies is 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century capitalist materialism: 'passing' or 'slumming' requires the existence of a hegemonic dyad. In the literary examples of this

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<sup>38</sup> This suggestion of authority re-established and strengthened, following a period of managed and permitted transgressive behaviour owes much to Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque, although in general this worked in the reverse manner – i.e. with the brief and controlled aggrandizement of the lower orders, followed by their removal and the reinstatement of the establishment. This suggestion, along with an investigation of mimicry, will be further investigated in the chapter on the butler.

<sup>39</sup> Lucy Delap, "'Campaigns of Curiosity': Class Crossing and Role Reversal in British Domestic Service, 1890-1950", *Left History*, 12, 2 (2007), pp. 33-63, p. 54. See also Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press, 2004), pp 93-99.

<sup>40</sup> Koven.

chapter, this dichotomy manifests not in the disguising of capital as poverty, but in the pretence that intimacy is genuine, that capital is not involved in the servant-mistress alliance at all.

Having established qualities unique to the lady's maid that may prove productive and resonant in the argument that domestic servants were a class apart, both protected and restricted from full participation in social transition, it will be useful to explain the rationale behind the choice of narratives for examination. Crucially, each of the chosen stories depicts a maid whose agency tends towards restoring the past rather than corroborating a narrative of modernization. The representations are significant in their respective textual contexts too, for the lady's maid is a prominent character in each story. In addition the stories chosen are taken from three points across the historical spread of this study – i.e. 1920, 1941 and 1943 – a transitional period for domestic social structures. Finally, each of the three provides insight with respect to the liaison between the lady's maid and her mistress, and the perpetuation of the divisiveness of class. Intriguingly, for example, the degree of interdependence or reliance exhibited within the association alters from one story to the next, but with significant similarities, the chief of these being that counter-intuitively the mistress is never singularly dependent upon her servant. These stories are unique amongst the fiction of the time in that we are herein offered the lady's maid as a narrator of her own tale.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, these three stories share a common authorial enthusiasm and commitment to this particular literary form. Of these three writers – Mansfield and Mollie Panter-Downes chose the short story as their preferred narrative mechanism.<sup>42</sup> Mansfield's choice of

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<sup>41</sup> See Jorge Sacido, *Modernism, Postmodernism and the Short Story* (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi), p. 21. Suggested by Frank O'Connor as a form in which the narrative of a 'submerged population group' could be articulated, the genre ought to represent the ideal medium for a class apart. See Frank O'Connor (1962) 'The Lonely Voice', in Charles May, *Short Story Theories* (Ohio University Press, 1976), pp. 82-93.

<sup>42</sup> See also, regarding Mansfield, Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Head describes ambiguity in form and ambivalence in terms of personality, which work towards a 'denial of solution' in her work (pp. 109-110). He does not specifically discuss 'The Lady's Maid'. Bowen and Panter-Downes wrote fiction only in the short story form throughout



the short story can be attributed to her inclination towards modernist form;<sup>43</sup> and certainly in this story the interrogative points of the maid's narrative remain unresolved.<sup>44</sup> Dominic Head's assertion that 'the denial of a single, simple effect ... is usually an integral part of the modernist short story form' is a concept that can be observed in all of the stories examined in this thesis.<sup>45</sup> It has been widely commented that Bowen believed that the short story was most suited to her writing during the war,<sup>46</sup> as the form itself was more appropriate to the fragmentary nature of experience during wartime,<sup>47</sup> although notably her use of the form 'both indulges and antagonizes modernist theory and practice'.<sup>48</sup>

The interdependence of the intimacy in Mansfield's story disrupts the potential existence of a transitional period, with respect to the

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the course of the Second World War. As well as her short stories, Panter-Downes also contributed a regular 'Letter from London' column to the *New Yorker*, 'a mixture of objective political commentary and detailed chronicling of the daily lives of Britons' which were almost universally admired. See Robert Calder, *Beware the British Serpent: The Role of Writers in British Propaganda in the United States, 1939-1945* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's Press, 2004) p. 167.

<sup>43</sup> See Geri Kimber, *Katherine Mansfield and the Art of the Short Story* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), also Head, and Adrian Hunter, *Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>44</sup> Hunter cites Mansfield's tendency to ask questions to which answers are permanently deferred. See Hunter, p. 81.

<sup>45</sup> Head, p. 77.

<sup>46</sup> Bowen believed that in wartime short stories allow the writer to plumb through to 'unstable things', See Elizabeth Bowen, Alan Hepburn, *People, Places, Things: Essays* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 313-4.

<sup>47</sup> Joannou, p. 30. *The Heat of the Day*, her only novel set during the war, was written post-war, in 1949. During the war years the only fiction Panter-Downes produced was the body of short stories written for *The New Yorker*. Lestage asserts that the form suited both the content she explored and the historical context of publication: 'Her concentration on the personal and particular is well suited to the magnifying lens of the short story form, which, by its very shortness, draws the reader's attention to detail. Being short in length and immediate in impact, it was well suited to the constraints of everyday life in wartime.' Geoffrey Lestage, 'Afterword' and 'Preface' in: *Good Evening Mrs. Craven: The Wartime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes* (London: Persephone, 1999). Panter-Downes' relationship with *The New Yorker* is similar to that of Elizabeth Taylor, although Taylor's contributions were always short fiction. Furthermore, like her fellow-countrywoman, Taylor continued to supply the magazine with regular stories, under contract, until late in her life. *The New Yorker* paid well, meaning that writers could expect a decent income from regular contributions to the magazine. Taylor wrote short stories almost exclusively for that magazine, and throughout her published lifetime these earned her more than the sum that she received from the publication of all of her novels.

<sup>48</sup> See Hunter, p. 113

servant question.<sup>49</sup> Mary Wilson aptly describes this as a 'paradox at the heart of the home' in Mansfield's work, with female employers tied into the domesticity of employing other women to care for them. Absolutely interdependent, 'both gain their identities through it, but obtain significantly different levels of power and agency.'<sup>50</sup> 'The Lady's Maid' takes the form of a 'dramatic monologue, in which Ellen, the lady's maid, tells her life story, along with details of her relationship with her mistress, to an unnamed listener.'<sup>51</sup> Intriguingly, Mansfield chooses to foreground the servant voice, which differentiates her from her female modernist peers. Wilson posits that in the narratives of Virginia Woolf servants are present in her use of parentheses, that 'materialise the thresholds' that other characters cross.<sup>52</sup> Then, in reviewing her work Bruce Robbins extrapolates this belief further with respect to the bond between mistress and maid, noting that the use of the parenthetical dash has the 'effect of marking interruption and ambivalence in the mistress'.<sup>53</sup> I contend instead that in contrast Mansfield's form places the employer in the parenthesis, in the ellipses of the story, whilst the entire narrative consists of the servant voice.<sup>54</sup> The resulting foregrounded servant 'life story' resonates with the background details of a harsh childhood and an early entry into service where she remains, effectively entrapped. 'An ambivalent domestic space linked to freedom, escape or even perhaps confinement [...] fascinated Mansfield.'<sup>55</sup> The narrator Ellen admits 'I don't remember ever feeling – well – a child,

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<sup>49</sup> Regarding interdependence and the maid/mistress – see Light, *Mrs Woolf*, p. 38.

<sup>50</sup> Wilson, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Patrick D Morrow, *Katherine Mansfield's Fiction* (Madison, WI: Popular Press, 1993), p. 90 - compare the maid-servant in 'The Child Who Was Tired'.

<sup>52</sup> Wilson.

<sup>53</sup> See Bruce Robbins' review of Mary Wilson's book – in *Woolf Studies Annual* (2014), Vol 20, p. 127.

<sup>54</sup> As discussed, domestic servants and their marginality can be read into the liminality of the short form. Claire Drewery considers Mansfield's liminality alongside Woolf, Richardson (hurrah!) and Sinclair. See Claire Drewery, *Modernist Short Fiction by Women* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> Kimber, p. 28.

as you might say.’<sup>56</sup> Her experience is one that is borne out by fact; furthermore evidence from the historical context suggests that child-maids were taken on partly to ennoble their Christian employers. Institutions saw themselves as fulfilling a Christian role by providing training opportunities, particularly for young women and girls, which would set them up for useful employment as servants.<sup>57</sup> One such example, that originated in 1874 as a Church of England voluntary organization to train girls for service, was the Girl’s Friendly Society (GFS).<sup>58</sup> Not only would women be supported to raise themselves out of poverty by learning a ‘saleable’ skill, they would furthermore be turned away from the possibility of sinning themselves. The ‘cleansing’ of laundry work had been deemed morally beneficial since the Victorian era.<sup>59</sup> The Metropolitan Association for the Befriending of Young Servants (MABYS) saw to it that through housework ‘little charmaids’ were ‘kept from incalculable temptation and wretchedness.’<sup>60</sup> Religious philanthropy also drove the activities of the Barnardo organization,<sup>61</sup> which undertook to run its own girls’ ‘Village’ in Barkingside, Essex, where girls and young women were educated by volunteer ‘mothers’ in all aspects of domestic service.<sup>62</sup> These girls left Barnardo’s engineered care for specifically selected positions.<sup>63</sup> A religious responsibility was accrued through rescuing young girls from a state of sin, training them in the ways of godliness (cleanliness) and providing them with a means of securing a morally

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<sup>56</sup> Katherine Mansfield, *Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield* (London: Constable, 1966), p. 376.

<sup>57</sup> This included Poor Law institutions, which came under local authority governance during the 1920s. Poor Law institutions continued long after the Poor Law was replaced by National Insurance legislation.

<sup>58</sup> Horn, *Life Below Stairs*, p. 101.

<sup>59</sup> Light, *Mrs Woolf*, p. 99.

<sup>60</sup> Mrs Raymond Ritchie, *Upstairs and Downstairs* (London, 1882), p. 200, cited by Lethbridge. Details concerning MABYS and the GFS can be found in Lethbridge, *Servants*, and Horn, *Life Below Stairs*.

<sup>61</sup> Charitable institutions such as Barnardo’s operated to fulfil the agendas of their philanthropic management, which were not necessarily as righteous as they purported to be. Seth Koven writes graphically of Barnardo dressing as a tramp for the night, ostensibly in order to experience poverty at first hand but meantime exposing a degree of prurience that we now find uncomfortable. See Koven.

<sup>62</sup> Light, *Mrs Woolf*, p. 99 and Delap, *Knowing their Place*.

<sup>63</sup> Lethbridge, *Servants*, pp. 89-90.

upright future that would be lived according to Christian values, and this was passed on from these 'philanthropic' organizations to the maids' employers. A Christian duty was handed on, with the maid, to the servant-keeper. A certain religious kudos in saving a soul from sin was also passed on to her new owners; keeping the servant girl in her place as an object was a means whereby the employer might exercise, and demonstrate, her own piety.<sup>64</sup> The religious responsibility and reward in the exercise of servant keeping extended beyond the institutions and servant-keepers, inculcating a value system that valorized service as 'Christian' for the servant herself.

So - work sustains the servant's beliefs. In reading 'The Lady's Maid' however, it is apparent that in the fictional example it is the servant who supports the mistress in the observations required by her belief. The Christianity of Mansfield's mistress is made apparent early in the story, so that we are given to understand from the outset that all of the mistress's actions towards her maid have been borne of this philosophy. In this passage Mansfield's maid describes how she supports her mistress in her religious observance, making tea whilst the lady prays:

Not at all, madam. I always make a cup of tea last thing. She drinks it in bed after her prayers to warm her up. I put the kettle on when she kneels down and I say to it, "Now you needn't be in too much of a hurry to say your prayers." But it's always boiling before my lady is half through. You see, madam, we know such a lot of people, and they've all got to be prayed for - every one. My lady keeps a list of the names in a little red book. Oh dear! whenever some one new has been to see us and my lady says afterwards, "Ellen, give me my little red book," I feel quite wild, I do. "There's another," I think, "keeping her out of her bed in all weathers." And she won't have a cushion, you know, madam; she kneels on the hard carpet. It fidgets me something dreadful to see her, knowing her as I do. I've tried to cheat her; I've spread out the eiderdown. But the first time I did it - oh, she gave me such a look - holy it was, madam. "Did our Lord have an eiderdown, Ellen?" she said.<sup>65</sup>

The maid attends to the physical needs of her mistress, enabling her spiritual aspirations, although Ellen contests the preeminence of

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<sup>64</sup> Firth, Violet, *Psychology of the Servant Problem: A Study in the Social Relationship* (London, 1925).

<sup>65</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Stories*, p. 375.

religion. Attempting to dampen the mistress's religiosity in favour of her physical comfort ('and she won't have a cushion, you know, madam: she kneels on the hard carpet'), the maid does not share Madam's Christian desire for self-abnegation. However, Ellen's presence in the room, with her supportive participation in the typically private ritual act of prayer doubles as another species of familiarity that reinforces their mistress-maid bond. The tender familiarity of the pair operates emotionally, as well as physically. A contemporary commentator, herself a servant, observed that extremely personal service, which might extend as far as support in the form of nursing for the sick or infirm, involves an extra degree of intimacy.<sup>66</sup> In the laying out of the dead the physical closeness is such that the lady's maid is permitted to ignore socio-cultural taboos (of touching the dead)<sup>67</sup> in what seems to be both a final act of subservience, and also of love for her mistress. Referring to her current and her former mistress, the 'incompatible paradigm' of subservience and love, subsist in the maid's description:

When I tucked her up just now and seen – saw her lying back, her hands outside and her head on the pillow – so pretty - I couldn't help thinking, 'Now you look just like your dear mother when I laid her out!'<sup>68</sup>

In this action those two contradictory features can be identified in the lady's maid characterisation. In this example of the servant question the financial expedient and intimacy are coterminous.

Servants' very lives are determined by their employment. Ellen is deliberately denied her childhood from her earliest experience as a maid:

I don't remember ever feeling – well – a child, as you might say. You see there was my uniform, and one thing and another. My lady put me into collars and cuffs from the first.<sup>69</sup>

Her uniform was a visible, physical mechanism of her enslavement 'from the first'. Historically uniform has been used as an ideological

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<sup>66</sup> Firth.

<sup>67</sup> Sigmund Freud explored the unconscious behaviour associated with taboos, including the taboo on the dead, using examples from cultures such as the Tongan tapu and the Maori. See Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (Dover Publications, 1998).

<sup>68</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Stories*, p. 376.

<sup>69</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Stories*, p. 377.

contrivance to signal and reinforce separation between groups.<sup>70</sup> As one of the first widely available consumer goods, access to suitably distinguished items of uniform gave employers a straightforward apparatus to specify and sustain the domestic structures they designed.<sup>71</sup> By the lady's act of 'putting' her maid into cuffs, this assertion of ownership, she has given her a physical totem connoting her servitude which also brings her childhood to an end. Cuffs, which were removed for washing and starching separately from the remainder of the servant garb, protected the sleeves of the maid's dress from dirt and damage. Resonant now with the scent of slavery, 'cuffs' conjure up the misery of the child forced into a servant role.

Ellen's donkey ride anecdote emphasises her misery as a child-servant, when she desires something permitted only to her young charges:

The way the little feet went, and the eyes – so gentle – and the soft ears – made me want to go on a donkey more than anything in the world! <sup>72</sup>

The donkeys are emblematic of Ellen's lost and now forbidden childhood. Domesticated wild animals, harnessed for the pleasure of others, they are yet more servants, yoked to a life of slavery. Lexis makes explicit here the familial promises of 'gentle' and 'soft' denied to a girl in service at thirteen. Mysterious, exotic and nonetheless homely, the donkeys connote the stuffed toys given to comfort children as they fall asleep; all out-with Ellen's reach. Twin barriers stand between Ellen and her desire. At the outset she is responsible for the nieces of her mistress:<sup>73</sup>

...Of course, I couldn't. I had my young ladies. And what would I have looked like perched up there in my uniform?<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Crane.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Stories*, p. 378.

<sup>73</sup> This feature of domestic service - with the child-servant being put in charge of other children - is further explored in this thesis with respect to the governess-child Cassandra in Elizabeth Taylor's novel, *Palladian*. (See the chapter on the Nanny.)

<sup>74</sup> Katherine Mansfield, *Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield* (London: Constable, 1966), p.378.

And furthermore – the uniform, a visual reminder of rank, additionally indicates her status as a non-child, someone no longer permitted to indulge in frivolity or fun; the uniform restricts her movement, like the donkeys saddled and bridled for the public she is harnessed for the service of the family.

Denied her childhood, her narrative proceeds to depict her lost marriage opportunity, likewise repudiated. Lassner cites this as a cause of her dependency.<sup>75</sup> For the life of the maidservant belongs to her mistress: in a transparent manifestation of the objectification of the servant class, a mistress would frequently choose a new name for her maid,<sup>76</sup> having selected typically standardised clothing in which she would be dressed,<sup>77</sup> infantilising and claiming her as a possession. Summers described the frequent employment of children as servants, observing that those in power tend to conceptualise their subordinates 'as more childlike than themselves.'<sup>78</sup> In her comparison of this story with Bowen's 'Oh, Madam...', Phyllis Lassner goes along with the suggestion that the maid is infantilised. She purports that Mansfield's story:

Reveals emotional subjugation of a servant... in reassuring and controlling her employer, she, like Bowen's maid, also infantilizes herself, choosing her relationship with her lady over any adult sexual relationship.<sup>79</sup>

But, in this literary representation of infantilisation I maintain that something very different is being illustrated. Ellen introduces her former mistress in child-like terms, saying that she 'did look sweet';<sup>80</sup> this literary infantilisation of the mistress is counter-intuitive - a reversal of what might be expected in the typical mistress-maid

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<sup>75</sup> Phyllis Lassner, *Elizabeth Bowen: A Study of the Short Fiction* (New York: Twayne, 1991).

<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth Bowen fictionalises this desire to name and possess one's maid, in her 1931 novel *Friends and Relations*, employing it to emphasise the self-aggrandising hypocrisy of the character in question.

<sup>77</sup> Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 62.

<sup>78</sup> See Summers, p. 371.

<sup>79</sup> Lassner, *Elizabeth Bowen*, p. 40.

<sup>80</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Stories*, p. 376.

liaison. This inference of infantilisation is upheld in the attention that Ellen describes giving to the body, which is reminiscent of a child playing with a doll, as she notes:

I did her hair, soft-like, round her forehead, all in dainty curls, and just to one side of her neck I put a bunch of the most beautiful purple pansies.<sup>81</sup>

As Ellen's depiction of her dead mistress represents her as a child, the natural response of disgust to the process of describing death is eluded. The gravest of taboos is managed as the narrative perspective is positioned through the lens of a servant attending a 'child-like' mistress. Ellen describes the feebleness of her mistress in her final year, when she was 'just like a child'.<sup>82</sup> The inevitable reversal of roles that takes place with old age and death, often depicted as a facet of the parent-child relationship, is here expressed in the mistress-maid dichotomy. At the end of her life, although the mistress still gave orders, 'Find it for me, Ellen. Find it for me,' and finally 'Look in the – Look – in –';<sup>83</sup> these 'commands' are utterly ineffectual. Time's advances – here the mistress's frailty and death – finally rob her of influence. Ellen assumes a duty that both ennobles her and challenges taboos. Critically, rather than the maid being childlike, in this literary reversal it is the mistress who has become infantilised.

So, whilst the domestic establishment uses the servant question to fashion a compliant servant through the infantilisation of the maid, a nuanced reading of Mansfield's story reveals that through the interdependence of their intimacy, mistress and servant are both infantilized.<sup>84</sup> Infantilisation is a means whereby women may be rendered childlike, reliant and compliant for the needs of patriarchy. The servant question, however, implies that servants remain in thrall to their employer throughout their life, not solely as servant-children,

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> The paragraph is splintered by Mansfield's punctuation, employing form to indicate the maid's difficulty in adequately expressing through language the behaviour and emotions expected of her.

<sup>83</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Stories*, p. 376.

<sup>84</sup> The notion that the servant's 'caring' role, stereotypically a female one, is 'worth less' than any male role, significantly lies beneath this analysis.



and that their servitude requires them to relinquish the norms of family life. 'The Lady's Maid' articulates the idea that service is a barrier to participation in the normal things expected of life: in this case marriage. The social contract of service requires the expectations of a servant to be tempered to the expectations of their mistress. For the lady's maid then, a love for the mistress necessarily replaces the love for any other partner, whilst there is in addition a nod towards hidden female sexuality, exposing the sensual elements of female closeness with or without sexuality. Feminist sociologist Muriel Dimen explores the politics of sexuality and intimacy, and suggests that this variety of familiarity 'presumes a certain democratic and reciprocal attunement between people',<sup>85</sup> in other words, she suggests that to be genuinely intimate a degree of equality is to be expected between the parties. This cannot be the case in a 'bought intimacy', so the servant-mistress association once again resists a comfortable analysis. However, it should be noted that Dimen largely conflates intimacy with sex, and this remains a subliminal thread only in Mansfield's story.<sup>86</sup>

Despite the uttermost of human intimacies, such as brushing someone else's hair, helping them to dress and to eat, and physically laying out a body – the affiliation is after all one of servant and master, a monetary arrangement in which the two are locked in enduring disparity. Significantly Anne Besnault-Levita attests that the mistress, though voiceless, has a more assertive role in the narrative.<sup>87</sup> This seems a reasonable assumption based on the status-driven roles of domestic service, although Besnault-Levita does not elaborate on the layered interdependence of this particular type of mistress-servant

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<sup>85</sup> Muriel Dimen, 'Power, Sexuality and Intimacy', in Alison M. Jaggar, and Bordo, Susan, eds., *Gender/body/knowledge: feminist reconstructions of being and knowing* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp. 34-52, p. 34.

<sup>86</sup> Hints concerning sexuality are decoded in 'The Lady's Maid' by Julia van Gunsteren. See Julia van Gunsteren, *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Impressionism* (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 1990), p. 234.

<sup>87</sup> Anne Besnault-Levita, 'The dramaturgy of voice in five modernist short fictions: Katherine Mansfield's 'The Canary', 'The Lady's Maid' and 'Late at Night', Elizabeth Bowen's 'Oh, Madam...' and Virginia Woolf's 'The Evening Party'', *Journal of the Short Story in English*, 51 (Autumn, 2008), pp. 81-96.

interconnection. Her position features several beguiling hints, for instance she asserts that the power in the stories is portrayed satirically, through the use of cues indicative of movement (or non-movement) between speakers.<sup>88</sup> Again, this is a sensible inference, although it is one that might be further bolstered by the consideration of negotiations of familiarity and status that are taking place through those cues. The closeness is engendered of duty (governed by ownership, a financial imperative and class) rather than of love. Through silent control of the dialogue, and showing the means whereby she might force Ellen to renounce her young man, the gestures of the mistress beguilingly imply that the intimacy between her and Ellen is really of the latter order:

I asked her if she'd rather I ... didn't get married. "No, Ellen," she said - that was her voice, madam, like I'm giving you - "No, Ellen, not for the *wide world!*" But while she said it madam - I was looking in her glass; of course, she didn't know I could see her - she put her little hand on her heart just like her dear mother used to, and lifted her eyes... Oh, *madam*.<sup>89</sup>

By indicating that the love between her and Ellen is inexpressible, only tangible through allusive gesture ('she put her little hand on her heart just like her dear mother used to'), and the ambiguity of the internal chant 'Oh, madam,' the mistress entraps Ellen psychologically. But - the central problem of the close association between Ellen and her mistress(es) is that it is, and remains, 'bought'; therefore it is perpetually unequal as the acts of intimacy remain unreciprocated. For instance, it is the mistress who has her feet rubbed and who is dressed by the maid, *not* the other way around. Their familiarity looks as though it is underpinned by their interdependence, but because the physical acts of intimacy are one-way, the servant's subordination remains. Ellen's desire for self-determination was first beaten out of her by her father and then 'necessitated' out of her by her old mistress, until the point when she

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Stories*, pp. 379-380.

knows and expects nothing more of her closest relationships than a position of subservience.

'The Lady's Maid' discloses a maid who has sacrificed her life for her mistress; her self-abnegation is marked out as a key feature of her narrative. Ellen is not only denied her childhood, she is also denied the opportunity of marriage, by her employer. However, Ellen's response to her servitude is not entirely complicit, nor is it passive. Moments of rebellion are clearly drawn from crucial memories, such as the time when she cut off her own hair as a child, a subconscious rejection of the 'hairstylist's doll' position that she had been placed in, and an assertion of her own strength. Moments of anger can also be perceived in the memories of the older child, when as a young servant she lists her uniform – itemising it as a litany that binds her. In shouting 'I do want to go on a donkey!' – although she feigns sleep in order to do so – Ellen is able to articulate her mutinous desire. As a young woman too she once acted in defiance of convention, when having spurned Harry she ran into the road after him:

I opened the door to him. I never gave him time for a word. "There you are," I said. "Take them all back," I said, "it's all over. I'm not going to marry you," I said, "I can't leave my lady." White! he turned as white as a woman. I had to slam the door, and there I stood, all of a tremble, till I knew he had gone. When I opened the door - believe me or not, madam - that man was gone! I ran out into the road just as I was, in my apron and my house-shoes, and there I stayed in the middle of the road ... staring. People must have laughed if they saw me ... <sup>90</sup>

Ellen's dejection, followed by her sudden understanding and then disbelief at her abandonment is apparent in the repetition of 'gone', whilst Harry goes from being a known individual – 'he had gone', to an unknown, objectified person – 'that man was gone!' Unfortunately Harry does not behave like the hero she seeks, but instead acts, ironically, like a servant. In the association of maid and mistress, intimacy and emphasis on female sexuality is shown as preferable to female-male relationships. In the final lines of the story Ellen's fear of

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<sup>90</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Stories*, p. 380.

the mistress's inevitable death speaks of the dreadful co-dependence of all intimate liaisons:

I always tuck in my lady's feet, every night, just the same. And she says, "Good night, Ellen. Sleep sound and wake early!" I don't know what I should do if she didn't say that, now.

... Oh dear, I sometimes think ... whatever should I do if anything were to ...<sup>91</sup>

Through her monologue we learn that the maid has had her dreams crushed first by her father, and then by service, until the point when her sole intimate tie is with her mistress. Ellen's revelatory narrative is indeed replete with 'moments when those who aspire to comprehension and order are confronted with the inadequacy of their systems of belief.'<sup>92</sup> Both Mansfield's mistress and maid fear upheaval. Disempowered by her status, the maid is unable to offer dissent to her employer, and the two are bound together, firstly by the maid's entry into service as a child, and more latterly by their shared intimacy. Finally, the lady's maid of Mansfield's story recognises the neediness of her mistress and comprehends that whilst she has chosen to remain with her lady, she has nonetheless exercised her own will. Recognition of their interdependence empowers her to transcend her situation. Whilst Mansfield's maid and her mistress are interdependent, the maid remains immutable.

Some critics have considered Mansfield and Bowen's stories together,<sup>93</sup> and there has been an assertion that Bowen's story 'Oh, Madam...' is modeled on Mansfield's 'The Lady's Maid'.<sup>94</sup> Bowen chose for her own title a phrase from the Mansfield story, which is internally expressed in Ellen's epiphany as she recalls the moment when she realised that she must renounce the opportunity of marriage, and all that this would have meant, for the continuation of

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> See Hunter, p. 80.

<sup>93</sup> Namely Lassner and Besnault-Levita.

<sup>94</sup> See Besnault-Levita, pp. 81-96.

her relationship with her mistress.<sup>95</sup> 'Oh, *madam*.'<sup>96</sup> The weight of the italicization, Mansfield's emphasis on the 'madam', together with the deictic play of the story, thoroughly ambiguates this slight but pregnant sentence. Internally uttered to both the mistress of the past and the mistress currently listening to Ellen's dialogue, the sentence holds her loving, her frustration and her human inability to extricate herself emotionally and physically from a situation in which she has, after all, become complicit. Bowen transfers this kernel of private imagination to her own story, in which the grandstanding theatricality of war has ravaged the scenery, backdrop, curtains and auditorium of the house that the resilient, enduring maid protects.<sup>97</sup>

The focus of my argument, however, is that in these three specific representations an impediment to development is depicted in the servants rather than the mistresses. A second critical assertion of this chapter is the suggestion that, counter-intuitively, the representations allude to the idea that any erosion of class boundaries, or negotiation concerning social mobility, is being led by the servant-owning class. In the Mansfield story the very closeness, intimacy and interdependence itself, for example in the breaking down of physical barriers, can be seen to result in a lessening or negation of the barriers of class so integral to service. Perhaps the interdependence of lady's maid and mistress indicates at least the right to equality? If this is accepted, then it follows that as it is the mistress who *requires and permits* the familiarity of the servant, it is the mistress who controls any erosion of the boundary between them.

In the 'highly concentrated moments' of Bowen's 1941 story,<sup>98</sup> 'Oh, Madam...' opposition to household innovation is shown

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<sup>95</sup> This passage is quoted on page 23 of this chapter.

<sup>96</sup> Mansfield, *Collected Stories*, pp. 379-380.

<sup>97</sup> Piette considers the notion of the private imagination during the war, subsumed into a public edifice of the propagandized national cultural narrative, the theatricality of war. See his introduction, in Piette, pp. 1-7.

<sup>98</sup> Levenson acutely observes that what 'we find in Bowen's writing of the period, beneath the surface elegance, is a supreme edginess, and awareness of transience that forces her to alter and interrupt narrative time and type within highly concentrated moments.' See Michael Levenson, *Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 295.

predominantly in the lady's maid, rather than the mistress. Bowen's story features an older lady's maid, in a one-way dialogic exchange, speaking to her silent mistress. This singular one-sided conversation takes place when the mistress returns to her London house, to inspect the bomb damage of recent nights of the Blitz;<sup>99</sup> she is accompanied through her survey of the property by the garrulous maid. In this story, the reader is treated to none of the history of the lady's maid, contrasting with the pivotal analeptic, hypodiegetic mechanism of Mansfield's narrative. Here the past is only revealed in the descriptions of how the fabric and furnishings of the house have been altered by the destruction of the bombing.<sup>100</sup>

In 'Oh, Madam...' the 'maidservant seems more deeply affected by the bombing than the house's owner,'<sup>101</sup> caring more about the damage to the house than her mistress. The story takes on the quality of a tour around the house, inspecting each room in turn, focusing on what remains.<sup>102</sup> On one hand it is natural that the lady's maid would have a particular awareness of the spaces of the house, being

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<sup>99</sup> This story was written literally in the wake of some of the most devastating damage to civilian life of the war. The Blitz – from September 1940 to May 1941 – saw 60,000 killed, half in London. The night of the 10-11 May 1941 was that of the greatest destruction – 1436 were killed, and part of the House of Commons destroyed. See <http://www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2010/sep/07/blitz-timeline-second-world-war>. For a recent account of Bowen's experiences in London during the war, complete with illustrations, see Lara Feigel, *The Love-charm of Bombs: Restless Lives in the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

<sup>100</sup> Wartime literature sees an intriguing treatment of object fetishisation – particularly with respect to Bowen's *Heat of the Day*, which despite being written in 1949 is set firmly in wartime London. Working class collections of newspapers, upper class collections of photographs, abound. Elizabeth C. Inglesby extrapolates that Bowen's 'collections' infer the desire to create sentience and vitality in a physical domain troublingly out of control. See Elizabeth C. Inglesby, "'Expressive Objects': Elizabeth Bowen's Narrative Materialises", *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 53, 2 (Summer, 2007), pp. 306-333. The theme of the relative importance of material possessions in wartime is central to Sylvia Townsend-Warner's story 'Sweethearts and Wives'. (See the anthology of wartime stories by women, Anna Boston, *Wave me Goodbye*, London: Virago, 1988.)

<sup>101</sup> Joannou, p. 29.

<sup>102</sup> Allan Hepburn points out that in the US edition of *The Demon Lover* published in 1945, Bowen posits herself as a 'documentarian of bombed London architecture'. See Allan Hepburn (2012) 'Architectural London: Elizabeth Bowen in Regent's Park in Tom Herron, ed., *Irish Writing London: Volume One Revival to the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p112-127, p.123. Depiction of ruined London recurs in stories such as 'Ivy Gripp'd the Steps' and 'In the Square' and of course in *The Heat of the Day*.

associated specifically with the bedroom,<sup>103</sup> and the dressing room of her mistress.<sup>104</sup> On the other hand, however, such delineation of servant/employer spaces within the home of the employer is a necessary element of the management of closeness in a living space that works to maintain the deliberate structures of the household by keeping the lower orders at a remove from their employer-betters. The maid describes to her mistress how the servants avoided the bombing by retreating to 'their' space:

'Yes, we all sat down in our sitting room. It is a strong basement. It does rock, but not like the rest of the house.'<sup>105</sup>

It is 'our' sitting room – a place belonging to the servants. The maid's matter-of-fact description of what we interpret as the intransigence of the servants, who even in the dire circumstances of aerial bombardment choose of their own volition to retreat to a space designated to them by their employer, shows her class inelasticity. The servants' sitting room is in counterpoint to the remainder of the house that 'rocks', the part that is determined as 'theirs'. Emblematically then, in the suggested opinion of the servant, the working class are protected from the bombing by a place of safety that has been vouchsafed them by the generosity of their upper class employers. As a result, in the belief of the servant, the upper class are exposed to the events of the world, to the vicissitudes war engenders, with their sections of the house 'rocking'.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> The lady's maid occupied a function also espoused in France as the maid-of-the-bedroom resulting in the Anglicisation of the term 'chambermaid'. (OED online.)

<sup>104</sup> Elsewhere this thesis discusses further the spatial segregation of employer and servant, with 'us' downstairs and 'Them' upstairs. Spatial segregation also worked to establish and promulgate hierarchy within the servant body, marking out marginal, liminal spaces. For example, in *Brideshead Revisited* Nanny Hawkins' nursery rooms are her own particular space, at the top of the house, beyond upstairs. She is thus doubly separated from the servants and simultaneously elevated and distanced with respect to the family. See the chapter on the Nanny.

<sup>105</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, *The Collected Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980) p. 579.

<sup>106</sup> For a thorough account of the means by which the psychology of wartime is represented in the literature of the time – see Alan Munton, *English Fiction in the Second World War* (London: Faber, 1989).

Bowen's narrative depicts the working class as being fearful of the future, and being comfortably reliant upon any security kindly provided by their employers, for terrifyingly London had become a 'network of inscrutable canyons'.<sup>107</sup> Deborah Parsons and Lawrence Philips interrogate Bowen's scenes of wartime London, in respect of their expression of narrative anxiety, so aptly represented in the fractured, impressionistic short story form. In 'Oh, Madam...' despite being represented as a voiceless entity, Madam withholds information from the maid until she is asked direct questions, due to what the Malcolms identify as the 'necessity of denial and evasion' for continuity.<sup>108</sup> The lady offers on the one hand the physical security and continuity that the servant craves, whilst on the other hand she exercises absolute control over the future of all parties – the house included. This silent control, Besnault-Levita's 'voiceless authority',<sup>109</sup> is exemplified in a sequence of the story when with characteristic irony the lady's maid reacts to her mistress's unspoken command:

What is it – an ashtray, madam? ... No, I don't wonder, really: I'm sure if I was a smoker – you have to have something, don't you, to fall back on? I'll bring the ashtray upstairs with us for the rest of the stumps ... Yes, madam, I'll follow, madam.<sup>110</sup>

Intuiting their requirements from their silence, the working class is driven by duty to respond to the unspoken but nonetheless perceived orders of their betters. In the detail of this exchange-less-exchange the mistress begins to smoke, which would further add to the mess overwhelming the house were it not for the quick response of the maid, who sources an ashtray to mitigate the results of her mistress's

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<sup>107</sup> This evocative phrase and a discussion of Bowen's wartime London (from her essay in *The Demon Lover*) is picked up by numerous commentators, including Deborah Parsons, Maroula Joannou and Lawrence Philips. See Lawrence Philips, *The Swarming Streets: Twentieth Century Representations of London* (London: Rodopi, 2004), p. 84; Deborah Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 201; and Joannou, p. 32.

<sup>108</sup> See David Malcom and Cherry Alexander Malcom, *A Companion to the British and Irish Short Story* (London: John Wiley, 2009), p. 46. They suggest the narrative makes 'clear points about subservience and class, but perhaps more interesting is the evasion involved.'

<sup>109</sup> Besnault-Levita, pp. 81-96.

<sup>110</sup> Bowen, *The Collected Stories*, p. 579.



actions. Intimacy between the two women is reestablished by the maid's cosy inclusiveness as she says she will 'bring the ashtray upstairs with us for the rest of the stumps'; their familiarity is founded through their shared interest in the paraphernalia of smoking: through objects rather than through an emotional, human association.<sup>111</sup> Madam is inured to the symbolic irony of her action: smoking amidst the pyre of Blitzed London; creating the 'stumps' or half-raised memorials of formerly upright structures.<sup>112</sup> The 'us' links the women, whilst the lyrical bathos of 'stumps' denotes the comic deference of this particular act of servitude. The servant-keeper on the one hand represents the comfort of intimacy and security that the servant craves, whilst on the other hand her position allows her to decide the future for all. Financial control establishes the rules. The mistress decrees that the house will be shut up and that the maid will go to work at the employer's country home.

Analysis of another wartime Bowen short story from the same collection, 'In the Square'<sup>113</sup> from 1941, further illuminates the negotiation of class space that was taking place during the exigencies of the Blitzed capital. The story shares features in common with 'Oh, Madam...', despite the lack of servants, with its setting in another house on a partly bombed-out square. Here, however, the absence or presence of a character is all that is required for the acquisition or relinquishment of ownership. No servants remain to serve the former mistress of the house, Magdela; instead it is her husband's former secretary (and mistress) who opens the door to Magdela's visitor. An odd assortment of individuals is found to be living in the precarious house, in whatever space can be found. Even with space at such a

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<sup>111</sup> This calls to mind Day's assertion concerning class, where he states that middle class ideology is imposed on the working class, but with different inflections according to capitalism. The onus is on the reification of things rather than relations between them. See Day, *Class*, p. 169.

<sup>112</sup> Bowen herself directly experienced the homelessness and nomadism of London life during periods of bombing, viewing too the ruins and 'stumps' of the city. Her house at 2, Clarence Terrace in Regent's Park suffering successive damage, although it was never completely destroyed. See Parsons, p.201. (Allan Hepburn believes the house was bombed twice, see Hepburn, 'Architectural London'.

<sup>113</sup> (First published September 1941) *Collected Stories*, pp. 609-615.

premium, the caretakers – the nearest to servants – are put in their place to subsist in the most marginal of rooms, ‘at the bottom’:

‘This is my only room in the house – and, even so, as you see, Bennet comes in. The house seems to belong to everyone now. That was Gina who opened the front door.’

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘who is she?’

‘She used to be Anthony’s secretary, but she wanted to come to London to drive a car for the war, so he told her she could live in this house, because it was shut up at that time. So it seemed to be quite hers, when I came back. She is supposed to sit in the back dining-room; that was why I couldn’t ask you to dinner. But also, there is nobody who can cook – there is a couple down in the basement, but they are independent; they are only supposed to be caretakers. They have a son who is a policeman, and I know he sometimes sleeps somewhere at the top of the house – but caretakers are so hard to get. They have a schoolgirl daughter who comes in here when she thinks I am not about.’<sup>114</sup>

In contrast to ‘Oh, Madam...’, here the mistress is no longer in a position of strength. She is weakened - undermined by husband’s mistress, and then by her own incompetence in the face of a servantless existence. Rooms around her house are taken over. The caretakers are ‘independent’: they will do nothing for her but everything for themselves, taking advantage of any empty spaces of the property to provide valuable space for their own family members. Nonetheless, these caretakers have assumed the anxieties of the servant question, as it is learned that ‘caretakers are so hard to get’. In this story the war has revoked many of the rules of the social contract that maintains the separation of classes. New tenets can be established, but these will be dependent upon an unfamiliar liminal situation or environment and the strength of character of the individual. The mistress, demonstrably weak in that she fails to perceive her husband’s infidelity, finds the spaces in which she lives her life circumscribed by the caretakers who would formerly have been her subordinates. Ideologically this story suggests quite obviously that war disrupts social ordering; without the boundaries of class it is disorder that rules, allowing human personality to surface; the private imagination cannot be controlled by the managed theatricality of war. This strange fragmentary narrative depicting

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<sup>114</sup> Bowen, *The Collected Stories*, p. 612.

splintered lives makes apposite use of the short fiction form, where there is no expectation or necessity for resolution or explication, whilst the opacity and marginality of the short story work additionally to embed and emphasise thematic concerns. The future is all uncertainty. But, this story does carry on the thread from 'Oh, Madam...' in which the servant had become dependent upon the mistress; class negotiation *in extremis* is central to both stories. In 'On the Square', because the mistress figure is not strong enough to assert herself, the bedlam of social disorder ensues. Individuals enter uninvited to inhabit areas of the house; there is no appeasement of one's betters, only social fluidity with a policeman 'sometimes somewhere' and a secretary-come-mistress answering the door. Here, in 'Oh' Madam...' where the intransigence lies with the mistress figure, the result is a chaotic, inchoate species of domesticity. In 'Oh Madam...' the immutability resides with the maid, not the servant-keeper. Controlled to the point of recalcitrance, the servants disport the required wartime 'stoicism that makes endurance possible'.<sup>115</sup> Both stories therefore share a message: only the controlling class can properly continue to define the social contract in a changing world.

Post-war the literary short story 'Oh, Madam...' transferred to the theatre, and was transformed into a matinee play piece with mass appeal.<sup>116</sup> The mode of production of the short story in a literary magazine with a limited coterie readership, shifts in emphasis to attain the mass-market appeal of a dramatic presentation. It is significant too that Bowen, whilst 'asserting her belief in the short story as a modern mass art form',<sup>117</sup> also appreciated the difficulty for readers of the form in approaching its central tenet of 'human unknowableness'. The mistress is erased entirely from the matinee production, which was a one-handed performance piece. The London theatre environment, and the complete negation of the person of the

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<sup>115</sup> See Malcom and Malcolm, p. 46.

<sup>116</sup> Angus Wilson, cited by Hepburn, Allan, Introduction to *The Bazaar and Other Stories* Elizabeth Bowen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p.3.

<sup>117</sup> Hunter, p. 116.

mistress in the play format, is a re-presentation of the meaning of Bowen's original,<sup>118</sup> with different elements extracted from the story in order to make its transfer to a popular theatre piece a success. The obvious potential for Bowen to operate similarly in both forms is identified by Bowen scholar Hepburn, when he notes that 'dialogue in both the short story and drama can occur without being spoken.'<sup>119</sup> With the newly singular, unqualified monologue of a maid who 'epitomises the grit and endurance of ordinary London citizens',<sup>120</sup> the text as play script must have been absolutely transformed.<sup>121</sup> The one-hander meant that resistance could be repackaged as resilience, a far more readily assimilated post-war attribute for the working class to have reflected back at themselves in a matinee performance.

In its short story form, 'Oh, Madam...', the reluctance of the servant to adapt is central. The servant wants to repair the damage that has been done to the house, to recreate the former appearance of the surfaces of the objects and rooms around her; she valorizes the past in calling attention to those things that are intact rather than those that have been spoiled, for example "The clock's going: listen – would you believe that?"<sup>122</sup> However, this is to reassure herself rather than her mistress, and comes from a nostalgic or romantic urge to recreate or repair the past. The maid looks forward to making the repairs:

'When we just get the windows back in again – why, madam, I'll have the drawing room fit for you in no time! I'll sheet my furniture till we're thoroughly swept, then take the electro to the upholstery.'<sup>123</sup>

The servant's identity is largely bound up in her care of, and thereby her attachment to, the things of the house and the house itself.

Grounding the nostalgia of the piece with the servant emphasises her

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<sup>118</sup> Therefore the play format can be interpreted as a retelling of Bowen's story, which is in itself a re-presentation of Mansfield's story,

<sup>119</sup> Hepburn, Introduction to *The Bazaar and Other Stories*, p. 15.

<sup>306</sup> Sayre P. Sheldon, *Her War Story: Twentieth-century Women Write About War* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), p. 130.

<sup>121</sup> The script is not extant.

<sup>122</sup> Bowen, *The Collected Stories*, p. 581.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

intransigence. By way of contrast, the mistress has many material possessions elsewhere, indicative of the notion that her identity is not fixed by her surroundings, unlike her sentimental maid. Only the mistress has genuine personal as well as social mobility. The lady's maid believes that she can repair the physical damage of enemy bombing, enabling the situation (the house and its contents) to stay the same:

'All the same, I should like, if you didn't object, madam, to stay on here for a month and get things straight. I'd like to leave things as I found them - fancy, ten years ago!'

Bowen's maid is unaccepting of the exigencies of wartime. Meanwhile, the mistress is more adaptable; it is apparent that by conferring the opportunity for an increased number of choices, money makes for greater personal flexibility. After all, 'It will be nice for you down at her ladyship's.' The servant, however, is pictured as trapped by her position, lulled into an ignorant optimism. 'I *am* a silly: I was upset this morning, but somehow I never saw us not starting again...'<sup>124</sup> She is foolishly trusting of her mistress, and confident in the incontrovertibility of the upper class, her subservience means that she offers no dissent. The mistress is mutable as she has the money to constantly refashion her surroundings and her identity; her class status means that she is able to construct possibilities from the rootless, peripatetic exigencies of wartime London. She will 'take everything' ... for 'good clothes should be where it's safe.' Social mobility for this mistress presents her with the physical, literal mobility of being a mistress either in town or at her country property. In contrast, the opportunity for the maid to move to another location is presented to her by her mistress as a *fait accompli*, illustrating the point that any mobility for the maid is permitted and engendered by the whim of her employer. Any erosion of class boundaries or negotiation concerning social mobility is being led by the upper class. This is both similar to and different from the Mansfield story, wherein

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

age, and her near death, mean that the mistress cannot literally refashion herself, however she is still empowered in so far as she is able to buy the time, attention and proximity of her maid for as long as she desires, despite her own *physical* powerlessness. The interdependence of Mansfield's mistress and lady's maid is exchanged for the dependence of the maid upon her mistress in Bowen's 'Oh, Madam...':

That dependence of maid upon mistress, and the intransigence of the maid, contrasting with an enthusiasm for innovation amongst the servant-keeping class, is at its most prominent in 'Cut Down the Trees', a wartime story first published in *The New Yorker* in September 1943. The author Mollie Panter-Downes has received scant critical attention, save to label her as middle class and middle brow, whilst her short stories have very recently come back into print.<sup>125</sup> She is one of a number of writers who feature in the arguments of Nicola Humble,<sup>126</sup> regarding the middlebrow, and John Brannigan *vis-a-vis* a possible geographical/literary response to wartime.<sup>127</sup> In Panter-Downes' story, the background context of the war is familiar, although the scenario is manifestly different from Bowen's bombed-out London. Mrs Walsingham, an old aristocratic lady of some considerable means, keeps a single servant, her own maid Dossie, in her big country house home; this simple situation is challenged when the house is requisitioned for the remainder of the war to provide accommodation for forty Canadian airmen. The lady and her servant retain their own rooms, their individual areas, and in the case of the mistress the formal space of the head of the household. The setting is of a drastically reduced all-female household; this continues a theme from the other stories, 'The Lady's Maid' and 'Oh,

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<sup>125</sup> Published by Persephone books.

<sup>126</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*.

<sup>127</sup> Brannigan, John, *Orwell to the Present: Literature in England, 1945-2000* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). Brannigan's analysis of Panter-Downes' geo-spatial literary wartime representation is limited to an analysis of her 1947 novel *One Fine Day*. See Brannigan, John, *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles 1890-1970* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

Madam...’ where we likewise witness women left to ‘make do’ without men. This manifests as a warped and uncomfortable fact, illustrative of the increase in female dominance over the middle class household. The way in which this dominance works to support ideology, and its literary representation, is debated by Nancy Armstrong.<sup>128</sup> The domestic male-lessness was not the positive, desired progression of the female sphere but was artificially created by the obligations of war. Female dominance of what was known as ‘the home front’ was a substantial feature of wartime Britain. This operated alongside a parallel development that saw gender roles simultaneously being recast due to the wider societal requirement for women to pick up the jobs of those missing men.<sup>129</sup> By 1943, the date of publication of this story, some 90% of women had been obliged to undertake war work of some kind.<sup>130</sup> A culture of ‘national duty’ had emerged, which ran parallel to the duties of domestic service.

Generational transformation is a feature of the story ‘Cut Down the Trees’: this trope of generational divergence between old servants and the younger generation of servant recurs in the examination of the servant question throughout this thesis, particularly with respect to the housekeeper and the nanny. Panter-Downes’ treatment of generational change is transfigured by the variation between the independence and acceptance of the servant-keeper and the dependence and resistance of her employee. There is an old maid, and also an aged mistress who is counter-intuitively more adept to revision. The three stories making up the case study of this chapter have also shown three ‘ages of the lady’s maid’, with Mansfield’s story showing the maid in the last years of her childhood, the Bowen story focusing on a servant who seems to be in her middle years, although this is not specifically stated, and finally the Mollie Panter-Downes’

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<sup>128</sup> Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*.

<sup>129</sup> Juliet Gardiner, *Wartime Britain 1939-1945* (London: Headline Review, 2004).

<sup>130</sup> In December 1941, the National Service Act (no 2) made the conscription of women legal. At first, only single women aged 20-30 were called up, but by mid-1943, almost 90 per cent of single women and 80 per cent of married women were employed in essential work for the war effort.’

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain\\_wwtwo/women\\_at\\_war\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwtwo/women_at_war_01.shtml)

story depicting an older lady's maid. The aged lady's maid and her old mistress are also socio-historically apt representations, as the young (both male and female) had left British country houses for wartime roles.<sup>131</sup> Generational adjustment is taking place all around the servant and her mistress, with the youthful soldiers ushering in a shift so great that it will prompt the mistress to accept the metaphorical and literal necessity to 'Cut Down the Trees'. The presence of the Canadians forces the women to retreat into a small part of the country house, for: 'Mrs Walsingham had kept for her own use her room and Dossie's, an extra one for guests, the dining room, and the library'.<sup>132</sup>

The women are displaced. Mrs Walsingham has the influence to decide the nature of that dislocation, choosing the rooms to which she and the maid will limit themselves; Dossie is reliant physically and emotionally upon the decision made by her mistress.<sup>133</sup> Panter-Downes presents a mistress who embraces advancement, becoming a participant in the process to which her maid can only acquiesce. This element of the story problematises the affinity between mistress and maid, and is foregrounded in the narrative:

Dossie had mourned as they packed away the crystal chandeliers and hung dust sheets over the Gainsborough and Zoffany conversation pieces, but Mrs Walsingham had been firm.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall*, also Horn, *Life Below Stairs*. Selina Todd explains the attitude of the state towards the call-up of servants, that demonstrated the class prejudice/favouritism of the establishment: 'The Ministry of Labour made huge allowances for those women [...] who were 'servantless'. Even at the height of the war, the ministry allowed servants' employers to request their maids' exemption from conscription, although by 1942 officials noted, with some consternation, that many servants "left of their own accord to take up war work".' Todd, *The People*, p.127. See also James Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership and the Second World War: Continuities of Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 29. 'Many Labour Exchange officials conscripted working-class mothers into the factories, but readily accepted that servantless middle-class women were fully occupied with running their homes.' (Hinton, *ibid.*)

<sup>132</sup> Mollie Panter-Downes, *Good Evening, Mrs Craven: The Wartime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes* (London: Persephone Books, 2008), p. 145, this story is also available at *The New Yorker* archive online at <http://archives.newyorker.com/?i=1943-09-04#folio=016>

<sup>133</sup> The Malcolms affirm that Panter-Downes' 'treatment of emotion and psychology is masterly'. See Malcom and Malcolm, p. 47.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*



Rearranged to suit the incursion, the house's valuable antique items are put out of sight, protected from the rough pragmatism of wartime appropriation. The message here is that antiques and art are part of the past, and should be preserved carefully in order that they might be brought back into full use after the war; sentimentality is pointless, for the aristocracy themselves are in a similar position to that of their valuables. The country house must be almost wholly surrendered for what is portrayed as the 'greater good'.<sup>135</sup> In 'Cut Down the Trees' this concept is more easily assimilated by the aristocracy than by their servants. A similar observation was made concerning the story 'Oh, Madam...', with the laconic reactions of the lady contrasting with the anxious response of her maid to the damage from bombardment inflicted upon the house. Bowen's maid is reliant upon her mistress - economically, emotionally and bodily - and correspondingly exhibits less adaptability than her mistress. Both these examples point to an underlying nuance of ideology: the perception that whatever the circumstances, class will persist, and the symbols of aristocratic wealth will re-emerge with the materialization of a more knowable post-war world.<sup>136</sup> Additionally, this certainty in the continuation of class, particularly in the case of the mistress of 'Cut Down the Trees', the demonstrable preservation of the paraphernalia of class primacy is most clearly to be observed in the representations of the servant-keeping characters.

Following the war, in 1947, Panter-Downes would go on to write and publish another short story in *The New Yorker* that enunciates anxiety around the continuation of class, again mediated through the trope of the servant question. 'Minnie's Room' reprises the central servant/master and mistress relationship, featuring a middle class family who feel let down by their cook's decision to leave

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<sup>135</sup> This was a pattern that was replicated all over the UK, with houses requisitioned for use by troops, evacuees, and as hospitals, see Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall*. We recall too that Charles Ryder returns to Brideshead with his military unit during the war and finds the house appropriated by the wartime authorities. Piette explicates Waugh's personal nostalgia for the architecture of England, and his recognition of this impulse within the national psyche, see Piette, p. 99.

<sup>136</sup> An entirely apposite and ambiguous noun in this context.

them. After 25 years' service the cook reaches the age of 45 and wishes to move to a room outside the servant-keeping family's home, so that she can experience some ownership of her immediate environment: a room of her own. Evidently for Panter-Downes the anxiety concerning class dependence – the necessity of keeping the servant classes physically and economically dependent upon their masters in order to preserve the social certainties of the past – did not diminish with the end of the hostilities.<sup>137</sup>

The aged Mrs Walsingham of 'Cut Down the Trees' attempts to cross the most immediate of class boundaries, in a dutiful response to what she believes is a necessity wrought by the environment of war. In a reversal of the expected order, the lady exhibits less concern for the delineations of class, the maid more. For the lady chooses to cross the physical boundaries of class space within the house, insisting on eating her meals in the kitchen (it is warmer here once the heating has been turned off). She wishes to eat in the kitchen alongside her maid. This the servant will not countenance, she wants to stick not only with the status quo but with the ways of the past. Dossie observes her mistress with 'horror', whilst the old lady of the house takes pleasure in adapting to the new situation, eating 'cozily and pleasantly, the heat of the kitchen fire toasting her old back'.<sup>138</sup> The mistress is prepared to accept their intimacy, allowing it to extend 'cozily' to a comfortable familiarity. Panter-Downes emphasises the affront that such a move represents to the servant within the class-spaces of the country house, as Dossie 'resisting all invitations to join her, withdrew and chewed morosely in the pantry.'<sup>139</sup> Rather than accepting the offer of familiarity, with its invitation to transcend the physical boundaries of class, Dossie pulls back into a smaller and less comfortable space, which is to her mind more acceptable than sharing with her mistress. Whatever the arrangement, the servant desires the self-abnegation of

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<sup>137</sup> Mollie Panter-Downes, *Minnie's Room: The Peacetime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes* (London: Persephone Books, 2002).

<sup>138</sup> Panter-Downes, *Good Evening, Mrs Craven*.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

a physically poor environment, specifically of a lowly place more befitting her station than that of her mistress, in order that the prescribed domestic positioning is maintained. This is reminiscent of Bowen's lady's maid describing the servants' retreat to 'our sitting room' during the bombing, wherein the servant space was in effect portrayed as a place of safety vouchsafed by the generosity of the servant-keepers. Here at Lady Walsingham's, as the space in which the servant class is able to operate reduces, the servant chooses to limit herself even further. The servant is in thrall to past structures, to those safe spaces once guaranteed to them by their employer, and would rather retreat and endure greater restriction than adjust:

It was all part and parcel of the unwarranted bad joke, the conspiracy against Dossie's way of life, which they called a war and which had taken first the menservants and then the girls one by one, which had stopped the central heating, made a jungle of the borders and a pasture of the lawns, marooned the two old women in a gradually decaying house with forty Canadians, and made Mrs Walsingham stop dressing for dinner.<sup>140</sup>

Bowen's servant's retreat to a place formerly gifted them by their employer, necessitated by war, is replicated by the withdrawal of both women in 'Cut Down the Trees', as the large country house is encroached upon by the disuse and decay of neglect, as well as by an influx of Canadian soldiers. The wartime position of Britain, an island-state backed up against the wall and faced with the inevitable onslaught of European turmoil, is emblematised in the women's withdrawal. Although both women are described as old, and they are 'marooned together', only the servant-keeper is able to adapt her behaviour to suit this new situation. The inference of this servant-mistress dyad is that the refusal to advance is depicted in the servant rather than the mistress. The servant-keeping class is leading any likely erosion of class boundaries or negotiation around social mobility. This is contrary to what might reasonably be expected in literary representations of the time, which are assumed to promulgate a narrative of transformation instigated by the working class. Walter

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* (1933), for example, is populated by working class characters struggling for survival in the slum conditions of Salford's Hanky Park. Considering its reception in the 1930s Stephen Constantine praises this much-discussed novel for its qualities as social documentary,<sup>141</sup> whilst it is recognized that the proletarian Greenwood desired to represent 'living working class experience in all its rich and complex detail'.<sup>142</sup> For the novel's working class idealist Larry Meath, through his own self-driven politicization, transformation can be achieved. The impetus for change in Hanky Park can only be driven by the working class;<sup>143</sup> by way of contrast our lady's maids are intransigent, with the mistress alone embracing transformation.

For, there was in truth no likelihood of improving social mobility for the lady's maid. Social mobility in a downwards trajectory is feasible and easier to achieve for the mistress than social mobility upwards for the maid. This action – of joining the maid for a meal in the maid's space – smacks again of the 'slumming it' referred to previously in this discussion; the mistress can take pleasure in witnessing 'how the other half live' prior to retreating to the society of her equals. Ritual participation in a carnivalesque meal for two is accessible for the employer class in this inversion of behaviours.<sup>144</sup> What is witnessed is not truly an act of social mobility: it is instead a pretense at social mobility – the mistress demonstrates that she is able to operate within whatever social sphere she wishes, as her fancy takes her. Therefore, her troubling action serves to underscore her dominance. In 'Cut Down the Trees', Mollie Panter-Downes creates a representation of a servant who wishes things could stay the same –

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<sup>141</sup> Constantine, p. 234.

<sup>142</sup> See Jack Windle, 'What Life means to those at the bottom: *Love on the Dole* and its reception since the 1930s', *Literature & History*, 20, 2 (November, 2011), p. 36.

<sup>143</sup> Alternatively, 'If there is hope, wrote Winston, it lies with the proles.' George Orwell, *1984* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 72.

<sup>144</sup> Similar forces are depicted acting upon the domestic hierarchy, through a shared meal, in the chapter on the Butler. Raunce, the butler in Henry Green's *Loving*, presides over a scene of carnivalesque mimicry around the servant meal table towards the end of the novel. The dominance of the governing body is re-established, strengthened, as a result.

she is resistant to wartime constraints and necessities. Once again the mistress appears more adaptable, possibly because the landowning aristocracy has seen these transitional shifts in the social fabric of the country coming for some years. The lady's maid is an elderly servant trapped by her position in an ignorant nostalgia. Whilst she recognises herself to be an anachronism, she is powerless to transform herself after a lifetime's service.<sup>145</sup> It is less easy for those who have had no power over their own lives to abruptly modify their attitudes and their behaviour.

A significant focus of the servant question, as asked by the servant, concerns her degree of dependence: will she be able to cope without her mistress in the future? The query asks how a servant whose identity has been framed around the service of her mistress, who is in effect powerless, and who is simultaneously lacking in a strong sense of her own identity, might find it within herself to adapt to greatly changing circumstances? From this it may be inferred that the servant question can be posited from the opposite direction, that is, it may be asked by the employee of the employer, refuting the suggestion that it is a question singularly asked by the servant-keeper of the servant. These literary examples suggest that the dependence of the servant upon the master instigates a concern that worries the servant more than the employer. This goes towards explaining why in these examples the servants are seen to struggle with transitions, rather than the employer. The form of the modern short story also works here to support this reading: with its tendency to suppress or problematise actions and motives in the characters portrayed, the interrogative short literary form is suited to depict servants who find it difficult to act positively towards transformation, or who are even, as argued, doggedly reluctant. If the intransigence can be shown to originate with the servant's dependence rather than the servant

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<sup>145</sup> Social historian Joanna Bourke asserts that the potential of transformation became available for women in the late forties, opining that 'the war did leave a valuable legacy in opening up a wider range of occupations to women and hastening the end of traditional women's employment in areas such as domestic service.' See Bourke, p. 86.

keeper then this aspect of the servant question can be subsumed within the social contract of domestic service, and is thereby made manageable for the employer. If this immutability were not represented as originating with the servant, it might be allowed to resonate as a question emanating from social (class) change, which would be an external force operating threateningly outside the employer's control.

In summary, each of these three short stories concerns ideas of bought intimacy, reliance and interdependence operating in the coupling of mistress and lady's maid, underpinned by the received idea that the lady's maid had a special affinity with her mistress, whilst illustrating development in the servant question through the period. The servant question can be appropriately considered through the form of the short story, which fragmentary, fractured and liminal, holds its constituent representations outside history, denied the recourse to social advance that might be expected in the novel.<sup>146</sup> With the lady's maid representations held within the short story form, then, the servant is frozen for our inspection, in a position of continuous servitude. Any newly-negotiated 'closeness', whether in the form of 'intimacy' or perceived class 'levelling' of wartime, is without foundation when it comes to the lady's maid, and the wider servant body, because they are perpetually bound up in and reduced by financial expediency. In addition, as both Steedman and Todd report, servitude was developing rather than disappearing during the early decades of the twentieth century,<sup>147</sup> which required the necessary response from the wider establishment in order for their primacy to be maintained. So, when the propinquity of mistress and maid is challenged by revision, as the stories by Bowen and Panter-Downes particularly show, with the impinging exigencies of wartime

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<sup>146</sup> The most influential treatise proclaiming the novel's potential for provoking social upheaval is Georg Lukács' *The Theory of the Novel* originally written in 1914-15. See Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (Cambridge, MS: MIT Press, 1971).

<sup>147</sup> See Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950', and Steedman, pp. 29-43.

exacerbating the developments of the servant question, the maid is represented as being antagonistic to advancement. She has been fashioned as absolutely dependent, and in these narratives the possibility that this association might alter is demonstrably threatening; as a result the contention around revision is therefore depicted in the servants rather than the mistresses.

With the lady's maid the employer has fashioned a dependent intimate servant whose identity relies absolutely upon their role, ideologically inferring that the servant class require the servant-keepers to look after them, make their decisions for them and generally structure their lives for their own good. The lady's maid is a troublesome hindrance to change, as fracturing the contingent connection of lady and maid calls her identity into question. There are wider ramifications for the entire servant question, because the structures built to shore up the delineations of domestic status have resulted in such a degree of inter-reliance that their dismantling will disrupt every part of the constructed whole.

Dependence is fundamental to the dynamic between maid and her lady. The literary examples share an ideological impetus to show the servant as intransigent, but the servant-keeper as dynamic, highlighted by the link between dependency and reliance upon the continuation of the current state of affairs. In narrative representations of the servant question, the dynamic of reliance has altered – from the dependence of mistress upon maid, through interdependence (shown in Mansfield) to Bowen and Panter-Downes' wartime dependence of the maid upon the mistress. It follows then that the maid's intransigence and the mistress's dynamism is foregrounded in the later examples of the dyad.

These representations of the lady's maids show a working class that seeks the continuation of certain domestic structures rather than the development of a new working environment, countered by an adaptable servant-owning class embracing rather than challenging local social variance. The ideological message is far from that expected

in the literature of the period, which depicts a working class tired of oppression, desirous of communal upheaval; these lady's maids confront the changing social and political reality through complex forms of denial, disavowal, and even defence of the continuation of an environment fashioned, stratified and managed by their employers. This observation ties the discussion of the lady's maid back to central point of thesis – the representations ultimately demonstrate a reactionary stance in these writers of the period, who wish to maintain the current state of affairs – contrary to our expectations that writers of this period were interested in narratives that speak of negotiation that encompasses class adaptation, and see that as originating with the working people.



## Chapter Two: The Housekeeper – Trust and Trespass

Who and what *is* the housekeeper in 1938, specifically, at the time of the context of publication of the texts chosen for analysis, and secondly how does she fit into the structures of domestic service? Both questions can be addressed together. The housekeeper is always a female servant, often an older and typically unmarried woman, with seniority over the predominantly female servant body.<sup>1</sup> In a large household she would specifically supervise housemaids, take responsibility for room allocations, and along with the butler ensure the smooth operation of all servant activity in the house.<sup>2</sup> The housekeeper has seniority of rank and experience in the meritocracy below-stairs, but she also represents a household jurisdiction of heredity and class privilege that is beleaguered. This makes her a significant and telling figure for this study: she is a dominant individual within the structured servant body at a time when authority both above and below stairs is under attack.

Established social and domestic spheres were being harried by revisionist forces during the 1930s. In social terms the political and intellectual challenge to conservatism had gained ground throughout the course of the decade, as witnessed for example, in the rise of a Popular Front, which contributed to the construction of a narrative of the 'revolutionary 1930s'.<sup>3</sup> In the domestic arena patriarchal dominance above stairs was also being confronted, for instance by the force of newly enfranchised women who found encouragement to work outside the home. Following the Second World War this would be countered by a contradictory media-led impetus to encourage the

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<sup>1</sup> The Census of England and Wales 1931 Occupation Tables show 1.3 million women over 14 working as indoor servants, compared to just 78,000 men. See Woollard,

<sup>2</sup> Horn, *Life Below Stairs*, pp. 67-8.

<sup>3</sup> Todd, *The People*, p. 78.

innovative, and consumerist *professionalization* of the housewife.<sup>4</sup> Economic pressures also worked upon the influence of the employer, for instance with wealthy and landowning individuals and families being doubly hit by taxation increases and falling land value and rents.<sup>5</sup> The impetus behind these challenges to the power-prerogative of those above stairs led to rippling repercussions of dissent in the servant quarters. So here, below stairs, the controlling systems imposed by their employers also came under attack economically, socially and even technologically. In economic terms, the burgeoning manufacturing sector depleted human resources from domestic service, luring staff away with better pay and conditions.<sup>6</sup> Society was changing rapidly; increasing mobility meant servants found it easier to move from one employer to another, whilst the social status of the typical servant was under threat from smaller households and the increasing employment of different 'types' of servant, such as dailies. Technological developments of this 'New Media Age' meant more houses with telephones and electricity,<sup>7</sup> although it is debatable whether more than a small number of homes benefitted significantly from labour-saving devices at this juncture.<sup>8</sup> Those technologies that did enter the service realm did so particularly in the kitchen, where superior cookers and fridges were inclined to alter and proliferate employer expectations of servants.<sup>9</sup>

For the middle classes the 'servant question' articulates the attack on their mandate emanating from both below and above stairs, embodying their apprehensions firstly about sourcing adequate staff, and secondly over the increasingly more demanding attitude they

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<sup>4</sup> Krista Cowman, and Louise A. Jackson, eds., *Women and Work Culture: Britain c. 1850-1950* (London: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> See David Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London: Picador, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> See Gardiner, *The Thirties*, and Thomson, *England in the Twentieth Century*.

<sup>7</sup> See David Trotter, *Literature in the First Media Age: Britain Between the Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Critics have noted the British reluctance to take up labour saving devices, citing the preference for servants to continue to work manually at their traditional tasks. Delap goes so far as to suggest that the existence of servants was itself partly responsible for the late-take up of domestic technologies in the UK. See Delap, *Knowing their Place*.

<sup>9</sup> McBride.

perceived in those staff they contrived to secure. From the housekeeper's perspective then, operating as the management intermediary between mistress and maid,<sup>10</sup> she was in charge of a dwindling, but simultaneously a more self-aware, assertive group of younger servants. Her job was becoming more challenging. As the most senior of female servants she would provide the fulcrum between the employer and the maid servants of the house, reportedly often acting out status-conscious behaviour aped from 'upstairs'.<sup>11</sup> For she is caught between worlds: being the servant who is closest in the household strata to the master and mistress, she is in effect a direct representative of their command, and yet she is not, and can never be, one of the governing 'class'. For the housekeeper, class mobility is out of the question; she is already at the highest point in the pyramid of servant status. In other words, the housekeeper is perpetually a servant of capital, not an owner of capital, but despite this she must wield its supremacy over the other servants. Furthermore, with respect to the mistress and master she is in a position of both trust and trespass. She is trusted with aspects of the household's arrangements that touch upon the physical well-being of its inhabitants, for example with her responsibility for sleeping arrangements and menus,<sup>12</sup> learning too the secrets of her employers – from their food preferences to their beloved friendships. But for the employer a trusted servant who sits so closely, who literally knows which beds have been slept in, also represents a threatening, undesirable trespasser. In other words, she is important because she sits at a cuspidal point in the household structure. She is at the edge of the servant group, straddling the divide between them and the employer; she stands within the remit of her master and mistress, yet she can never be one of them. Such liminality makes the position itself

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<sup>10</sup> Delap, *Knowing their Place*, p. 69.

<sup>11</sup> Horn describes how 'younger staff often complained that their seniors were more authoritarian and status conscious than the employer'. She continues with a description of the hierarchical eating arrangements below stairs, with seating in 'order of precedence' and grace said by the most senior'. See Horn, *Life Below Stairs*, pp. 160-1.

<sup>12</sup> Delap, *Knowing their Place*, p. 69.

tenuous, rendering the housekeeper an ambivalent and troubling figure.

The introduction posited that in the work of social and cultural historians, servants tend to receive minimal attention. Of the attention that servants do receive, the majority is given to butlers and maids. One example of a critic who writes prolifically about other servant roles, but gives little consideration to the housekeeper, is social historian and critic Light. In the Prologue to her study, subtitled 'The Hidden Heart of Domestic Service', Light writes off any likely interest in the housekeeper, reasoning that the housekeeper is too *unlike* the majority of servants to render her significant, saying that "The housekeeper in an affluent family, with responsibility for several staff, might have little in common with the lodging house skivvy."<sup>13</sup> The role is not mentioned again, with preference given to a focus on positions offering a more radical narrative, as can be seen the rationale that "The kitchenmaid's story has not yet found its place in accounts of how the English working class was made."<sup>14</sup> Lethbridge entirely neglects to mention the housekeeper in her 2013 study, *Servants: A Downstairs View of Twentieth Century Britain*, although numerous pages are allocated to butlers, servant girls and housemaids.<sup>15</sup> The housekeeper, unlike some of her fellow domestics, seems to be of little value to the social historian seeking a revolutionary thread with which to sew the servant into the narrative tapestry of 1930's social change. For another of the few social historians researching the topic, Delap, it is the title 'housekeeper' that causes consternation. A contemporary source, Llewellyn Smith, speaks of the 'housekeeper' as being a servant name that was new to the 1920s,<sup>16</sup> this sparks consternation regarding the nomenclature of the role, which Delap takes up,<sup>17</sup> partly in explanation for the lack of coverage she gives to

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<sup>13</sup> Light, *Mrs Woolf*, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Lethbridge, *Servants*, p. 372, p. 382, and p. 378.

<sup>16</sup> Hubert Llewellyn Smith, *New Survey of London Life and Labour: Volume 2* (London: King, 1929), p. 435.

<sup>17</sup> Delap, *Knowing their Place*, p. 120.

her. The housekeeper is neglected because her compromised position itself renders her less amenable to certain prevalent kinds of narrative of this period.

Having considered the limitations of the coverage that the figure of the housekeeper receives in social histories, it is necessary to ask how these particular housekeeper representations – from Bowen and du Maurier – are regarded by literary critics. In respect of Bowen, whilst *The Death of the Heart* is considered to be amongst the most important works of fiction of the 1930s,<sup>18</sup> separating this 1938 novel from the author's wartime works proves problematic. For instance, in her influential study Maud Ellmann suggests that 'WW2 brought forth Bowen's most celebrated writing, *The Death of the Heart*, *The Heat of the Day* and many of her finest stories'.<sup>19</sup> Bowen's wartime works sit comfortably together for critical study, however *The Death of the Heart* was actually published in 1938 in the period of intense British anxiety before the Second World War.<sup>20</sup> It is highly unlikely that this represents a factual error on Ellmann's part; she creates instead a link, through the treatment of furniture, in examples of Bowen's writing of this period. Inglesby also considers Bowen's appropriation of objects.<sup>21</sup> Bowen's later wartime work considers the destruction of furniture, the past and memory, whilst the 1938 novel emblematises the trepidation of the immediate pre-war period in its treatment of fixtures and fittings passed down the generations. Furniture, we are given to understand, is symbolic of tradition and stability in the novel. Ellmann refers to Matchett as the 'spirit of the furniture' who helps Portia to 'reconstruct the puzzle of her history'.<sup>22</sup> Notably this simultaneously dehumanizes and mystifies Matchett, whilst eliminating all reference to her servant status. In point of fact little criticism can be discerned that centres on Matchett and her specific

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<sup>18</sup> Ellmann, p. 146.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 26.

<sup>20</sup> This period is sometimes referred to as the 'phoney war', a term which is often used inaccurately. The phoney war lasted from the outbreak of hostilities on 3 September 1939 until conflict truly broke out in May of the following year.

<sup>21</sup> See Inglesby, pp. 306-333.

<sup>22</sup> Ellmann, p. 142.

housekeeper or servant role. Ellmann's influential deconstructive and psychoanalytic study focuses on the substitution and displacement of characters in the novel.<sup>23</sup> She reminds us that Portia's father had been exiled for his sexual transgressions, like Oedipus, and that his daughter is left both puzzling over names and with a puzzle *of a name* – struggling to assert her identity in the Quayne household. The successful way in which she does assert herself is as a diarist,<sup>24</sup> prompting a critical observation that the novel is 'Portia's initiation to the violence of style.'<sup>25</sup> Although Matchett is largely outside the range of her argument Ellmann is, however, sensitive to the housekeeper's liminality, singling her out as the only character to 'remain outside the circuit of displacement',<sup>26</sup> an idea that simultaneously, although somewhat unhelpfully, justifies the servant's marginal inclusion in her argument. Feminist readings do no more to unpick the servant-mistress dichotomy. For example, Harriet Chessman, in analysing the anxiety of women with respect to narrative in the novel, identifies Matchett's narrative as one of three devices used to tell Portia's story – and once again Portia is central, whilst Matchett is a marginal means-to-an-end.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, Lassner's otherwise feminist reading again attends to Matchett as a furniture keeper;<sup>28</sup> she also notes Matchett's position as a 'conventionally subsidiary character', and places her emphasis on the interrelationship of Portia and Anna.<sup>29</sup> Chris Hopkins, considering *The Death of the Heart* and *To the North*, extends this importance placed on Portia's relationship with Anna, denying Matchett's influence in favour of what he explains to be

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<sup>23</sup> According to Alexander G. Gonzalez, *Irish Women Writers* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), p. 43.

<sup>24</sup> Ellmann, p. 145.

<sup>25</sup> Phyllis Lassner and Neil Corcoran likewise focus in on Portia as a writer. See Phyllis Lassner, *Women Writers: Elizabeth Bowen* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1989), and Neil Corcoran, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>27</sup> Harriet Chessman, 'Women and Language in the Fiction of Elizabeth Bowen', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 29, 1 (1983), pp. 69-85, p. 79.

<sup>28</sup> Lassner, *Women Writers*, p. 98.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

Anna's modernist sensibilities.<sup>30</sup> Recent critical work centring on this novel engages more significantly with Matchett's final monologue, and investigates its modernist 'unfinished' properties.<sup>31</sup> Bennett and Royle concentrate on the similarities between Matchett's final monologue and that of Molly Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Their conceit of a 'dream wood' structure applied to the novel incorporates Matchett as part of the 'architectonics' without once dwelling on her domestic service position.<sup>32</sup> The prominence of the servant in Bowen's work is, however, recognised by Neil Corcoran, who observes that

Servants are often significantly present in Elizabeth Bowen, as they are not in other modern novelists of the liberal tradition in whom their ministrations also sustain the relatively leisured and cultured life which is the primary subject-matter of such fiction. In Henry James and E.M. Forster, for instance, servants certainly exist but they do so without speaking.<sup>33</sup>

Corcoran employs a singular focus in his study, which for the purposes of this thesis makes his comments more pertinent than those of Bowen's earlier commentators. His analysis applies historical contextual understanding to a reading of the novel, resulting in a rounded examination of Matchett's role. For instance, having noted that 'she makes out of servility something resolutely unservile', he states that 'there is indeed a deeply conservative element in this portrait.'<sup>34</sup> The first of these statements implies that Matchett is resistant or antagonistic to the dominion of the master and mistress, whilst the second picks up on her as an old-school traditionalist. Both of these aspects of Matchett's characterisation are considered in the analysis of this chapter. But, Corcoran leaves a question mark hanging in his final linkage of Matchett with other servant roles in the

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<sup>30</sup> Chris Hopkins, *English Fiction in the 1930s: Language, Genre, History* (London: A & C Black, 2006), p. 39.

<sup>31</sup> Yoriko Kitagawa, 'Anticipating the Postmodern Self: Elizabeth Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*', *English Studies*, 81, 5 (2000), pp. 484-96. Kitagawa points out Hermione Lee's interest in this same modernist analysis.

<sup>32</sup> See Andrew Bennett, and Royle, Nicholas, *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 78-81.

<sup>33</sup> Corcoran, p. 118.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.119-120.

literature of the period, and does not extend his analysis to consider the implications of Bowen's representation.<sup>35</sup>

In respect of du Maurier, her writing has not received a significant degree of critical attention; her work covers a variety of literary genres and has been remained popular, particularly with a female readership, since their first publication, all factors that could mitigate against a literary reputation. For instance, the exciting new technology of the telephone is critical to a number of moments of revelation in the course of the novel, so it is surprising that David Trotter fails to mention it in his chapter on telephony in *Literature in the First Media Age: Britain between the Wars*.<sup>36</sup> In the critical commentary that does exist, Mrs Danvers is discussed fairly widely, however her characterization is often considered through narrative analysis that focuses on the generic context of the gothic, or with the application of queer theory, rather than looking at the way in which the character operates to reinforce the hegemony of the servant-mistress relationship in the domestic situation at the time of publication. Giles does consider class, but primarily with respect to the narrator's domestic education and her coming of age as the wife of a landowning gentleman, and without a particular emphasis on Mrs Danvers' educative function;<sup>37</sup> similarly Wisker considers the historical context of gender expectations offered by a reading of the gendered roles of du Maurier's characters.<sup>38</sup> Another critic who does consider class emphasizes the narrator's sexual awakening as the instigation of her 'learning', insinuating that the narrator remains a virgin until immediately following Maxim's confession, at which point

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<sup>35</sup> Corcoran appreciates the importance of servants in several of Bowen's novels, and in his analysis at one point he mentions Matchett and then goes on quickly to assert, but not to explicate, a link with butlers such as Raunce.

<sup>36</sup> See Trotter.

<sup>37</sup> Judy Giles, "'A Little Strain with Servants': Gender, Modernity and Domesticity in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* and Celia Fremlin's *The Seven Chars of Chelsea*", *Literature & History*, 12, 2 (January, 2003), pp. 36-50; see Alison Light, "'Returning to Manderley' – Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class", *Feminist Review*, 0, 16 (1984), pp. 7-25.

<sup>38</sup> Gina Wisker, 'Dangerous Borders: Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*: Shaking the Foundations of the romance of privilege, party and place', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 12, 2 (2003).



her 'education' takes place.<sup>39</sup> Taking this speculation to its logical conclusion it appears that the servant's hold over the mistress is also severed at this point. Certain interpretations accentuate the intimacy between Mrs Danvers and Maxim. This is convincingly worked through in a gothic reading from Lowell-Smith that places Mrs Danvers as the helpmeet of Bluebeard;<sup>40</sup> whilst the excessively gothic context has also featured predominantly in the analysis of the 1940 filmic Hitchcock text.<sup>41</sup> Nicky Hallett is one of many critics who address the possibility of Mrs Danvers' lesbianism;<sup>42</sup> meanwhile Alfred Hitchcock's 1940 movie text spawned a plethora of articles on its queer subtext, centring on the evidence of Mrs Danvers' fetishistic pleasure in the clothing and totems of her dead mistress-lover.<sup>43</sup>

I, on the other hand, will focus on the housekeeper in these novels because she presents as the mechanism through which the combined influences of heredity, privilege and wealth reassert themselves in the face of a threat to their dominance over the household. To re-establish itself, and as result of the class fear engendered by the servant question, the group in charge of the household manipulates the servant into acting to maintain the structures that support it. Although profoundly differentiated one

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<sup>39</sup> See Light, 'Returning to Manderley', pp. 7-25.

<sup>40</sup> See Rose Lowell-Smith, 'Anti-Housewives and Ogres' Housekeepers: The Roles of Bluebeard's Female Helper', *Folklore*, 113, 2 (2002), pp. 197-214, and also Nina Auerbach, *Daphne du Maurier, Haunted Heiress* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> See Kim Wheatley, 'Gender Politics and the Gothic in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca*' *Gothic Studies*, 4, 2 (2002), pp. 133-144.

<sup>42</sup> Nicky Hallett, 'Did Mrs. Danvers Warm Rebecca's Pearls? Significant Exchanges and the Extension of Lesbian Space and Time in Literature', *Feminist Review*, 74 (2003), pp. 35-49.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Patricia White, *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 64-72. A still from the scene between Mrs Danvers and the gauche Mrs de Winter in *Rebecca*'s bedroom showcases the movie on the cover of the title; and Shameem Kabir *Daughters of Desire: Lesbian representations in film* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998). Also interesting is Rhona Berenstein, "'I'm not the Sort of Person Men Marry,'" : Monsters, Queers, and Hitchcock's *Rebecca*', in eds. Corey K. Creekmur and Doty, Alexander, *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queen Essays on Popular Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), pp. 239-61, which as well as positing *Rebecca* as the source of haunting invisible desire also points to the sublimated sexuality of the new Mrs de Winter.

from the other, in each of the two literary examples the agency of the housekeeper ultimately operates to preserve the domestic framework of the house. These particular novels each afford a prominent position to a complex, intriguing housekeeper: in *The Death of the Heart* Matchett is critical not only to the operation of the Quayne household, but also to the unravelling and recollection of events; whilst in *Rebecca* Mrs Danvers' opposition to her new mistress is mysterious and contradictory when read in relation to her presentation as the ideal, selfless servant, making the interpretation of Mrs Danvers' behaviour vital to any reading of the novel. Moreover, whilst they share the same 1938 context of publication, each of these two novels offers an unique perspective on the housekeeper and the servant question.

Firstly it will be argued that Bowen's housekeeper works to facilitate the continuation of the powers that be, and their reestablishment in the context of threatening generational transformation. Secondly, whilst that same concern with the continuation of the dominant group is evidenced, I will suggest that a divergent perspective is offered in du Maurier's representation, where the housekeeper teaches the new generation of mistress to be authoritative, having an educative and elucidatory function for the establishment figures at the head of the house. The Housekeeper representations of Bowen and du Maurier reveal the way in which the servant question plays out as a struggle over the redistribution of capital and power during this period. Class histories of the 1930s imply that the impetus for societal development came from below, from the working class and those in poverty.<sup>44</sup> For instance, in his introduction to the Penguin edition of *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), Richard Hoggart argues that much of Orwell's work is 'about a struggle towards a liberation, liberation from the constrictions of

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<sup>44</sup> See Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, pp. 110-113. The defeat of the Liberal party in the General Election of 1918 saw Labour, and the wider newly-enfranchised populace turn the country towards a slow (and some would say unachieved and probably also unachievable) process of democratization. David Cannadine argues that a UK sundered along class lines also witnessed the increasing politicization of the masses in this period.

class.<sup>45</sup> But, this chapter proposes that, rather than focusing upon any such narrative of class struggle, the subtext of the servant question yields up a number of cross-currents at work in society: there was a vested interest on both sides, not just on the side of capital, in the continuation of the comfortable, self-serving state of affairs that had persisted for so long. The housekeeper, poised at the top of the servant ladder, both trusted and trespasser to her employer, is the figure best placed to carry out the necessary negotiation and collusion over their vested interests with the head of the domestic establishment. In these literary servant question representations, the familiar meta-narrative of the revolutionary thirties is cut across by a class within a class who had a vested interest in the continuation of social hierarchies as they exist; the housekeeper was the key figure in the negotiation and continuation of those structures.

Bowen's housekeeper has a facilitating function in the privileged London household of the dysfunctional Quayne family, where Thomas and his childless wife Anna are attempting to provide a home for his orphaned teenage sister. Overlooking Regent's Park, serviced by a body of servants, the Quayne's is a house fitted out by wealth, not warmth. Here the servant question is elided in favour of the continuation of the mandate of the employer, with Matchett's behaviour as mistress-manqué and relationships with the young heroine, Portia and mistress Anna, evidencing her disposition towards the continuation of a comfortable Quayne household. Relishing class, and respecting order, the housekeeper's final decisive action in the novel sees her acting as her employer's surrogate.

In an early confrontation between housekeeper and mistress, her longing to behave as though she were a mistress surfaces in Matchett, but is swiftly overpowered by the prevailing desire to act as aide to the domestic establishment. In the scene in question, the pair

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<sup>45</sup> Richard Hoggart, 'Introduction' to George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), p. vii.

are discussing Portia's imminent arrival at Windsor Gardens, with two symbolic elements of the room's furnishings - a mirror and a stain on the wall - providing a topic of negotiation between the two characters. A powerful class subtext is revealed in operation between the mistress and her servant. Bowen's mirror is hung simultaneously in a symbolic manner, and also through a type of class conciliation:

[Matchett] having done the valance she got up and, with a creak of her poplin dress at the armpits, reached up and hung a wreathed Dresden mirror Anna had got from somewhere on a nail above a stain on the wall. This was not where Anna meant the mirror to hang - when Matchett's back was turned she unostentatiously moved it. But Matchett's having for once exceeded her duties put Anna less in the wrong.<sup>46</sup>

Bowen's choice in presenting this minor domestic occurrence in such detail, with such an emphasis on the symbolism of the mirror, is enlightening. In terms of the symbolic resonance of the object itself, the placing of the decorative mirror over the stain represents the notion that an ugly truth is hidden behind a façade composed of image and self. So, the servant is figuratively, and purposefully, concealing the family's misdeeds, the stain on the house of Quayne, behind a screen that allows onlookers to see themselves in the place of the imperfection. The viewer, like the *flâneur* strolling alongside shop windows, observes the reflective surface of personified consumption and egotism. Matchett works to hide the family's secrets.<sup>47</sup> The response of the mistress of the house to this action is telling, as Anna gives credence to an alternative association implicit in the mirror's movements. Bowen's narrative presents one inference, which is then superseded by another, although both implications still pertain. For Anna the positioning of the looking glass adheres in terms of its decorative, rather than its concealing properties. Seeing the object as a feature of the house's décor, for Anna the mirror is a piece of property, an object to display financial and physical comfort. She possesses the wealth, and the mirror is hers to display, just as the stain is hers to ignore. But, in addition to the symbolic meanings of the

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<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 41.

<sup>47</sup> Ironic that the anachronism works with iconic totems of modernity to obfuscate the present.

mirror and the stain, Bowen describes the negotiation of class positions between the mistress and maid, in the performance of a symbolic action. The social standing of the employer-family can be substantiated through the control of this action, through determining who literally hangs the mirror; for Anna this positioning itself is taken to be a status marker. In situating the looking glass Matchett has taken upon herself a decision that should not be that of a servant. Critic Nicola Darwood argues that Matchett is 'only too aware of Mrs Quayne's true nature' and that she 'holds a firm opinion of Anna',<sup>48</sup> this may be the case, but Darwood fails to take into account the social contract of the servant question that underpins the relationship between the two women, which guarantees that Matchett must always subdue her own desires. For Anna, and the domestic establishment of the Quaynes, the prospect that the housekeeper might exceed her duties is perilous. Matchett has confronted the boundaries of responsibility between the mistress and servant, and in taking on the movement of a mirror – a decorative item and therefore one that falls under the remit of the mistress and is her possession – Matchett has crossed a line. She is pushing towards a class position that is out of her reach; she is a mistress manqué, striving towards a status forbidden to her. Yet, in this example the individual who sits at the top of the household pyramid responds by *sanctioning* the act of insurrection – the hanging of the looking glass – which is then surreptitiously reversed by the mistress, as 'when Matchett's back was turned she unostentatiously moved it'. Anna, it would appear, sees a clear oppositional link between the mistress and servant roles, visualizing it as a game in which points are being continually accrued and deducted at one another's expense. Counter-intuitively, it seems, Anna permits Matchett her moment as mistress manqué, and in so doing the mistress reasserts her primacy. We note that: 'For Matchett's having once exceeded her duties put Anna less in the

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<sup>48</sup> Nicola Darwood, *A World of Lost Innocence: The Fiction of Elizabeth Bowen* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), p. 132.

wrong.' If Matchett is permitted to overstep the mark and to experience the thrill of superiority as she crosses the class boundary from servant to mistress, then she loses moral ground, allowing Anna to make up the ground she had lost earlier in the chapter. Meanwhile the reassertion of the condoned order of things is apparent in the cunning nuance of Anna's behaviour – Matchett is being *permitted* to believe she has got her own way; her moment as mistress is being tolerated. Anna simply moves the mirror later.

The housekeeper is seen particularly to reconsolidate the primacy of the family Quayne, once young Portia has arrived in the house, in her careful negotiation of her relationship with the child. This is evident in Matchett's rejection of the attempts by the motherless Portia to inveigle her into a 'pseudo-family' relationship. Portia likes Matchett to speak to her at bedtime, in what seems remarkably like parent-child behaviour; frankness singles out their communication and they speak freely together, unlike Portia with her brother-guardian Thomas, or sister-in-law Anna. On one such occasion Matchett is seen to indulge the child, by telling her stories of her past, as well as speaking subversively about Anna. Portia reflects:

'She had to have me here.'

'She had this room empty, waiting,' said Matchett sharply. '*She* never filled it, for all she's so clever. And she knows how to make a diversion of anything – dolling this room up with clocks and desks and frills. (Not but what it's pretty, and you like it, I should hope.) No, she's got her taste, and she dearly likes to use it. Past that she'll never go.'

'You mean she'll never be fond of me?'

'So that's what you want? Matchett said, so jealously pouncing that Portia drew back in her bed.<sup>49</sup>

Matchett's subversive criticism of her employer centres on her materialism and obsession with appearances, which Portia intuitively will preclude her from any familial love. Having made this criticism, effectively taking her stance, however, Matchett turns to Portia and asserts her own duty and the notion of proper relationships: 'I have my duties,' she said, 'and you should look for your fond-ofs where it is

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<sup>49</sup> Bowen, *The Death of the Heart*, p. 83.

more proper.<sup>50</sup> Even in intimacy we see that ‘something steadily stood between them’: Matchett’s rigorous attention to the terms of the employer-employee social contract, with the additional inference that she will never be more than a mistress manqué, serves to separate them. A further instance of Matchett’s rejection of Portia’s appeal for a mother substitute can be traced in their dialogue following the youngster’s return from her summer seaside trip to Seale. In this example Matchett proceeds to invoke the necessity of capital in sustaining their existence:

‘I must say,’ said Portia, sitting on Matchett’s table, ‘today makes me wish only you and I lived here.’

‘Oh, you ought to be ashamed! And mind, too, you don’t get a place like this without you have a Mr and Mrs Thomas. And then where would you be, I should like to know? No, I’m ready for them, and it’s proper they should come back. Now don’t give me a look like that – what’s the matter with you? I’m sure Mr Thomas, for one, would be disappointed if he was to know you wished you were still at that seaside.’<sup>51</sup>

Portia is over-friendly with Matchett, ‘sitting’ on her table, physically displaying her tendency to treat Matchett as ‘family’, and expressing her desire to be alone with the housekeeper rather than with the relatives who are of her class. Childishly Portia wishes that she and Matchett might be the householders, an urge that ought to expose the mistress manqué in Matchett. But, rejecting the subliminal servant question, the housekeeper specifically endorses the Quaynes’ influence in her response, reminding the child of the wealth of her brother and sister-in-law, and the reliance of both child and housekeeper upon the couple. For with her comment that ‘you don’t get a place like this without you have a Mr and Mrs Thomas,’ Matchett points out the youngster’s status – ostensibly she is a homeless orphan – and the propriety and necessity of her gratefulness for brother Thomas’s largesse. Rejecting and refusing a maternal role, Matchett acquiesces with the class norms that her servitude shores up, knowing that the behaviour that Portia desires of her would transgress the category distinction that stability depends upon,

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

disturbing the critical order of things. Matchett is thereby seen to work to facilitate the reconsolidation of heredity and privilege, and in presenting the opinions of her employer she acts as its substitute. Using nuanced multiple meanings Bowen's servant repeatedly acts and speaks in a manner that foregrounds the complex negotiation around class subtexts that is woven into the fabric of the novel. Despite her disputatiousness and disavowal, Matchett operates constantly for the continuation of the Quayne family.

In rejecting the disorderly insecurity implied by the 'servant question' the housekeeper does appear to relish the order and structures of class offered by the domestic service paradigm. This is apparent when Matchett reminisces of a past when servants, such as her, were treated with respect:

Oh she was fair to me, the fifteen years I was with her. You couldn't have had a better employer, as far as the work went: the one thing that put her out was if you made her feel she wasn't considerate. She liked me to feel she thought the world of me. "I leave everything in safe charge with you, Matchett," she'd say to me on the doorstep, times when she went away. I thought that when I saw her coffin go out. No, she'd never lift her voice and she always had a kind word.<sup>52</sup>

Matchett approved of the old Mrs Quayne, her employer from the previous generation of servant-keepers. The understanding between the two women included the employer's trust and the servant's fulfilment of her duties beyond her mistress's death. Central to the relationship between Matchett and old Mrs Quayne was a thorough understanding of what each required from their interrelationship. The servant observes that 'the one thing that put her out was if you made her feel she wasn't considerate. She liked me to feel she thought the world of me.' Matchett recognizes that the original Mrs Quayne exercised a considered and reflexive understanding of their interrelationship: the mistress wanted the servant to see how much she was liked, and Matchett was pleased to oblige. Matchett's new mistress Anna Quayne is altogether a different prospect. Although she

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 76.



is fond of mistresses, Matchett detests the young Mrs Quayne, Anna, who 'likes the look of a thing'.<sup>53</sup> It is critical however, that Matchett's disobedience remains non-confrontational. The subversion of the housekeeper does not threaten the office of power, only the temporary inhabitant of it. For, openly stating her attitudes concerning class in the course of the extended conversation with Portia, from which both of these examples come, the housekeeper expresses her love of mistresses and masters, particularly those of yesteryear.<sup>54</sup> This demonstrates Matchett's judgement of class and the weight she affords to the notion of it being maintained.

On a number of occasions Matchett speaks of social division as necessary and desirable. She expresses her interpretation of such a requirement in her criticism of Eddie, the objectionable interloper and 'friend' to both Anna and the youngster. Portia has just admitted that Eddie showed her kindness when she fetched his hat for him. Matchett is not impressed by Eddie, and tells the girl so: 'It's the first manners he's shown here, popping in and out like a weasel. Manners? He's no class.'<sup>55</sup> Not only does Matchett understand and respect the imperative of class, she also requires it to be reciprocated. This is reiterated in her appellation of Portia's schoolfriend - '*that* Lilian'.<sup>56</sup> Again the mistress manqué, Matchett exactly echoes the sentiments of her mistress Anna who likewise does not 'find her very desirable'.<sup>57</sup> Mistress and housekeeper, considering the world through similar lenses of class-consciousness, share in their response.<sup>58</sup>

Matchett acts again as the delegate of her employer in her critical final action, when she takes on the task of going to collect Portia from Major Brutt's hotel. Having gone there unaccompanied and without the knowledge or approval of her family, Portia has placed herself in a

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<sup>53</sup> Bowen, *The Death of the Heart*, p. 81.

<sup>54</sup> Her love for her old employer Mr Quayne was somewhat quashed by disappointment when she found he ended up living in hotels on the continent.

<sup>55</sup> Bowen, *The Death of the Heart*, p. 84.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>58</sup> In addition Matchett is unimpressed by Mrs Heccomb, presumably because she has risen from the position of governess, to be middle-class and have a servant herself.

position that challenges the core of paternalistic domesticity, making it crucial that the child be retrieved immediately. Understanding this, and to combat the delaying prevarication over who will go to collect Portia, Matchett has been attempting to prompt the master, Thomas, into urgent action:

Matchett, in person, came to the study door to say Portia was still not in yet, and to ask Thomas what he meant to do. She stood in the doorway, looking steadily at him: these days they did not often confront each other.<sup>59</sup>

The contrast between employer and employee is at its most finely tuned in this section of the novel. This is apparent in the distinction between the chosen inaction of the employer and the proxy action of the housekeeper, into which she is forced by her master. To a degree the stasis of Thomas's stance is supported by Maud Ellmann's statement that "aboulia is typical of Bowen's characters," and central to her fiction;<sup>60</sup> however, Ellmann fails to note that the 'aboulia' does not extend to the denizens of 'downstairs'. Matchett attains moral superiority in her recognition of Thomas's aboulia despite the urgent necessity of his response, and through her subsequent request for his action. The distinction between the careless employer and his soon-to-be-empowered servant is apparent in the following rare glimpse of Thomas's thoughts: 'Evidently Matchett was thinking something – but was Matchett not always thinking something?'<sup>61</sup> He appears to be justifying to himself a course of non-action, inwardly attesting that his housekeeper is a perpetual worrier. However, the 'unsaid' of the narrative, the textual locus of ideology, underpins Thomas's expression.<sup>62</sup> Internally repeating the phrase 'thinking something' suggests Thomas's unexpressed frustration with the housekeeper, which he appears to be foregrounding in order to elide the necessity of quick responsible action to remedy Portia's situation. In the

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 299.

<sup>60</sup> Ellmann, p.111.

<sup>61</sup> Bowen, *The Death of the Heart*, p. 299.

<sup>62</sup> Macherey.

analysis of the class schism in the novel 'it is the silence and reticence of the literary text'<sup>63</sup> that must be identified to clarify meaning; this is amplified in Concilio's observation that, silence is 'the reticent discourse that punctuates Bowen's narration.'<sup>64</sup> In the lacunae created by this reticence of Thomas, Matchett can be seen to be worrying away at the boundaries of employee-employer responsibility – in effect at the boundaries of class. The narrative goes on to describe the influence that her anxiety has upon him:

Thomas went upstairs, to gain the drawing room landing enough infected by whatever Matchett did think to open the door sharply, then stand on the threshold with a tenseness that unnerved the other two – 'Portia isn't back,' he said. 'I suppose we know where she is?'<sup>65</sup>

The startling use of the verb 'infected' serves to emphasise the threat of Matchett's otherness: she is an external agent, something that attacks the body (the body of upper class hegemony). The temerity of Matchett's approach to her master matches the social instability of the girl's present position: both undermine the status harmony of the family Quayne. In response the powers that be secure the action of the servant as their replacement; they will *temporarily* permit the servant to act with their strength. The critical point is that the passing of this dispensation is only temporary, and that it is a decision *made* by the employer rather than *taken* by the employee.

So, the Quaynes entrust Matchett – their surrogate – with the task. Thomas does this rudely: he does not behave as an employer should, but rather shows tendencies of the 'new employer' of which Matchett disapproves.<sup>66</sup> Generational change is taken up in the housekeeper's assessment of the current generation of employer, using the benchmark of the previous generation, when she considers 'Thomas's

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<sup>63</sup> See Carmen Concilio, 'Things that do Speak in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*' in Wim Tigges, *Moments of Moment: Aspects of the Literary Epiphany* (Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 279-293, p. 282.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Bowen, *The Death of the Heart*, p. 299.

<sup>66</sup> The notion of the 'new employer' corresponds with the 'new servant'; both imply an era of change underpinning the servant question.

thoughtlessness in sending her away with no idea of where she is going:

Oh, they did ought to have thought. Forgetfulness is one thing. But this isn't natural, really.

It puts me wrong. That's where they're different really. That's where they're not like Mr Quayne.

Not like Mr Quayne. He would always think of a thing. He'd tell you, but he would say why. He wouldn't never put you in that sort of a position, not with a taxi man. He wouldn't leave you to be put in the wrong. Oh, he was fair, he was fair in all that he did, For all there were many worse that would put him down.<sup>67</sup>

Matchett believes such a lack of deference between classes to be a contemporary phenomenon; the old Mr Quayne, by contrast, consistently acted towards her in a manner she considered appropriate. Her perception is that the relationship between master and servant has altered, and the master of the new generation is less honourable than his predecessor. In ideological terms the new middle classes are not to be trusted. Criticism is not 'voiced' here to her employer, indeed it would be unacceptable for a servant to question the judgement of their mistress, but is instead expressed solely to the reader through Matchett's free indirect discourse.<sup>68</sup> Matchett's indirect voice expresses class concerns around generational change, from a servant perspective. Servant voices in literature are capable of embellishing the often overlooked or misrepresented articulations of documentary forms. The language of Matchett's judgement is harsh and direct. Thomas's thoughtlessness 'isn't natural' and it 'puts' the housekeeper 'wrong'. The action of depositing Matchett in the taxi without properly communicating to her is not the proper behaviour of a respectable, blameless servant keeper; this gives rise to her subversive thought that the previous generation had been not only 'different', but also better. As the senior Mr Quayne treated his servant appropriately - not putting her 'in the wrong' - Matchett comes to the conclusion that he was therefore 'fair in all that he did'. As Neil Corcoran concludes, Matchett 'is in many ways made to carry the

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<sup>67</sup> Bowen, *The Death of the Heart*, p. 382.

<sup>68</sup> Neil Corcoran suggests that Matchett's final monologue is 'radical'. See Corcoran, p. 120.

ethical weight of what is... an ethically instructive novel.<sup>69</sup> The morality of a generation is summed up in their attitude to their servants. But, taking up the notion that Thomas requires Matchett to act as his substitute, and that the jurisdiction she assumes is only temporary, his rudeness can be inferred to simultaneously serve another function. With this in mind, the employer can be as brusque as he wishes; his servant has been tasked, the taxi-driver has been briefed. Both these working class people serve capital, which requires them only to act on its behalf, temporarily, until such time as Portia is restored to the family and the norms are re-established.

Matchett ventriloquises the voice of her superiors in her dialogue with the taxi man *en route to The Karachi Hotel*: with the speech of her employer issuing from her mouth, the housekeeper is the willing puppet of the Quayne family.<sup>70</sup> In order to assert her proxy status Matchett converses with the taxi driver in a manner that mimics her master's voice, saying: 'None of that, young man. You mind your own business.'<sup>71</sup> Speaking with the commanding voice of her master, Matchett is able to re-establish class superiority over her driver. Ventriloquy refers to the formidable suggestion that the employer speaks through the voice of the servant, who can adopt the accent of the master to differentiate herself from the taxi driver, demonstrably assuming the position of Thomas's stand-in.<sup>72</sup> Just as the notion of 'passing' works in both a racial and class setting to enable members of disadvantaged faction to appear to belong to an alternative and more privileged group,<sup>73</sup> so too the concept of literary 'ventriloquy', often

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<sup>69</sup> Corcoran, p. 103.

<sup>70</sup> Hermione Lee said of Matchett's monologue that it was 'startling as though a sphinx had broken silence.' See Hermione Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen* (London: Vintage, 1999).

<sup>71</sup> Bowen, *The Death of the Heart*, p. 314.

<sup>72</sup> Accent 'was a piece of cultural capital which everyone could borrow', according to Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, literature and conservatism between the wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 245.

<sup>73</sup> 'Passing' as a servant, and 'passing' as honest will be discussed in depth in the chapter on the manservant.

depicted in the context of ethnicity,<sup>74</sup> can operate as a mechanism for members of one class to take on the voice of another. Intriguingly literary ventriloquism simultaneously retains a comedic quality,<sup>75</sup> which is borne out in this example of Matchett and the taxi driver. The dialogue of Compton-Burnett operates in the same manner,<sup>76</sup> with Compton-Burnett's mimicry and 'a species of ventriloquy' offering 'a kind of elevation whose snobberies were paradoxically open to all: all one needed to do was to speak with the right accent.'<sup>77</sup> However, ventriloquy alone – that notion that the servant is the puppet or mouthpiece of the employer – does not fully explain the significance of Matchett's speech act, and nor does it credit the housekeeper with an understanding of her own agency. For, in the first instance Matchett is here demonstrating her comprehension that the cultural capital of class-specific accents can be appropriated for a specific purpose, and secondly she possesses the ability to do just this in order to transcend class. However, that potential of the act is not fully realized, as it is put to use merely to create class distance between herself and the other class actant. Once Matchett has spoken in what she believes to be the voice of her employer, she withdraws from the taxi driver, her superiority now asserted. 'You know what drivers are. Not a nice class.' She reflects. Her sense of a necessary social structure is uppermost in both her speech and her physical behaviour during this final journey of the novel:

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<sup>74</sup> Michael North, writing of the modernist propensity for ventriloquy, explains that 'writers as far from Harlem as T.S. Eliot and Gertrude Stein reimagined themselves as black, spoke in a black voice' and changed twentieth-century literature. See Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language and Twentieth Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.1.

<sup>75</sup> Ricardo Quinones agrees that comic ventriloquism is practiced even in the work of high modernists, and cites Eliot to demonstrate this. See Ricardo J. Quinones, *Mapping Literary Modernism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p. 108.

<sup>76</sup> See Sara Crangle, 'Ivy Compton Burnett and Risibility' in Marina Mackay and Lynsey Stonebridge, *British Fiction after Modernism: The Novel at Mid-Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 99-121.

<sup>77</sup> Compton Burnett's novels, set in the late-Victorian or Edwardian era, often feature the master-servant relationship. See the brief analysis offered in the introduction with respect to the butler, Bullivant – in *Manservant and Maidservant* (1947). In the context of this insight Light is referring to her 1930s' work. See Light, *Forever England*, p. 47.

With a movement of implacable dignity she drew herself up and read *The Karachi Hotel*. Her eyes travelled stonily down the portico to the glass door, the dull yellow brass knob, then down the steep steps blowsy from many feet. Not looking round she said: 'Well if you've brought me wrong, don't think you'll get your money. You can just drive right back and I'll speak to the gentleman.'<sup>78</sup>

Stance confers status. Matchett's ventriloquy of the speech of class superiority continues with her mimicry of physical assertion of rank. The trip to the rather down-market, down-at-heel hotel, with the vital mission of redeeming Portia, is a journey that the housekeeper takes on behalf of her master and mistress. In acting as the surrogate of capital, it has already been demonstrated that Matchett appropriates the voice of her master; but furthermore, the housekeeper is able to take on something of the *appearance* of her employers, as she 'drew herself up' and did not look round to engage with the driver as she imparted her last instructions to him, aping the lack of engagement of higher with lower that she has experienced over a lifetime in service. Of all the working class, surely servants, with their intimate knowledge of middle and upper-class behaviour and mores, are most aptly placed to mimic effectively the language and stance of their employers. The closing paragraph and sentence of the novel show Matchett on the threshold of the hotel:

Through the glass door, Matchett saw lights, chairs, pillars – but there were no buttons, no one. She thought: 'Well, what a place!' Ignoring the bell, because this place was public, she pushed on the brass knob with an air of authority.<sup>79</sup>

The concluding physical action of the housekeeper continues her mimicry of her employer, her behaviour as his substitute. Her gesture to ring the bell and gain entry is performed, 'with an air of authority'. This mandate is not hers to possess, but she will instead mimic the attitude it might confer – she will act out its pattern of behaviour in her 'air'. Living in close proximity to her employers, a senior servant such as a housekeeper would be well-placed to recognize and ape the typical attitude and gestures of her mistress. In addition, because she

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<sup>78</sup> Bowen, *The Death of the Heart*, p. 318.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

has permission to deputise for her employer, Matchett acts with self-confidence, and her pretence to stature is rendered convincing and effective.

So, what can we say this housekeeper representation has added to the debate over the servant question and class? Matchett is complex, simultaneously undermining and shoring up the structures in which she operates. In her challenge to Anna's superiority she denies the leverage of the new mistress whilst asserting the primacy of the old; she challenges Thomas to act, but will not act herself without his command. Bowen's housekeeper does not aspire to be a mistress herself, she is unwilling to go beyond the prescribed boundaries of her class role unless she is permitted to do so; because of her service through the generations her subjugation is complete: the powers that be can trust her to work to preserve the domestic establishment, with its functions of privilege and heredity. Bowen's narrative yearns towards the persistence of a careful, considered and non-confrontational orderliness. The notion added to the debate is that servants are steadfast and backward-looking; they do not desire to be in the vanguard of class change, and with careful management, facilitative of the re-establishment and continuation of class-crafted household structures, they will toil to secure the stability of hierarchy.

The housekeeper of *Rebecca* works to explain the structures of the age-old systems and educate the new generation of mistress into her position of supremacy, shoring up the de Winters' domestic hegemony. The housekeeper is uniquely placed to do exactly this, due to that exclusive position in which she is both trusted and trespassing within the domain of her employers. The tension between these two, which underpins the middle class servant question anxiety, is clearly articulated in du Maurier's housekeeper representation, Mrs Danvers. In the novel Mrs Danvers has been left in charge of the house and the servant equipage whilst the master, Maxim de Winter, travels abroad in an attempt to distance himself mentally and physically from the act



of murdering his wife, Rebecca. In the absence of her employer Mrs Danvers oversees the redecoration work that takes place, having been entrusted to take care of the house and emboldened to act as her employer's substitute. Such a situation may only be permitted to pertain whilst no 'lady of the house' exists. Once Mr de Winter remarries, the new Mrs de Winter must consider the degree to which the housekeeper has been too trusted, and how far she has trespassed, in order to take back the influence that has been passed to Mrs Danvers. This passing of control back from the housekeeper to the young mistress is crucial to the longevity of the family in a position of superiority. It will be argued that Mrs Danvers, as both servant custodian and intruder, effectively teaches the new mistress her duty – the necessity that she takes on the responsibilities that comprise Manderley, educating her on the necessity of class boundaries and the correct attribution of status in a structure born of the exchange relationship, heredity and privilege.

Naïve, new to the class status of the de Winters and the position of mistress, the narrator mistakenly puts her trust in Mrs Danvers, and her learning begins. The servant inveigles the 'girl' into choosing the same costume that was worn by her predecessor for the Manderley ball, promising to keep it a secret from Maxim:

'I should study the pictures in the gallery Madam, if I were you, especially the one I mentioned. And you need not think I will give you away. I won't say a word to anyone.'<sup>80</sup>

Trusting Mrs Danvers is a critical error of judgement that will lead the narrator to consider throwing herself from the window of Rebecca's former room, encouraged by the demented housekeeper. However, the dress incident also exposes Mrs Danvers to the narrator, who notes 'I shall never forget the expression on her face, loathsome, triumphant. The face of an exulting devil. She stood there smiling at me'.<sup>81</sup> Mrs Danvers is educating her mistress, for from this incident the narrator learns two valuable lessons: servants may not always be

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<sup>80</sup> Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca* (London: Virago, 2003), p. 223.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

inappropriately defers to Mrs Danvers' greater knowledge and seniority, to her experience of the domestic service. Meanwhile, in her responses, the housekeeper makes it apparent that this should *not* be part of the servant's role; it is instead 'for you to say'. Mrs Danvers is alert to the irregularity of the situation, fully comprehending that the head of the family should be the lawgiver and decision-maker. As if to underline the difference between them, and call attention to the mistress's misdemeanour, the housekeeper (who is the lead interlocutor in their dialogue) permits a silence to fall. This is the silence of the educator, as she waits for the educatee to ingest the knowledge just imparted. Mrs Danvers has shown the narrator that she must resist her predisposition towards servility: any such reversal of norms would be incongruous for the head of the household. In this example, as with Matchett and her rejection of Portia's maternal caresses, the housekeeper is clearly seen to reject that which is inappropriate, so as to work towards a social stratum that perseveres.

Trust, circling as it must between the parties in the master-servant social contract, recurs in another revealing scene in the novel. After accidentally breaking a valuable ornament that belonged to Rebecca, the narrator hides the evidence, and is then afraid to own up to the mishap. Maxim creates a scene, and involves Mrs Danvers, recognising this as an opportunity for the new Mrs de Winter to be educated in the ways of her class and the social mores of the mistress. The narrator must learn that it is imperative that she accepts her position of influential primacy and acts accordingly, to allow the reconstitution of household order. The ornament is valuable, a possession associated particularly with her predecessor, a visible asset in Rebecca's cultural capital.<sup>88</sup> Neither literal financial values, nor those of cultural capital, the fundamental structure of the class system, are yet properly recognised or appreciated by the unsophisticated mistress.<sup>89</sup> From the

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<sup>88</sup> And a reminder of the conspicuous consumption so frequently alluded to in the novel.

<sup>89</sup> Bourdieu's original concept of cultural capital is worked through with respect to ornaments (and even food) in a domestic context by Cowman and Jackson. See Cowman and Jackson, p. 74.

perspective of the governing body, the specific class attribution of monetary worth, and additionally of cultural capital, is critical for societal wellbeing, and it is imperative that the new mistress discovers that above all else, its hegemony must be respected and maintained. This particular incident extends beyond the foregrounded issue of trust, to expose both her inadequacy and vulnerability with respect to the more knowing Maxim and Mrs Danvers, who seek to teach her on behalf of capital. The breakage also metaphorically depicts the schism of the class divide perceived by the narrator to exist between herself and her husband. She owns up in conversation with Maxim:

'You broke it? Well, why the devil didn't you say so when Frith was here?'

'I don't know. I didn't like to. I was afraid he would think me a fool.'

'He'll think you much more of a fool now. You'll have to explain to him and Mrs Danvers.'

'Oh no, please Maxim, you tell them. Let me go upstairs.'

'Don't be a little idiot. Anyone would think you were afraid of them.'

'I am afraid of them. At least, not afraid, but...'<sup>90</sup>

The narrator believes that the servant will judge her: a blatantly inappropriate consideration for an individual 'worthy' of her mistresshood. She continues to think of the servants as fellow-individuals; yet it is only through contemplation of their inferiority that she will be able to establish the necessary culturally-prescribed degree of distance between her and them. In ideological terms she must see class correctly in order to reach the comfort of household stasis. Maxim's response to the narrator's admission of breaking the ornament at first appears troublesome for this analysis, because he holds up the old, established servants Frith and Mrs Danvers as figures of domestic strength to whom the narrator must make an admission of guilt. It might be expected that Maxim would wish to encourage superiority in his wife, rather than submission to inferiors. However, considering the contention of this chapter – that when considered closely these housekeeper representations can be seen to promulgate the notion that the comfortable continuation of present

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<sup>90</sup> du Maurier, *Rebecca*, p. 158.

conditions must prevail at all costs – an additional nuance emerges. In this scene, together with Mrs Danvers, Maxim is rather cruelly engaged in educating his young wife in the stipulations of heredity and privilege.<sup>91</sup> The master of the house and the housekeeper are bound by their financially-based employer-employee contract, and by its financial basis and the requirement that it persists through the generations, so they act together of necessity.<sup>92</sup> A degree of complicity between de Winter and Danvers is revealed as Maxim baits his young wife concerning the broken ornament, calling upon Mrs Danvers for support:

‘Perhaps Mrs de Winter was not aware of the value of the ornament?’ said Mrs Danvers, turning her eyes upon me.

‘Yes,’ I said wretchedly. ‘Yes, I was afraid it was valuable. That’s why I swept the pieces up so carefully.’

‘And hid them at the back of a drawer where no one would find them, eh?’ said Maxim, with a laugh, and a shrug of the shoulders. ‘Is not that the sort of thing the between-maid is supposed to do, Mrs Danvers?’

‘The between-maid at Manderley would never be allowed to touch the valuable things in the morning room, sir,’ said Mrs Danvers.<sup>93</sup>

Ignorant of the significance implicit in her denial of self-aggrandisement, the new mistress presents an untenable threat to the stability of the Manderley edifice, which is underpinned by the proper operation of the servant-master dynamic. Consequently, Maxim and Mrs Danvers are seen here to unpleasantly taunt the new Mrs de Winter, in an attempt to goad her towards comprehension. She becomes ‘wretched’ – a descriptor denoting her absence of self-esteem. But, despite the narrator’s state of distress, master and housekeeper join forces against the upstart incomer. Maxim turns to Mrs Danvers to corroborate his point, as one parent might turn to the other in the course of reprimanding a child. When he compares her behaviour to that of the ‘between-maid’, Maxim invokes the servant

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<sup>91</sup> Light suggests that ‘what saves the girl is her middle-classness.’ Light, ‘Returning to Manderley’, pp. 7-25.

<sup>92</sup> According to Greenblatt ‘the survival of the rulers depends upon a supplement of coercive belief.’ See Stephen Greenblatt, ‘Invisible Bullet: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion, *Henry IV and Henry V*, in Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield’s *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, eds. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 18-48, p. 23.

<sup>93</sup> du Maurier, *Rebecca*, p. 159.

question as a powerful subtext in his argument. Discussing the servant-like behaviour of the mistress *with* a servant doubly inflects the inferences of the servant question into this section of the narrative, working to demonstrate to the hapless narrator just how far beneath the required behavioural standards of a mistress she has fallen. In the context of the book's production and first reception this reference would have been distinguished as an insulting term, for the 'between-maid' was culturally familiar as 'a maidservant who assists both the cook and the housemaid'.<sup>94</sup> In 1923 the *Daily Mail* reported the general ubiquity of the between-maid role, saying that it included 'all of the general servant class masquerading as parlour-maids, cooks, between-maids, or others of experience.'<sup>95</sup> The between-maid's 'masquerading' implies a lack of professionalism, even the likelihood that the lower class servants were hoodwinking their employer-betters. The very lowest of the maids, the between-maid was generally the youngest, and the most severely put-upon, of the servant household. In J M Barrie's *Admirable Crichton* (1914) the between-maid is given her alternative title, 'tweeny' and her status frankly stated:

A tweeny; that is to say, my lady, she is not at present, strictly speaking, anything; a between maid; she helps the vegetable maid.<sup>96</sup>

The tweeny is 'not... anything'. She is reduced to a status neither one thing nor the other, out-with the enduring orderliness of service, therefore lacking even in the identity conferred by a robust servant title. This projected idea, the 'between-maid' comparison, feeds in to the narrator's two-fold servant anxiety – this is firstly her worry that she is herself servant-like (and so of lower caste) and secondly her concern that she cannot manage the servants and is therefore unfit to

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<sup>94</sup> <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.stir.ac.uk/view/Entry/18398?redirectedFrom=between-maid#eid>

<sup>95</sup> *Daily Mail*, 25 January 1923, p 5. The newspaper was a frequent arbiter on the servant question.

<sup>96</sup> J. M. Barrie, *Admirable Crichton*, i. 53. (1914)

be a 'society' wife and mistress of a household.<sup>97</sup> Once Mrs Danvers leaves the room de Winter reiterates the assertion that his wife's behaviour with the broken valuable cupid ornament was inappropriate, saying she has acted: 'Just like a between-maid, as I said, and not the mistress of a house.'<sup>98</sup> Intriguingly, the mistress of the house then additionally debases herself, in offering up her own class nonconformity to her husband for his scrutiny:

'I am like a between-maid' I said, slowly, 'I know I am, in lots of ways. That's why I have so much in common with Clarice. We are on the same sort of footing. And that's why she likes me. I went and saw her mother the other day. And do you know what she said? I asked her if she thought Clarice was happy with us and she said, "Oh, yes, Mrs de Winter. Clarice seems quite happy. She says, 'It's not like being with a lady, Mum, it's like being with one of ourselves.'" Do you suppose she meant it as a compliment or not?'

'God knows,' said Maxim; 'remembering Clarice's mother, I should take it as a direct insult. Her cottage is generally a shambles and smells of boiled cabbage...'<sup>99</sup>

The narrator inappositely identifies herself with her maid, asserting that 'we are on the same sort of footing', even using the ill-chosen phrase that 'it's like being with one of ourselves'. But, although Maxim has taunted her with her 'between-maid' behaviour, he is not prepared seriously to have the lady of the house question her position in the patterns of privilege. Such a situation is untenable for the systems of heredity and advantage so fundamental to the family. He absolutely rejects her monologue by reducing the conversation to nonsense, prompting her into humour with his bathetic olfactory imagery of the smell of 'boiled cabbage'. Mr de Winter's dominance may not be challenged, and the narrator has to learn her lesson. She must recognise and assert the position in the hierarchy that her station now concedes to her, so that the correct domestic order can be reasserted following Rebecca's death.<sup>100</sup> To do so she needs to

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<sup>97</sup> See Ben Griffin, Lucy Delap, and Abigail Wills, *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>98</sup> du Maurier, *Rebecca*, p. 160.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>100</sup> This highlights something veering towards a disagreement with Alison Light's position, which attests that sexuality precludes the centrality of social mobility in the novel, saying: 'There is no straight-forward model for social mobility in the novel

overcome that troublesome middle class domestic anxiety persuasively posited by Nancy Armstrong – the fear that she could be replaced by her own servant.<sup>101</sup>

Trust is implicit in the relationships of master and servant in *The Death of the Heart*, although Matchett's fondness for the master is largely based on her trust in the mistress of the past. Matchett's commitment is described by Anna as being 'to the furniture',<sup>102</sup> however this also serves to emblemize the relationship between master and servant through the generations. The housekeeper's attentiveness to the objects that furnish the home of her employers is a requirement of her job; this is not the fetishisation of collections of objects found in other Bowen novels, for example, in Louie and Connie's newspaper hoarding or Stella's display of photographs in *The Heat of the Day* (1948). The old Mrs Quayne trusted Matchett alone with the furniture. Similarly Anna and Thomas put their trust in the housekeeper when they send her, as their delegate, to collect Portia. Matchett's genuine capitulation to the family Quayne, from one generation to the next, sees her rewarded with the responsibility of the task at the end of the novel.

In order for her to correctly assert her mistress-hood, the narrator of *Rebecca* initially must learn from the housekeeper that with proper management by the employer both trust and trespass will of necessity co-exist in the social contract between master and servant, and then in addition she must realise the need to distrust where necessary and apply discipline to acts of infringement. Mrs Danvers does not merely exceed her duties; she transgresses. The

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because what is central to it is the question of female sexual pleasure.' Light, 'Returning to Manderley', p. 21.

<sup>101</sup> Armstrong, *Love and Desire*.

<sup>102</sup> In conversation Portia asks Matchett: "The furniture would have missed you?" 'Furniture's knowing all right. Not much gets past the things in a room, I daresay, and chairs and tables don't go to the grave so soon." Maud Ellmann's chapter entitled 'Furniture: *The Death of the Heart* and *The Heat of the Day*' in *Shadow Across the Page* has already been alluded to: she describes 'hallucinatory properties' of furniture in Bowen, which I am suggesting to be less evident in this novel, where the furniture (and Matchett's relationship with it) is instead emblematic of the continuation of the servant question.

housekeeper betrays the reliance placed upon her by her superiors. Displaying the undergarments and hairbrushes of her former mistress to the new lady of the house suggests that an improper intimacy has existed between mistress and maid; the trusted has become the trespasser:

She looked beautiful in this velvet. Put it against your face. It's soft isn't it? You can feel it can't you? The scent is still fresh, isn't it? You can almost imagine she had only just taken it off. I would always know when she had been before me into a room. There would be a little whiff of her scent in the room. These are her underclothes, in this drawer.<sup>103</sup>

Hitchcock's 1940 movie text of *Rebecca* focuses on this scene, most notably on Mrs Danvers displaying Rebecca's fine, see-through black lacy underclothes. Intimacy, with its hinted sexual overtones, is insisted upon rather differently in this key scene of the novel, with Danvers' reference to the smell or scent of Rebecca. It is less the covert sexuality of the housekeeper that presents the greatest threat to the new mistress, but rather more the affront explicit in her encroachment upon the intimate things of the superior body, her intrusion upon the personal physical existence of the upper class.

The structured domestic establishment must be strong enough to discipline those who trespass against it, so that societal order may resume. As the novel progresses, the invasiveness of Mrs Danvers becomes more explicit, for rather than merely continuing to criticise her new mistress, Mrs Danvers moves to support the social upstart Favell in his charges against the master.<sup>104</sup> The result is a spectacle of social instability within the closed environment of the ancestral home: a suggestive and dangerous situation at a time when the uncertainty of approaching war threatened the enduring concept of the 'house' or 'home'. Mrs Danvers' dissatisfaction with the transformation of her situation is not tolerated. Servants are paid, so must put up or shut up, and hence the housekeeper receives her comeuppance. The

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<sup>103</sup> du Maurier, *Rebecca*, p. 191.

<sup>104</sup> From his accent to his drinking, everything about Favell points to his intention to be a social climber. The actions of de Winter, in concert with the judge, put him properly 'in his place'.



representatives of the professional classes join forces to signal their support of the aristocracy:<sup>105</sup> the judge and Rebecca's medical consultant agree that her death was all-but self-inflicted. The agents of privilege and heredity ensure that the menace of social instability is thwarted, as the primacy of the aristocracy is restored. In the process, however, the true moral principles of those in power have been exposed. The ethics of the aristocracy, with respect to justice and loyalty, have been exhibited, with de Winter confirmed to have murdered a philandering but terminally-ill wife. Stephen Greenblatt describes just such a revelatory process, which he believes is:

at its most intense at moments in which a comfortably established ideology confronts unusual circumstances, moments when the moral value of a particular form of power is not merely assumed but explained.<sup>106</sup>

The plot revelation in the final chapters of the novel ties in with this notion. De Winter's new wife must become complicit in his sinful act, having been passed the knowledge of Rebecca's murder – these would be for Greenblatt ideology's 'unusual circumstances'. As de Winter's wife the girl cannot testify against him, and must live with the secret. Meanwhile, Mrs Danvers' desertion of the home legitimises the domestically superior position of the mistress. The moral value, the necessitous continuation of hereditary hierarchy that is now wielded by both master and mistress de Winter has been 'not merely assumed but explained.'<sup>107</sup>

By the end of the novel the narrator has come into her mistresshood, and can invoke the dominance that has been granted to her through marriage to a man of a higher class, to assert herself as the new aristocracy. She can now behave in a manner obligatory for the lady of the house. Again the troublesome area of domestic service is conjured up to prove that this shift has taken place, with the mistress demonstrating her new servant-keeping manner by ordering the under-housemaid Maud to take away some dead flowers:

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<sup>105</sup> In this case, the law and medical profession.

<sup>106</sup> Greenblatt, pp. 27-28.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

'And the flowers are dead. Will you please take them away.'  
She looked nervous and apologetic. 'I'm very sorry, Madam,' She said. She went to the mantelpiece and took the vases.  
'Don't let it happen again,' I said.<sup>108</sup>

With the power of the housekeeper broken, the mistress is able at last to exercise the mandatory power afforded to her status. Tellingly, the narrator no longer exhibits any qualms over the wasteful behaviour of the Manderley dining room. She is now empowered to treat all things within her realm in the same manner; this includes both the opportunity to act belligerently towards the servants and to consume with profligacy. Finally, once her role in educating the new figure of familial influence, through the trust and trespass of the servant question, is over, Mrs Danvers is understood to have flown the house.<sup>109</sup>

The narrator has received a thorough education from her housekeeper, and the result of this is seen for one last time through a focus on the affiliation between mistress and servant. Mrs de Winter has a changed manner towards her staff. Here her status is expressed in terms of the dominance the narrator expects to wield in her future servant interactions:

With Mrs Danvers gone I should learn bit by bit to control the house. I would go and interview the cook in the kitchen. They would like me, respect me.<sup>110</sup>

The re-appropriation of power by the ruling class produces a refreshed household structure, based on amicable companionship and esteem.

Whilst the housekeeper of *Rebecca* trespasses in the domain of her employer, and then requires to be disciplined and ultimately ousted, by the powers that be, Bowen's housekeeper interlopes less

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<sup>108</sup> du Maurier, *Rebecca*, p. 324.

<sup>109</sup> The novel's bathetic end to the character of Danvers is completely re-imagined by Hitchcock in his 1940 Hollywood movie. Hitchcock has Danvers reduced to insanity, roaming through the bedrooms of the burning Manderley, consumed by the conflagration she is understood to have ignited. The political, historical (and geographical) contexts of the text had altered seismically between Cornwall/London in 1938 and Hollywood in 1940.

<sup>110</sup> du Maurier, *Rebecca*, p. 422.

overtly. Instead the trust that is placed in her seems well-placed, with the result that her employers overlook any misdemeanours she might have committed and she is permitted into their immediate circle of trust to work as their understudy. If Matchett had accepted Portia's desire to have her as a mother figure, this might have proved a more serious encroachment. However Matchett's infringement has been known and sanctioned by her employers, for Anna has realised that the housekeeper and Portia speak together, about her and about 'the past'. This notion that those of superior status distinguish and consent to the bad behaviour of their subordinates, resulting in the strengthening of the rule of authority in the longer term, is one suggested in Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque,<sup>111</sup> which is further taken up by Stephen Greenblatt in his analysis of Henry V's use of spectacle to control his subjects.<sup>112</sup> Something very similar seems to be at play in the Quayne household. The housekeeper is permitted her moment of misbehaviour, for the longer term benefit of household equanimity. Matchett withdraws at the point of trespass – her disobedience is non-confrontational. Her disaffection is only with the temporary holder of privilege – Anna – and not with authority *per se*. Matchett has no need to educate her mistress, her duty is to support heredity, ensuring the safety of the child of the house. It is Anna who asserts the mistress hood of young Portia to Matchett – with her suggestion that Portia will eat alongside her and Thomas, taking her rightful place beside the servant-keepers:

'Oh, then Miss Portia is to dine downstairs?'<sup>113</sup>

'Surely. She's got to learn to. Besides, where else could she eat?'<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984).

<sup>112</sup> Greenblatt, pp. 27-28.

<sup>113</sup> Note that in this instance the family eat 'downstairs' whilst Matchett, and formerly Portia, might eat upstairs in their respective rooms, set aside from the formality of the public eating spaces of the Quaynes. A class or status distinction is still implicit here, then, between upstairs and downstairs, although it is operating in the opposite direction.

<sup>114</sup> Bowen, *The Death of the Heart*, p. 41.

Matchett shows surprise, but acceptance of this alteration to arrangements, the assertiveness of the new mistress and the implication that the young Portia will 'learn' her correct position alongside the older members of the employing family. So, in contrast to Mrs Danvers in *Rebecca*, in Bowen's novel the housekeeper is reliable and knows and enjoys 'her place'.

What have these novels shown us about imaginative literary representations of the Housekeeper and what are the ramifications of this for our understanding of the wider servant question? Ultimately I contend that these depictions of the Housekeeper work to maintain the conditions of the present, to which all parties have become accustomed: a vested interest for both the employer and employee. However, whether by facilitating and acting as the substitute for her master, or in an educative and elucidatory function, each housekeeper capitulates to capital. Whilst the novels employ the servant question as a subtext, which can then be read to reveal ideology favouring conformity, Bowen's housekeeper is a character of significant complexity. Trusted and led by Anna to believe that she is trespassing, Matchett is on one hand a mistress manqué, operating to maintain hierarchy and support the Quayne family through generational change, whilst her position also enables her to operate as a surrogate for her employer when she is charged to do so. Although she disapproves of the latest incarnation of aristocracy, her role is to sustain it into the future. Whilst Matchett's role is facilitative, Mrs Danvers' is educative. Du Maurier's housekeeper teaches her new mistress the requirements of her role, until the point when the balance of domestic control begins to tip in preference of Mrs de Winter. As propriety is re-established, her educative function fulfilled, the same disputatious qualities that she used to enlighten the girl become untenably mutinous and she is overwhelmed by her transgressions against the servant-master dyad. In contrast to Matchett, Mrs Danvers is trusted and also trespasses, which cannot be permitted.

The influence that the housekeeper represents – that of privilege and heredity, is under siege. Often positioned on the stairs, symbolically between those upstairs and those below, the housekeeper is herself an authority figure challenged by the developments in the structure that she serves and the one that she supervises. Although she must wield the power of capital, she remains a servant rather than an owner of that wealth. What might be the ramifications of these representations; what can be extrapolated from them? In these literary examples it is the servant who works to preserve the order of the household. Reading them in the light of the servant question encourages us to see them standing up against the overwhelming cultural narrative of the 1930s, for they are far from revolutionary.

### Chapter Three: The Nanny – serving on

As we saw in chapter one, Mansfield, Bowen and Panter-Downes portray the lady's maid as a figure resistant to social change and one indifferent or even occasionally hostile to the emancipatory rhetoric of class-based political discourse in this period. In the following discussion, I extend this argument to the figure of the nanny as she features in two key novels, Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) and Elizabeth Taylor's *Palladian* (1946). Like the lady's maid, the nanny functions as a locus of resistance within a broader context of cultural and ideological change, and, glorified and demonized,<sup>1</sup> again serves to complicate the narrative of transformation in the social contract that, as I suggested in the introductory chapter, remains dominant in literary histories of the 1930s and 1940s. Unlike the lady's maid, however, the nannies of Waugh and Taylor serve an intricate double function. While they, too, confront the changing social and political reality through complex forms of denial, disavowal, and even defence of the continuation of the established domestic systems that shore up class, they do so in ways that are also subtly subversive of the new changing arrangements upstairs and downstairs that were now seeking dominion over the household. Swept by forces of destruction beyond their reckoning, they continue to inhabit the ruins, constructing roles and identities for themselves that, while different from those of old, serve to protect and perpetuate class and, by extension, familial relationships and structures, even as these begin to disintegrate.

This double function can be seen clearly in Waugh's Nanny Hawkins who, while embodying the virtues and values associated with the role of the nanny to the great house, also serves a polemical

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<sup>1</sup> See Katherine Holden, *Nanny Knows Best: The History of the British Nanny* (Stroud: The History Press, 2013). Holden's book includes some interesting insights, but these are mediated through a highly autobiographical lens.

function in the novel by casting doubt on the validity of Ryder as a narrator and the reliability of his narrative. Amidst the flux of war Nanny Hawkins remains a constant, providing witness to Ryder's return to a Brideshead transformed. Nanny perches sublime in the attic quarters that once made up the nursery, attended to by servants, chargeless now but comfortably carefree, her domestic inversion complete. The sharpness of the contrast between Nanny Hawkins' decades of cumulative intimacy totted up in the service of the Flytes, and Ryder's merely peripheral acquaintance with the family, ultimately illuminates the flimsiness of his narrative, and threatens the dominance of his perspective.

We can see this contrast in an early scene of the novel, where Sebastian employs his Nanny to baffle Ryder's expectations:

'Don't worry,' [Sebastian] continued, 'they're all away. You won't have to meet them.'

'But I should like to.'

'Well you can't. They're in London.'

We drove round the front into a side court – 'Everything's shut up. We'd better go in this way' – and entered through the fortress-like, stone-flagged, stone-vaulted passages of the servants' quarters – 'I want you to meet Nanny Hawkins. That's what we've come for.'<sup>2</sup>

A valorized Nanny Hawkins functions to confound the assumptions Sebastian recognizes in his friend. This description, of the men's use of the wrong entrance, clarifies the patterns of aristocratic behaviour that the snobbish Charles expects of young Flyte. Whilst acceptable for servants, through Ryder's class-conscious eyes this entrance becomes forbiddingly 'stone' and 'fortress-like' for the visitors. Nanny's dominance over the Flyte family is problematised for Charles as narrator, because in overtly preferring his relationship with his Nanny over his relationship with his family, Sebastian indicates the double-function of the servant. Noting this singular affiliation with Nanny, his father's mistress Cara attests that 'Sebastian is in love with his own childhood';<sup>3</sup> however, this pointedly simplifies Sebastian's

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<sup>2</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

behaviour towards Nanny Hawkins. Operating as custodian of the past and site of memory for the Flytes, Nanny's primacy simultaneously describes a possible future in which servants are no longer in thrall to the structures of servitude. Dual functions of denial and defence with respect to maintaining the domestic establishment are initiated from the servant's first appearance in the novel. In the following example, the initial sentence describing her outward appearance and physical position illustrates the predominance of the current domestic state of affairs whilst implying her denial, whilst the second sentence intimates her disavowal:

Sebastian's nanny was seated at the open window; the fountain lay before her, the lakes, the temple, and, far away, on the last spur, a glittering obelisk; her hands lay open in her lap and, loosely between them, a rosary; she was fast asleep. Long hours of work in her youth, authority in middle life, repose and security in her age, had set their stamp on her lined and serene face.<sup>4</sup>

Her position beside the window, looking out upon the sculpted, majestic grounds of Brideshead, is one of privilege. Aristocratic spectacle, crafted for richness and variety, lies within reach through an 'open window', but the transience of the vista is implicit, for an open window may be closed and what glistens in the sunlight fades with evening. Guardian of the past, her second but crucial position as primary keeper of the family's religious observance is made blatant in the rosary she holds. Potent imagery of the continuation of the establishment lies before her, and in her hands. But being pictured 'fast asleep' troublingly indicates a dissociative denial of her surroundings. In contrast the second sentence in this passage draws attention to the job role of the Nanny:

Long hours of work in her youth, authority in middle life, repose and security in her age, had set their stamp on her lined and serene face.

The centrality of her employment is reinforced, making use of the clausal structure strategy of hypozeuxis, which repetitiously emphasises the patriarchal involvement of the Flytes through three

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 36-7.



eras of her working life. As the three clauses progress, 'work' becomes 'authority' and finally 'repose and security' – all three aspects of her daily life are vouchsafed by her employer, whilst the stylistic technique confers their inevitable sequentiality. Nanny Hawkins is disempowered, for her personal narrative is dictated by her employer. Denied the responsibility for crafting her own tale, the implication for the servant is that of disavowal. Rather than progressing towards old age as an emancipated individual, Nanny remains in thrall to the rigid structure in which her life has been lived. Her charges have moved on, she is 'freed' from 'work', but transformation is out of the question: her life is not her own.

Although this longevity as the primary child-care-giver in the household of her employer helps to establish her as a supporter of the moral standing of the family, Nanny Hawkins subversively undermines the Flytes' claim to moral licence. It is learned that Sebastian is not the only one of her former charges to put Nanny on a pedestal. His sister, Julia, sees in Nanny the moral compass she finds lacking in other aspects of her life. Just as Sebastian finds he must tell Nanny the truth that cannot be communicated to the rest of the family; she asks him 'Now what's the news? Are you studying hard at your books?' to which he responds 'Not very, I'm afraid, Nanny.'<sup>5</sup>

So Julia looks to Nanny for honesty, explicit in the explanation given to Ryder that Nanny has recounted the story of his visit with Sebastian:

'Thanks. You've been here before. Nanny reported it. We both thought it very odd of you not to stay to tea with me.'<sup>6</sup>

The moral grip that Nanny Hawkins exerts on Julia is implicit at this point in the novel, when at the end of the evening Julia leaves to go and play cards with her, referring to a promise to Nanny that may not be broken, saying 'I promised Nanny a last game of halma.'<sup>7</sup> But, by

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

the close of Ryder's narrative it has been revealed that Julia's perception of Nanny's moral framework is not wholeheartedly positive:

'I've been punished for marrying Rex. You see, I can't get all that sort of thing out of my mind, quite – Death, Judgement, Heaven, Hell, Nanny Hawkins, and the catechism. It becomes part of oneself, if they give it early enough.'<sup>8</sup>

For both Sebastian and Julia, Nanny's influence is indisputable. Because she has been presented as resolutely catholic, so influential on the young Flytes, the subversive counterpoint of her inaction is discordant with our notion of 'nanny'. Waugh describes 'Nanny stitching complacently in the corner', an image which specifically recalls a description in his 1934 novel *A Handful of Dust* in which a nanny figure regulates morally the behaviour of the main characters.<sup>9</sup> In Waugh's 'comic' novel the nanny's unsympathetic charge dies, whilst meanwhile 'Nanny sat at a distance, crocheting, on her camp stool; out of earshot.'<sup>10</sup> Passive subversion, such as opting not to comment, or taking up a position of neutrality, negates the protection offered by her role: in failing to intervene Waugh's Nanny Hawkins leaves the Flytes to cope with the resultant fallout of their misbehaviour. Whilst critics such as Rosemary Johnson might construe Nanny's non-intervention to be the influence of one of the actants in Waugh's depiction of a 'Fall' after the moment of modernism,<sup>11</sup> this study chooses instead to focus on Nanny's servant role, and the way in which she does, or in this case does not, take up and act on her prescribed responsibilities. For here Waugh depicts a servant who is carelessly, even dangerously, uninvolved with the present:

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>9</sup> Nancy Mitford's 1945 novel, *The Pursuit of Love* touches on this perception – that the upper class must be ethically educated by their servants. Although she never makes an appearance as a character, but is only present in the dialogue of her former charges, it is implied that the now-grown Radlett children continue to be kept in check morally by their former nanny.

<sup>10</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *A Handful of Dust* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> Rosemary C. Johnson, 'Human Tragedy, Divine Comedy: The Painfulness of Conversion in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*.' *Renascence*, 64, 2 (2012), pp. 161-75.

Nanny did not particularly wish to be talked to; she liked visitors best when they paid no attention to her and let her knit away, and watch their faces and think of them as she has known them as small children; their present goings-on did not signify much beside those early illnesses and crimes.<sup>12</sup>

Handiwork – this time knitting – serves once more as a barrier erected mutinously between the inner private and outer public worlds she inhabits.<sup>13</sup> With the appearance of being passively occupied, the character's seditious inactivity indirectly exacerbates the family's problems. For example, in the course of the narrative Sebastian becomes reliant upon on Nanny's discreet, neutral non-intervention, offering the suggestion that he has 'been with Nanny' as a cover for his secret drinking, and also retreating to her 'nursery' rooms to avoid the inevitable domestic censure of his alcoholic dissipation, encouraging Charles to 'come and see Nanny' rather than endure an excruciating drawing room gathering. Non-involvement is subversive of the evolving forms of domestic structure, with the inference that she has retreated from a position of emotional concern for the Flytes. Distanced from her former charges, 'their present goings-on did not signify much beside those early illnesses and crimes'. However, her 'non-involvement' remains underpinned by continuing affection for the past, because the servant seeks simultaneously to perpetuate and protect the structures of household and class.

Nanny, engaged in the passive domestic activity of sewing, is revealed to be a significant image for Julia, who describes her in her reminiscences with Charles as a vision from a former age, 'A word from so long ago, from Nanny Hawkins stitching by the hearth.'<sup>14</sup> Nanny Hawkins *in situ* operates as Julia's sentimental 'site of

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<sup>12</sup> Waugh, *Brideshead*, p. 146.

<sup>13</sup> In her groundbreaking treatise *The Subversive Stitch* Roszika Parker introduces and expands on the notion that embroidery, whilst an occupation that served to maintain female submission and emblematic of homely domesticity, simultaneously offered women a powerful means of unification and dissent. Handiwork is purported to be a 'Naturally revolutionary act'. See Roszika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: The Women's Press, 1984).

<sup>14</sup> Waugh, *Brideshead*, p. 274.

memory’;<sup>15</sup> however, this is not straightforward. Certainly Nanny offers ‘comfort and reassurance’,<sup>16</sup> with reminiscences of the carefree simplicity of Julia’s childhood, simultaneously connoting safety, security, and continuation, all of which build upon a figure recognizable from contemporaneous socio-historical evidence,<sup>17</sup> supportive of the contention that this Nanny operates to conserve the authoritarian regime of her employers. But, tellingly depicted through the objects with which she surrounds herself, Nanny’s complex empowerment is derived from a lifetime’s entanglement with the history of the Flytes. For this servant, objects that are emblematic of previous times are of greater consequence than the attachments of the present. Charles describes his first experience of her room, detailing the material quality of each of the childish gifts presented by family members to their nanny down the years. The preservation and safeguarding of these presents is emphasized by their display, ‘laid out on the top of a chest of drawers and carefully dusted.’<sup>18</sup> Tokens, of the kind that might be treasured by a parent as *aides memoires*, are transformed into coinage representative of the social contract between servant and mistress, firstly forming material evidence of her household status and secondly demonstrating her capacity to keep safe the relics of a particular, now socially threatened, past. In one instance, the collection of a new souvenir demonstrates that Nanny acts beyond her remit, when Sebastian urges Charles to gift the picture he paints of the view at Brideshead to Nanny rather than his

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<sup>15</sup> Historian Pierre Nora coined this term, which he used to describe the use of cultural memories to reconstruct valuable history regarding, for example, genocide victims of the Second World War. The idea has been maintained in historical analysis, with the recent re-issue of Jay Winter’s *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). The term was adopted for use in the critical literary environment by American novelist Toni Morrison, whose 1984 essay investigates the use of this term to describe and debate the use of memoir to form cultural memories, in particular to counter marginalisation. See Toni Morrison, ‘Memory, Creation and Writing’ *Thought*, 59, 4 (1984), pp. 385-390.

<sup>16</sup> Valerie Kennedy, ‘Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited*: Paradise Lost or Paradise Regained?’, *ARIEL*, 21, 1, January, 1990, pp. 23-39, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972)

<sup>18</sup> Waugh, *Brideshead*, p. 37.

mother.<sup>19</sup> Counter-intuitively, elevating the servant above her mistress as this example illustrates, Nanny's function in preserving and protecting the established order usurps what ought to be a role of the aristocracy.

Waugh's focus upon the material possessions encircling Nanny recurs notably towards the end of the novel, in a passage describing Ryder's return to Brideshead with Julia, when meeting her sister Cordelia at the house the three characters venture upstairs to the nurseries:

Then she said: 'Is it too late to see nanny?'

'No, she sits up to all hours and listens to the wireless.'

We went up, all three together, to the old nursery. Julia and I always spent part of our day there. Nanny Hawkins and my father were the two people who seemed impervious to change, neither an hour older than when I first knew them. A wireless set had been added to Nanny Hawkins' small assembly of pleasures – the rosary, the Peerage with its neat brown-paper wrapping protecting the red and gold covers, the photographs, and holiday souvenirs – on her table.<sup>20</sup>

Despite Ryder's assertion that Nanny is 'impervious to change', this is followed quickly by the mention of a radio. The 'wireless' is a technology of connective modernity that ironically offers a disconnect from the source of language production; this affords the servant the opportunity to 'sit up to all hours', in thrall to the 'influencing machine'<sup>21</sup> listening 'disconnectedly' to world events rather than contemplating the affairs of the family. Questioning the veracity of Ryder's narrative, we learn that having become technologized Nanny is *not* 'impervious to change' after all. Alongside this means of mass communion and populist distraction sit three familiar motifs. The rosary, demonstrating the continual and continuing presence of Catholicism is emphasized by its primacy in the list.<sup>22</sup> Of greater

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 286-7.

<sup>21</sup> Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 193.

<sup>22</sup> Waugh's conversion to Catholicism, and its representation in the novel, has been the subject of critical focus. Littlewood infers the religious significance of Nanny's relics, and emphasises this reading. See Ian Littlewood, *The Writings of Evelyn Waugh* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

significance for the focus of this study are the other two items in the list, and their relative positioning. First of these is the Peerage: physical, literal protection of the aristocracy is emphasised in Nanny Hawkins' treatment of Debrett's, for she keeps this 'Peerage with its neat brown-paper wrapping protecting the red and gold covers'.<sup>23</sup> The 'photographs, and holiday souvenirs' embody a second motif representing the family and their history. Emblematising the central concerns of the novel in Nanny's possession, the book – representative of the structure and order of society – is shielded by its wrappers from the taint of the items juxtaposed – religion (the rosary) on the one side, and changeable family relationships and human frailty (photographs and souvenirs) on the other. The ultimate organisation of the class system and the primacy of the aristocracy are symbolically separated/protected from the influence of religion and family/history – the three central themes of the novel are thereby put into order with respect to one another (religion, then aristocracy, then family/past). Posited within Nanny Hawkins' realm, she preserves and maintains them in their requisite sequence. Ian Littlewood scrutinises the juxtaposition of the nursery and religion and the security offered by each. Recognising something of Nanny Hawkins' sentimental centrality, he offers up the idea that 'Nannies... offer an unchanging point of reference in a changing world',<sup>24</sup> but finally places religion in the ascendancy as he believes that this, rather than the nursery, meets the author's nostalgic requirements, and opines that Waugh wishes 'not to indulge nostalgia but to transcend it'.<sup>25</sup> My contention, however, is that in putting the servant question at the heart of the argument, exposing both the assertion and denial of household order and class at a time when a new regime is

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<sup>23</sup> Waugh, *Brideshead*, p. 287.

<sup>24</sup> See Littlewood, p. 162.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

manifesting, enables a new reading in which religion and nostalgia are secondary.<sup>26</sup>

Waugh's *Nanny Hawkins* works in a complex manner to defend and protect the local domestic establishment during the flux of the period when the Servant Question was at its most querulous: in doing so she contrives to reinvent her role. A class-crossing, aggrandizing act of self-fashioning is exemplified in her final appearance in the novel, when she is seen aping the behaviour of her employers. Mimicry is a recurrent figure in this thesis, featuring in addition with Taylor's Nanny in *Palladian*, and apparent in the servants' behaviour at their final, carnivalesque meal in Henry Green's *Loving*.<sup>27</sup> Charles takes a cup of tea to the nursery. Initially Nanny hesitates to remember him; fragility has put paid to assertive needle-working, although she enthuses afresh given the opportunity to impart recent family news. But - her feebleness has necessitated a reversal. Now the nanny is served by 'Effie, who does for me.'<sup>28</sup> Notionally, a servant as the mistress of another servant is unsurprising, reflecting the supportive system of rank below stairs. Social historians describe lady's maids making use of lesser maids who saw to their needs.<sup>29</sup> However, servant interrelationships are not underpinned by the principles of exchange, as all parties remain in their master or mistress's employment, therefore any pretension towards mistress-like behaviour rests there: with pretense. Alternatively, Nanny's dependence can be interpreted simply as the needs of an old lady, a fictive relative, entitled to linger over the remaining bones as rank and privilege leave the party. Finally, she has created a new role that simultaneously upends *and* employs the tenets of the class system of which she has such intimate knowledge. The symptoms of helplessness render servant and aristocrat homologous. Embracing

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<sup>26</sup> John Su notes that Waugh scholars 'have been at pains to deny the nostalgia'. See John Su, *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 122.

<sup>27</sup> See the manservant chapter.

<sup>28</sup> Waugh, *Brideshead*. p. 329.

<sup>29</sup> Lethbridge, *Servants*.

domestic ordering by virtue of status, but denying difference, Nanny Hawkins reconfigures her self-schema.

Whilst Nanny's cost to the Flytes is never alluded to, the increasing financial precariousness of the family is a source of worry for both Julia and Lady Cordelia towards the end of the novel. The situation for the contemporary nanny in the marketplace was a state of flux, with the cost of the nanny rising steadily in the interwar years, creating an additional strain on the domestic arrangements of wealthy servant-keeping families. Social historian John Stevenson describes the financial relationship between supply and demand for childcare staff at that time.

One aspect of the 'servant problem' was that plentiful, *cheap* domestic help to rear and tend for children was becoming difficult to obtain. Living-in nannies, nursemaids and full time domestic help were becoming both scarcer and more expensive. The children of an upper-middle class academic family like that recalled in Carole Iman's *An Oxford Childhood* were reared almost exclusively by a 'Nana' who in 1914 could be paid anything between £20 and £50 a year. By 1939 a good nanny might cost £100 in wages as well as 'living-in' expenses.<sup>30</sup>

Stevenson goes on to assert that this supply issue – the difficulty of 'obtaining domestic help in the nursery' – would be a driver in the limitation of family size in the years immediately before the Second World War.<sup>31</sup> Taking into account this assertion, that the availability of childcare was an influence in population control, the importance of the childcare element of the servant problem – the nanny question – is demographically as well as culturally vital. Children of the wealthy who did not remain at home, cosseted by an increasingly costly in-house nanny, might find themselves instead in the care of nanny in another environment: that of the public school. The nanny of Angela Thirkell's 1951 public school novel *Summer Half* is seen both to have reinvented herself in her retirement *and* to remain within the ambit of her former role. Whilst centring on the interaction and transformation of both staff and students during a single summer term at the prestigious public school, Southbridge, the novel also

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<sup>30</sup> John Stevenson, *The Penguin Social History of Britain: 1914-1945* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 158.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.



features the trope of the 'return to the nanny' of a group of nostalgic adults.<sup>32</sup> Several sixth formers from the older school, about to embark on lives out-with the cosy environment, actively seek out the former school nanny Mrs Twicker, whom they encounter at her cottage home, at the margins of the school estate, comfortable in retirement with her husband the school gardener. Through the welcome Mrs Twicker provides, Thirkell describes the servant's affiliations with the ruling class:

Mrs Twicker had the old Nanny's passion for gentry children, and welcomed them with as much joy as if they had once been babies in her charge. Of her own children, who were all out in the world, she never had thought much, owing to their parentage, though she had treated them with the impartial kindness due from the upper classes to the lower.<sup>33</sup>

The nanny, in preferring the 'gentry' to her own children, asserts and defends the primacy of the aristocracy, and goes on to complicate her class position by suggesting that her biological children are of a lower status than she is herself. Her self-elevation has been achieved through servitude. The aristocratic student youths look for Mrs Twicker to fulfill their physical and emotional requirements once again. The emotional reassurance and physical sustenance that only the unquestioning, subservient working class can offer is redolent of middle class nostalgia, a yearning for the predictable comfort of a recognizable structure of rank for these representatives of the future establishment as they rest briefly on the cusp of adulthood in a changed and changing world. In both examples – Nanny Hawkins in *Brideshead Revisited* and Mrs Twicker in *Summer Half* – the nanny is acquiescent, responding in the required manner to the requests of her former charges. On one hand these representations seem to ascribe to

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<sup>32</sup> Critic Nicola Humble posits Thirkell as a novelist whose work can be considered as exemplifying the feminine middlebrow. This supports the contention that the relationship between the aristocracy, the middle class and the servant were of cultural interest at the time, specifically to the literature written and read by the middle class. See Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*. Tellingly Alice Ferrebe sums up the persuasive position of a group of critics, to conjecture the 'feminine middlebrow as politically animated and contextually revealing'. See Alice Ferrebe, 'Elizabeth Taylor's Uses of Romance: Feminist Feeling in 1950s English Fiction', *Literature & History*, 19, 1 (2010), pp. 50-64.

<sup>33</sup> Angela Thirkell, *Summer Half* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951), p. 189.

the expectation that the nanny figure is for the middle class a metaphorical representation of stability, replete with nostalgia.<sup>34</sup> But on the other hand, the nannies that feature are no longer physically providing care for their charges. They have moved on. In this sense they remain a nanny in name only, and specifically to those who *previously* saw them as a nanny. These representations are of nannies who have ceased to be 'merely' servants, moving forward to lead lives no longer governed by the needs of their charges. Nanny Hawkins lives in her own space at Brideshead, where she is now the last remaining occupant, served in her turn by the young domestic help Effie. Thirkell's former school Nanny lives out-with the school, having retired from her role; she now elects for involvement with the boys on her home turf. In this aspect of the representations, even whilst ensuring 'the hegemonic authority of the cultural values of the upper-middle class' both Waugh and Thirkell's nanny figures contradict and undermine expectations, offering re-invention.<sup>35</sup> This inflection points to a new interpretation born of literary autonomy that critiques the ideological basis of both works.<sup>36</sup> This interpretation – that the nanny can reinvent herself – suggests that in the future it will be possible for a degree of independence for the working class to be carved out, in new structures that could be chosen by, rather than enforced upon, the worker. This stance does rather elide the continuing presence of the servant, even in retirement, in the orbit of the employer; the true flimsiness of this optimistic position will become fully apparent in light of the nanny representation in the forthcoming analysis.

Published in 1946, Taylor's *Palladian* features a nanny who is problematic and antagonistic to the domestic order, her rejection of

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<sup>34</sup> 'Middlebrow literary representations largely support the status quo, according to Nicola Humble, who asserts that such a text speaks directly to the preoccupations of its intended consumers and is thus heavily inflected with their discomfort about class identity.' See Humble, 'Sitting forward or sitting back', p. 44. Elizabeth Maslen also argues that Thirkell's stance is 'reactionary', see Maslen, 'Women Writers in World War II', pp. 625-635.

<sup>35</sup> Humble, 'Sitting forward or sitting back', p. 45.

<sup>36</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 98.

the forces of change being played out through the operation of the servant question. Whereas Waugh's *Nanny Hawkins* operated passively, Taylor's *Nanny* is recalcitrant in her opposition to the changes that the household champions. The novel is seen as a critique of the divide between high and low by critic Clare Hanson.<sup>37</sup> Employing nostalgia subversively in her relationship with her former charge, as a weapon that mitigates against the forces of change, Taylor's elderly *Nanny* furthermore denies and rejects the emerging household's efforts towards domestic modernisation. *Nanny* was embedded in the structure of the household, an established servant who was simultaneously 'part of the family' (fictive kin); her time was spent almost exclusively in the company of her employers, with responsibility for their most precious possessions – their heirs. Consequently the changing cultural and social context of the developing servant question during the 1940s accentuated her difference from her fellow servants. Physically older, she was precluded from the emancipating wartime activity that drew so many maids from country to city and from employer's hearth to factory workbench. Whilst we might hope that a *nanny* could find the impetus to embrace the changing environment of the mid-twentieth century, we might easily intuit instead a gently capitulating placable soul, taking pleasure in pleasing master and mistress. But Taylor's *Nanny* belies such easy categorization. She is a discomfiting locus of resistance within the broader context of cultural and ideological change, serving to complicate the popular narrative of transformation in the social contract.

The novel is set in a large house in an English country village, sheltering a complex, problematic family reaching the limit of their sometime aristocratic tenure. Into this household the newly bereaved young Cassandra Dashwood is thrust, ostensibly to act as governess for the precocious young daughter of the master of the household. The

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<sup>37</sup> Clare Hanson, *Hysterical Fictions: The 'Woman's Novel' in the Twentieth Century* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 75-9.

master and his daughter – and effectively the household – are similarly bereaved; the lively, idealised wife and mother are preserved in the cherished memories and totems that remain. This atmosphere of bewildered grief, a focus on the emotional anomie of those left behind, permeates the novel. It might be assumed that the nanny will counter these concerns through a representation of nostalgia and stability. But, undermining expectations, Nanny operates instead to dispute and disable the forces of transformation, crafting a new persona that may or may not carry her on into the forthcoming era of adjustment. Ultimately, as I will argue, this contradiction sheds light on the historical operation of ideology, which is undermined by these literary imaginings of the servant question in that their emphasis is counter-intuitive – the nanny works disruptively to disable and disavow change.

Taylor's servant questioning extends beyond the obvious concern regarding the changing nature of working class employment in the middle decade of the twentieth century; her servant is constrained by a new diversification of the 'family'. Supplanting the dead mother, Nanny assumes 'maternal' qualities and responsibilities whilst remaining under the auspices of the child's 'real' parent;<sup>38</sup> the guilt of the father-employer regarding his own 'abandonment' of his child is thereby assuaged.<sup>39</sup> In this way, the employing class are able to subsume the potential inadequacies of their own parenting into the socially invisible, servant supported underbelly of the family, as guardianship has been transfigured by transaction. Moreover, as that mothering role subsists elsewhere than with the mother, manifesting as a figure that is purchased, objectified and commercialized, there is

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<sup>38</sup> Contextually, alongside the power of paternalism in the servant/master household, the nanny is a literal reminder of the incompetence of the servant-keepers with respect to their ability to care for their own children. Gathorne-Hardy describes how historically it was accepted that children might be 'handed over' to nanny, and emerge from the nursery by prearrangement for staged meetings with their parents. See Gathorne-Hardy.

<sup>39</sup> This topic is investigated at some length, although largely from a US perspective, in Cameron Lynne Macdonald's *Shadow Mothers: Nannies, Au Pairs, and the Micropolitics of Mothering* (Berkeley and LA: University of California Press, 2010).

a resultant overwhelming emphasis on the triumphant ordered webs of domestic paternalism.<sup>40</sup> Domestic strength rests with the male head of the household in possession of the exchange capital, with concomitant responsibility for the act of purchasing 'mothering' for his children.<sup>41</sup> The female 'mothering' role is consequently diminished by its propensity for private commodification. Divisions between private (domestic) and public (work) were a gendered aspect of the power dynamic perpetuated by the structures of the household and society through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>42</sup> Her affection and allegiance bought, the nanny is subsumed into a fictive familial relationship with the household in which she serves.<sup>43</sup> In socio-economic terms the specific relationship with children and their nannies 'established a very different emotional register from that of other kinds of domestic work'.<sup>44</sup> This fictive familial relationship is both disadvantageous and advantageous for both parties – for the nanny and for her employing family.<sup>45</sup> But - in Taylor's novel the family is challenged by change: the solitary mother-replacement status enjoyed by Nanny is threatened in the course of the novel, with the announcement of a mother-to-be (Aunt Margaret) and in the final chapters a wife-to-be (Cassandra) destined to take up their respective positions somewhere beyond the end of the novel, potentially forcing Nanny's redundancy.

The double function of Taylor's Nanny is to defend and deny the establishment that created and sustains her, and to support and repudiate the continuation of harmony in local domestic affairs. Similarly to Waugh's character, Nanny has taken on the values of the

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<sup>40</sup> This condition can be argued to persist in modern Britain. In their 1994 work Nicky Gregson and Michelle Lowe examine the modern situation of the nanny and the socio-economic reasons behind the enduring need for the role. See Nicky Gregson, and Michelle Lowe, *Servicing the Middle Classes: Class, Gender and Waged Domestic Work in Contemporary Britain* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>42</sup> Griffin et al., p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Fictive kinship as a sociological concept was first posited by M. B. Sussman in 1976.

<sup>44</sup> Delap, *Knowing their Place*, p. 109.

<sup>45</sup> The notion of the fictive familial relationship with respect to care givers is researched in a modern setting by Tracy Karner, 'Professional Caring: Homecare Workers as Fictive Kin' *Journal of Aging Studies*, 12, 1 (1998), pp. 69-83.

employer class,<sup>46</sup> implying that intimacy encourages the imitation of social mores, a recurring theme in this analysis. This imitative and capitulating Nanny is conflated with her alternative foregrounded presence as a transgressive figure, for instance when she continuously challenges the easy nostalgia that others desire her to provide. This can be seen in the reader's first glimpse of her, mediated through the cynical lens of Cousin Margaret, who warns Cassandra: 'If you discover anything muttering in dark corners, it is Nanny and you must not mind her.'<sup>47</sup> Neither Nanny's behaviour nor her location can be predicted: being 'anything' her nature is itself suspect, unknown and Other; the location of the 'dark corners' is liminal, marginal and potentially evil. Furthermore, 'muttering' is ambiguous – Nanny's spoken voice is lowered, she knowingly subdues her voice to maintain harmony in her immediate environment. Yet, simultaneously 'muttering' implies discontent, the inability to remain silent, and suggests she wishes to voice her concerns, however unpalatable she knows they may prove to the family. Late in the novel Nanny ministers to the adult Tom, as he interrupts her mid-task, and her dissent is similarly described as 'murmuring and cursing'.<sup>48</sup> Her ensuing care for Tom, treating him as an adult child, gives him cause to question:

"Oh Nanny, don't act so silly." 'Is she in her second childhood?' he wondered. 'Or does she think I am in mine?'<sup>49</sup>

This particular nanny is able to treat the adults, for whom she cared as children, perpetually as the children they once were. Nanny controls the aberrant, alcoholic Tom through infantilisation.<sup>50</sup> In

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<sup>46</sup> Horn identifies a closeness between employer and employee, acknowledging that 'most nannies had close personal relations with their employers and with the children for whom they were responsible. ...They were also anxious to identify with the social values of the class they served. Horn, p. 64.

<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Taylor, *Palladian* (London: Virago Press, 2011), p. 19.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>50</sup> Ann Summers suggests that control is maintained over *servants* through this mechanism – i.e. infantilisation, attesting that 'those in authority tend to conceptualise their subordinates as more childlike than themselves.' See Summers.

addition, she keeps his secrets. Nanny's possession of knowledge about the family, repressed memories of hurtful truths, empowers her: she employs nostalgia antagonistically so as to disrupt the family equilibrium. This is demonstrated early in the novel through her frank, realistic descriptions of her now dead mistress. She willingly passes on destructive factual descriptions to the young daughter of the house, who upon finding that other household members are reticent to share their memories of her mother, turns to the brusque honesty of Nanny for answers:

"Did my mother dance?" Sophy, entranced, watched the locked, sauntering figures.

"Dance? She danced and led all of us a dance."

"In what way?"

"Oh, what I was saying over the ribbons and all the ironing, and losing everything as soon as she so much as laid it down. 'Nanny, I've lost me sapphire ring.' 'There it is,' I'd say, 'staring you in the face as bold as brass.' Plenty of servants in the house then to run about at her beck and call. Not a lot of charwomen." She stirred her tea scornfully. "Yes, helpless as a babe new born she was."

There was no question of her speaking of the dead with disrespect. She knew well enough ladies ought to be like that...<sup>51</sup>

Sophy receives a truthful answer to her question. Nanny's honesty contrasts with the 'deception and self-deception' that Niamh Baker recognises to be thematic concerns of Taylor, and suggests pervade this novel.<sup>52</sup> Baker agrees that Nanny's reminiscences are a means by which Sophy can 'attempt to recreate her dead mother'.<sup>53</sup> However, Baker does not analyse the language of the dialogue. The interaction between Sophy and Nanny, and Nanny's description of Violet demonstrate both a sense of humour and recognition of the irony implicit in the mistress/servant relationship ('danced? She danced and led all of us a dance'). The frivolous performance that is ascribed to the mistress, her 'dance', is reiterated as irony when that 'dance' is

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The feature of infantilisation is explored in this thesis in the chapter concerning the Lady's Maid. Whilst Summers' statement can clearly be applied to a generalized master-servant relationship, it is apparent that the statement can be applied in reverse to these Nanny-family relationships.

<sup>51</sup> Taylor, *Palladian*, p. 56.

<sup>52</sup> Niamh Baker, *Happy Ever After?: Women's Fiction in Postwar Britain, 1945-60* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 89.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

ascribed to 'us', attributing to the servants the contrasting and prosaic requisite agency of servitude. (As well as depicting the supposition that the Nanny figure can embody ideas around nostalgia, this iterates the notion that her figure is complex with respect to grief.) Her memories are the reliable ones, despite their sensationalism. Her description of the mistress reveals the real behaviour of the ruling class, their idiosyncratic inability to cope with the smallest, most trifling of requirements that simultaneously engendered their reliance on their subordinates for even the most trivial of things. By logical extension, Nanny's truths contrast with the fantasies of Cassandra, the newly arrived governess. This nanny affords no easy nostalgia or stability in the face of grief. She presents instead a contested past and a contentious present, with which the powers that be must engage and negotiate, undermining the notion that the working class continue to be satisfied with their lot.

Antagonism towards the domestic establishment, demonstrated in her relationships with other servants, critiques any perceived critical consensus of working class solidarity. Mimicking the class behaviour of the employer, Taylor's Nanny expresses elaborate value judgments about those she considers to be 'lesser' servants, complicating her own class position. Such behaviour bears out the observation of Maroula Joannou that Nanny 'apes the attitudes of her social superiors.'<sup>54</sup> Nanny has become a class snob herself, unmistakable in the debate that she stages over the char: Nanny sees chars as inadequate servants performing their given tasks to a poor standard:

'Into the corners!' Nanny suddenly rapped out.

'Thursday's me day for this floor. I'm only giving it a do-over.'

'Too many do-overs in this house. Nothing done right. Thursday you'll get one of your funny turns, I daresay. Then where will the floor be?'

'Where it is now,' Mrs Adams thought. She fanned out the soapy water over the flagstones, then gathered it up on the slimy cloth, wrung it into the bucket and shuffled backwards on her knees.'<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Joannou, p. 51.

<sup>55</sup> Taylor, *Palladian*, p. 65-6.



Several points of contention are apparent in Nanny's observations of the char. A rift is evident between this fictional Nanny's tradition-steeped, old-fashioned ideas concerning service, and the contemporary reality of life in a modern household. Taylor's Nanny feels that the char does not work hard enough: the 'do-over' that she undertakes to clean the floor is inadequate. This is in contrast with the contemporary char described by social historians, who are generally shown as working so hard that they have a reputation for 'doing the rough'.<sup>56</sup> It was not uncommon by the 1940s for a household to utilise both live-in help and 'chars'.<sup>57</sup> A 'char' was a cleaner, rather than a domestic servant, primarily a servant who lived outside the home of her employers (again the char was a female role), coming in to work for a given number of hours per day or per week.<sup>58</sup> Tellingly, Taylor's depiction of the char is at odds with contemporary evidence,<sup>59</sup> as Nanny's observations of the char contradict the historians' hard worker, conflicting too with the char of popular culture that had become a prevalent part of the servant body during wartime. Tommy Handley's popular BBC radio show 'It's That Man Again' ('ITMA'), that ran for a decade from 1939, had introduced a comic, downtrodden 'char' character, Mrs Mopp, whose name became a repetitive cultural cliché that would last into current use. The char became a twentieth century site of the comic servant trope, joining the ranks of work shy, deadpan, snobbish, and masterly maids, valets and butlers extending back in literature. Tremendous humour was derived from her subservient, ambiguous catchphrase, "Can I do you now, Sir?" and instances when she was required to work outside her prescribed role,

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<sup>56</sup> Lethbridge, *Servants*, p. 252.

<sup>57</sup> Horn, *Life Below Stairs*, p. 247.

<sup>58</sup> Lethbridge, *Servants*.

<sup>59</sup> Of the 'day servants' listed in the England and Wales Census of 1911, 24,000 of them had disappeared by 1921, meantime the figures for charwomen had actually fallen between these two points, from 126,000 to 118,000. Sources: Census of England and Wales, 1911, *Summary Tables...*, Table 48, and Census of England and Wales, 1921, *Occupation Tables* (London, 1924), Tables 2 and 4. See Woollard. Woollard criticizes earlier attempts to critically consider the changing nomenclature of service occupations, noting that his predecessors did not take seriously enough the issue of charwomen, who were in his opinion 'an extraordinarily important 'service' group for older married or widowed women.' Woollard, p.4.

such as in the 1945 episode when she was elevated to the position of 'domestic correspondent' for Handley's fictitious newspaper.<sup>60</sup> Tom Harrison, the originator and force behind *Mass Observation* read a wide assortment of popular fiction during the war. He was unimpressed with the quality of the material, but did note that many novels 'lauded predictable heroes: cockneys -preferably taxi drivers or charwomen.'<sup>61</sup> The ITMA character's compliant deference and witty insouciance, in a popular and quietly influential BBC programme envisaged and agreed to be a vehicle for maintaining the morale of the masses in wartime, demonstrate how central class understanding was to the smooth continuation of the cultural pecking order in Britain during the forties. Whilst the tasks that Taylor's char undertakes could lead us to assume she is downtrodden, with her 'slimy cloth' shuffling 'backwards on her knees', Mrs Adams' interior dialogue indicates self-awareness and cognizance of the subdued conflict between her and the nanny. Similarly, Nanny's points of contention are internalized, creating comic irony as their opposition becomes a display of conflicting cleanliness. Watching, simultaneously commenting, as Mrs Adams cleans in front of her, Nanny considers:

'She's no good for gentleman's service,' Nanny thought, watching her. "A good do-out of a room, I like," she said aloud.<sup>62</sup>

Drama bubbles up between the thoroughness of the 'do-out' versus the expediency of Mrs Adams' 'do-over': they are literally arguing in a shared 'nonsense' idiolect, using nominalizations of cleaning-agency slang verbs that exist only for them. The effect is humorous, despite an ongoing class opposition that accompanies the characters throughout the novel. Here Nanny's interior monologue speaks of her own nostalgia, imbued too with discontent concerning the present. She quickly voices this dissatisfaction: the self-proclaimed elevation of

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<sup>60</sup> ITMA – It's That Man Again – episodes are available in the BBC Radio 4 Extra archive at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00lnha6/episodes/guide>, Accessed 14 June 2012

<sup>61</sup> Gardiner, *Wartime: Britain 1939-45*, p. 490.

<sup>62</sup> Taylor, *Palladian*, p. 68.

her station is such that she is empowered to comment negatively on the work of Mrs Adams. Nanny's opinion of Mrs Adams is founded on her perception of the char's social identity as subordinate; an inferior unworthy of working for the elevated class of 'gentlemen'. The outdated fictional Nanny exalts her own capabilities, and her life in service (specifically also 'living in') above any other kind of work. The old refuses to acknowledge the qualities of the new. The comments of Mrs Adams contrast sharply with Nanny's perceptions. In her dialogue Mrs Adams demonstrates insight into class division:

'You could spend your life on your knees,' Mrs Adams said, thinking of the great house. 'We all like our little bit of shut-eye after dinner. And look at the paper. Half the world scrubbing on their knees, the other half sitting on its arse. That's what it looks like to me.'<sup>63</sup>

Their conversation, Nanny's reactionary stance, juxtaposed with Mrs Adams' accurate but reductive perceptions (and her sudden outburst of swearing), illuminates the central class tension of the novel.<sup>64</sup> Late in the novel the reader discovers that Mrs Adams not only recognises and resents Nanny's implications with respect to status, but also projects an opposing stance as regards their respective rank: "Mrs Adams resented being likened to a kitchen-maid. She was a married woman and not in service."<sup>65</sup> Each of the servants considers their position to be correct; the socially constructed and economically differentiated positions of nanny and char allow for no compromise. Nanny considers herself to be more akin to her masters than to her fellow domestics. She will no longer countenance doing the kind of work that a char, or a maid might do:

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<sup>63</sup> Taylor, *Palladian*, p. 66.

<sup>64</sup> Towards the end of the novel Nanny and Mrs Adams discuss the cinema (one of Nanny's favourite topics). Nanny abhors Technicolor, suggesting 'some of those blue skies are cruel. An artist wouldn't paint pictures like that. If he did he'd be disqualified.' p. 153. This is an interesting reflection from Nanny on the nature of art and reality. Furthermore, it is a discussion of cinema at a critical historical juncture when colour techniques were revolutionizing the industry, so recalling Dorothy Richardson's writing for *Close Up* magazine, at the time when the publication was full of debate over silent movies vs talkies. Nanny and Mrs Adams stand on either side of the divide again, old vs new.

<sup>65</sup> Taylor, *Palladian*, p. 153.

She had taken her standards from lives of idleness and plenty and despised those who worked for their living, and could not pick up a duster now without a feeling of being lowered in her own eyes.<sup>66</sup>

Having watched the laziness of the employing class, and having 'taken her standards' from them, Nanny is no longer satisfied by the work ascribed to her class. Moreover, having felt herself to be closer to her employers than her fellow servants, she isolates herself in what she believed to be a position of privilege. The 'feeling of being lowered in her own eyes' reveals that her hubris has led her to fear the prospect of any diminution in her standing. Snobbish, and blinkered, Nanny is resistant to change, whilst the char, Mrs Adams, works flexibly, works hard and gains greater independence.<sup>67</sup> Each connotes a representation of the working class, Nanny the deferential working class of pre-modernity, Mrs Adams the modern working class, still deferential but adaptable, self-aware and a force for transformation.

Mrs Adams was not Taylor's first fictional char. In *At Mrs Lippincote's*, published in 1945 just a year before *Palladian* and in the same year as Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, Taylor's protagonist Julia struggles with her family divided by the war and displaced into temporary, and rather diminished accommodation. John Brannigan proposes that the novel is a critique of domesticity.<sup>68</sup> Now servantless, Julia lives in fear of the char who comes in once a week. She gets 'up early to dust' prior to Mrs Whapshott's arrival.<sup>69</sup> Mrs Whapshot makes Julia nervous until she is 'afraid of her and dreaded Fridays'.<sup>70</sup> Julia's domestic tussle with the rented house, which is too large for her to cope with in such straightened servant circumstances, is a 'hopeless struggle'. This situation of domestic angst not only

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>67</sup> Historians observe that the development of a service economy outside the home led in turn to domestic transformation. For example, the use of commercial services (e.g. laundries, bakeries) meant that in-house operations closed or reduced significantly. As a result, staff numbers in domestic service fell, but also the hours worked were reduced. This was an additional factor creating opportunities for dailies/hourly rate staff to be employed.' See Horn, *Life Below Stairs*, p. 62.

<sup>68</sup> Brannigan, *Orwell to the Present*, p. 36-37.

<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Taylor, *At Mrs Lippincote's* (London: Virago, 2006), p. 31.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

prefigures feminist concerns with housework,<sup>71</sup> it also speaks of a 'longing for home'.<sup>72</sup> However, the home that the novel configures gives rise to a 'dystopian view of the ideology of home, which runs counter to the conservative constructions of Englishness of the time.'<sup>73</sup> Considering the socio-historical context during which Taylor was writing, for the middle-class mistress continuing to employ servants of any variety was important in status terms, for if she had no servants to work on domestic chores, then she must attend to these herself - as a housewife.<sup>74</sup> Julia's servant problem serves to signify middle class fears over an ungovernable future in a changed world. One historian sees the change to the 'daily' as one impetus in a number of forces that combined to offer 'personal opportunity' to many women during the inter-war period, with the char later becoming a part-time daily cleaner during the 1950s, and cites 'new patterns of domestic life which included the introduction of the daily servant rather than the live in maid, new forms of household appliance, new attitudes to housework.'<sup>75</sup> The use of chars increased exponentially following the Second World War.<sup>76</sup> Whether or not this is linked to divisions within the domestic service sphere, the work of the char was felt to be more demanding than that of the typical live-in servant. The increase in the number of dailies, or chars, used by middle class homes is symptomatic of a move towards servants who lived out, rather than under the roof of their employers. Whether or not this represented a substantial alteration to labour relations is now

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<sup>71</sup> Joannou, p. 87.

<sup>72</sup> This 'longing for home' is a notion considered by feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young, which is taken up with respect to domesticity in the interwar period by Chiara Briganti, *Domestic Modernism, the Interwar Novel, and E.H. Young* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2006).

<sup>73</sup> Brannigan, *Orwell to the Present*, p. 37.

<sup>74</sup> See Cowman and Jackson, p. 73-6.

<sup>75</sup> Light, *Forever England*, p. 9. Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950'; also see Summers (1998) who compares figures for those 'living in'.

<sup>76</sup> Delap, *Knowing their Place*, p. 35; also see the contemporary voice of Violet Firth, *Psychology of the Servant Problem: A Study in the Social Relationship* (London, 1925), and Bourke; there are statistics in Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950', p. 188, also given by Horn, *Life Below Stairs*.

recognized to be a contentious issue,<sup>77</sup> and the development that saw servants move outside their employer's home did not dent their deferential obeisance. Equally, in considering Taylor's representations, the working class do not appear to be progressing towards improved working conditions, negotiated by those who labour, instead the majority of inter-servant communication is marked by consternation and division stage-managed by the Nanny.

The relationship between the Nanny and the governess is adversarial in *Palladian*. Nanny has been the educator of the children of the house throughout their earliest years. She has borne the responsibility for childcare.<sup>78</sup> Therefore it might be posited that the nanny would be likely to receive less in the way of respect than the governess. As the children for whom the nanny is responsible, their charges (note the financial implications of the term) mature, they progress to become pupils of the governess.<sup>79</sup> In one sense the nanny can be seen to remain in stasis – she does not change, although the children she oversees do. They outgrow her ministrations, and require 'teaching' (as pupils) rather than being cared for. The elevated requirements of the children of the house are no longer ascribed to one of the servant class, but instead pass to the governess, to one in another service role, but with a wholly dissimilar, albeit further isolated, status within the servant body. Taylor's Nanny struggles against these kinds of assumptions, employing nostalgia, her status as fictive kin, and her longevity in the service of the master to upend the expectations of the governess. For the governess this results in a difficult position: she is nether firmly one thing nor another. Nancy Armstrong differentiates the governess from the servants in the household, saying that

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<sup>77</sup> The shift to living-out has been taken by some historians to be the historic moment at which the balance of power in domestic service shifted irrevocably to the employee. However, living-out did not prove to be the revolution that would modernise and perpetuate domestic service as many reformers had hoped.' Delap, *Knowing their Place*, p. 41.

<sup>78</sup> Trev L. Broughton and Ruth Symes, *The Governess: an Anthology* (London: St Martin's Press, 1997)

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

Because her work was restricted to domestic duties, she belonged to the cast of respectable women, and hers was one of the few professions open to women of the gentry who had to support themselves.<sup>80</sup>

Her duties are 'domestic', and she is paid for her service, therefore she is a servant, however she may be a 'respectable' gentry woman.

Armstrong sees a problem in that one in the role of the governess was 'marketing her class and education for money.'<sup>81</sup> This transgressive combination of the aristocracy and labour undertaken for payment is deeply disturbing to the comfortable continuation of class.

In *Palladian* Cassandra takes up the position of governess by default – the position is 'found' for her. This resonates with the biographical detail regarding Taylor's own youth. Gauche and inexperienced, fresh from school education, she is a child employed to teach – a governess-child. Cassandra's quixotic reflections are bound up with her naïveté. According to Elizabeth Maslen 'her capacity for self-knowledge is grounded entirely in literature'.<sup>82</sup> In her first meeting with her employer Marion, she envisages their relationship according to her reading of *Jane Eyre*, speaking 'in a little governessy voice. She knew that Jane Eyre had answered up better than that to her Mr Rochester.'<sup>83</sup> The ensuing dialogue sees Marion imposing his own bookish opinions on Cassandra, in an echo of Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. By the close of the conversation Marion has resolved to teach Cassandra Greek. As she requires an education, her status as a child is reinforced, whilst Marion's superiority is enhanced, for he evolves from employer to benefactor and educator: 'So you don't know Greek? Shall I teach you? And I turn into a governess for a change?'<sup>84</sup> His tone is patronising, as though enticing a shy child to respond. An ironic reversal turns here in the prospect of a child

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<sup>80</sup> Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p. 78.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>82</sup> Maslen, *Political and Social Issues in British Women's Fiction*, p. 48. Note that despite the title of the study, no discussion of the class issue of domestic service features in the book.

<sup>83</sup> Taylor, *Palladian*.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

teaching another child. Cassandra's understanding of the 'romantic' governess role is dangerously limited; it causes her to remain 'obdurately insensitive to the reality of the world around her'.<sup>85</sup> Sophy's sudden accidental death, crushed by a falling statue in the grounds of the house, further underscores the carelessness of the family – particularly the father, recalling that the child is motherless. If Sophy is considered to be in Cassandra's care, it must follow that her supervision was inadequate. The dangerous old house, with a conservatory that the household is forbidden to enter for fear of falling glass, claims its victim.

In this novel the country house is depicted as beyond repair, which seems to speak of the historical situation. Cannadine describes 'landed establishment decline, decay and disintegration.'<sup>86</sup> Over the interwar years the aristocratic owners of country houses were dealt a number of economic blows. For example, death duties, which increased to 40% in 1919, and then to 60% by 1939, became a tremendous burden.<sup>87</sup> This meant that 'some 221 country houses were actually demolished between 1920 and 1939.'<sup>88</sup> During the 1930s there were a number of strategies to save these homes, with many transferring their ownership to the National Trust.<sup>89</sup> The Second World War saw the requisitioning of large country houses for various war duties, this led to them making their own contribution as temporary accommodation for evacuated schools, military hospitals, convalescent homes, and billeting troops.<sup>90</sup>

In her 1943 story 'Sweethearts and Wives', Sylvia Townsend Warner turns this topic into a point for humour. She laments the idea of 'establishments suddenly denuded of servants' but suggests the country house has become intrinsically more interesting 'enlarged by such creative wartime activities as organizing First Aid Points,

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Maslen, *Political and Social Issues*, p. 170.

<sup>86</sup> See Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall*, p. 607.

<sup>87</sup> Pugh, p. 349.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>89</sup> J. Jenkins and P. James, *From Acorn to Oak Tree: The Growth of the National Trust 1895-1994*, London: Pan Macmillan, 1994).

<sup>90</sup> See Joannou, p. 52, and Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall*, p. 627.



entertaining Polish officers and breeding table rabbits.’<sup>91</sup> Cannadine, however, ends his diatribe on the loss of the stately homes by describing them falling into disrepair, with no possibility of rehabilitation, a situation which was then exacerbated when ‘the grandees and gentry suffered further hardship, because they lost their servants.’<sup>92</sup> Appropriately enough, following a consideration of the fate of the country house at the end of the Second World War, Taylor’s novel emblematises the decay of the past. *Palladian* simultaneously makes an emblem of tragedy of war. With the death of Sophy, the heir to the estate, the future is literally and metaphorically snuffed out. Themes of grief and loss are also advanced through the characterisation in the novel. Dysfunction in the family climaxes in the daughter’s death: there are resonances of the Second World War (which is never mentioned, but is instead dealt with in this oblique manner). Disaster arbitrarily claims the life of the young and innocent, whilst their elders opt for a stance of powerlessness that emphasises their denial.<sup>93</sup> The child could have been left in the care of Nanny; the Nanny of nostalgia and stability might have kept her safe. This Nanny, however, does not embody such qualities, but problematises them.

Relationships between the nanny, governess and char tell of the changing power dynamics at operation within the servant body, which draws attention to the manipulative intransigence of nanny, who operates both to maintain the structures of the past and to challenge the latest iteration of household order. The interwoven lines of dominance of the nanny and governess are depicted in Chapter Eleven of the novel, through the use of multiple contrasts. The

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<sup>91</sup> Sylvia Townsend Warner, ‘Sweethearts and Wives’, in Anne Boston, ed., *Wave me Goodbye: Short Stories of the Second World War* (London: Virago, 1999). The story was first published in the *New Yorker*, Dec 4 1943, the quoted passage is from p. 35. Can be accessed at <http://archives.newyorker.com/?i=1943-12-04#folio=034>

<sup>92</sup> Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall*, p. 629. Cannadine mentions servants only a handful of times in his 709 pages on the aristocracy. Notably this is one of those times.

<sup>93</sup> Nigel Reeve notes that the war stalks the novel, asserting that *Palladian* is ‘unusual among her novels in its clear lack of clear historical anchoring – the only specific contemporary reference is to the 1940 film of *Pride and Prejudice* - but is nonetheless intriguingly shadowed by the war that is nowhere mentioned.’ See Nigel H. Reeve, *Elizabeth Taylor* (London: Northcote, 2008), p. 19.

governess brings her flower arrangement into the room where the other two servants are taking tea, little realizing that flower arrangement would arouse such pertinent memories of the dead mistress and prove focal to such contention. Firstly, Nanny, who has become thoughtful over her cup of tea, surreptitiously criticises Cassandra's overblown 'great flower-piece' of 'sunflowers and magenta phlox': the gaudy mismatch of colours is not to her conservative tastes, but nor does it match up to the excesses produced by true aristocracy. Cassandra's aspirations, as she 'hoped to achieve something arresting', are nullified. With Cassandra excluded from the ritual of tea drinking, the distance between the characters is stressed:

But governesses are not quite servants in the usual sense of the word: their education puts them out of reach of the continual flow of tea which goes on in kitchens.<sup>94</sup>

Taylor juxtaposes a serious point, regarding differential education (a central tenet in the consideration of class) with humour – the availability of tea. Cassandra's attempted floral art shows her desire to please and to fit into the household and makes manifest her ambition to be lady of the house. Nanny describes Cassandra's efforts to the char, specifically contrasting them with those of the real aristocracy:

'That's a pretty apple, that wine-sap; but I'll lay the vine leaves are done for before evening. Just like all these young girls. I remember Miss Violet over the cold collation –Let's have it all green and coral, Nan" she used to say, and there it'd be – great lobsters lolling here there and everywhere on beds of lettuce, cucumbers sticking out in all directions, sliced down lengthways and cut out like crocodiles with prawns for tongues, everything smothered over with green mayonnaise and red pepper. It *looked* lavish enough, but who could eat cucumbers like that; it was mostly left, wasted. A stand-up buffy, too, and the lobster not rightly cracked... All the young gentlemen out on the terrace stamping on lobster with their boots. And laugh! "What goings-on!" I said to Miss Violet afterwards. She knew I didn't like it, but they didn't care, being half-cut at the time.

Nanny dismisses Cassandra's efforts, diminishing her as one of 'all these young girls'; a chasm separates the new governess from the excesses of the past. For Violet's decorative table-spread, the 'cold collation', uses foodstuffs fashioned to become surreal, with crocodile

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<sup>94</sup> Taylor, *Palladian*, p. 106.

cucumbers and lobsters 'lolling' in extremis, in a purposeless, culinary performativity in which the food itself is tainted, 'smothered' on a sea of 'green mayonnaise'. Profligacy and overindulgence were qualities of the old order of the aristocracy, illuminated here for the present by Nanny's nostalgia. Sentimentality over the mistress and her décor progresses to link the table piece that Cassandra offers with that of the now-dead Violet:

'I was just saying,' she added slyly, as Cassandra came back into the kitchen, 'you remind me of young Mrs Vanbrugh with your flower-arranging. She always liked something a bit different. I remember-' She turned to Mrs Adams again, '- one day she came in and said "Such an idea for the table to-night. I wonder I've never seen it before." She gets out the flat bowl we use to have tulip heads floating in when that was the rage and fills it with moss and toadstools – all different kinds, puff-balls and red and white spotted ones and those wavy ones like bits of shammy leather. "It smells a bit earthy," I made so bold as to say, but young ladies and gentlemen are tough, nothing puts them off their food. "How lovely! How original!" I expect they said.' (Her voice rose in imitation of the gentry.)

However – the surfeit tips over from profligacy into waste and decay, because the dead mistress's outrageous table piece, made up of rotting fungi and foliage, including poisonous varieties, has by the morning 'collapsed' leaving 'a writhing mass of maggots' in the centre of the dining room dinner table.<sup>95</sup> The table-piece became an unintentional *memento mori* prefiguring future deaths as well as calling up memories of those of the past. The tension of the servant question is implicit in Nanny's position: her own nostalgic focus requires her to accept that the former pyramid of status, of which she is so fond, was spoiled and rotten; however the deficiencies she perceives in the contrasting replacement demonstrates that for Nanny the domestic establishment that is currently negotiating its position remains inadequate.

The representative of this new hierarchy, Cassandra the governess, is socially uncomfortable in the new household milieu; she is unable to withdraw from the company of the ebullient Nanny, whose tales of Sophy's dead mother hold the young woman entranced. Nanny

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<sup>95</sup> Death continually foreshadows events in the novel.

relishes such inflections of dominance, as they signify her propensity to influence the household:

‘..Well, it was for herself, really. She didn’t care if the others thought her queer as long as *she* was satisfied. Nothing spoilt her looks. How many of us can say the same?’ Nanny rocked in her chair, her cup and saucer held high. Sometimes she sipped, tilting back, her old beetleish appearance, lined, yellowed, seemed wistful, but was not in reality. Cassandra, with her palely-coloured young face, intent on the evocation of beauty from the past, looked wistful, too. And was.<sup>96</sup>

Nanny is self-aware, ‘her cup and saucer held high’. Rocking in a chair, whilst simultaneously holding a cup and saucer, this adeptness symbolises or figures for us the powerful and somewhat playful-delinquent competence of Nanny. Although Taylor ascribes the simile of the beetle to her ‘appearance’, the simile seems equally apposite as a description of her stance and her character. Nanny’s is a tough, dark exterior, matched by qualities of emotionlessness and inhumanity. The suggestion that she ‘seemed wistful, but was not in reality’ accords with the contention that Nanny is in control, simultaneously managing her expression, her own movements, the conversation, and the reactions that she is able to provoke in others. She is able to facially dissemble, displaying emotion that, ‘beetleish’, she does not feel. The reaction she seeks in the naïve Cassandra is immediately forthcoming:

Cassandra, with her palely-coloured young face, intent upon the evocation of beauty from the past, looked wistful, too. And was.<sup>97</sup>

Cassandra’s romantic nature is apparent to the on-lookers. Her ‘palely-coloured young face’ is incapable of concealing emotion. Her contrast to Nanny is rendered emphatic: ‘And was.’ Nanny’s manipulative storytelling, and her pleasure in the misery of others, is overtly stated in the ensuing paragraph, underlining further the contrast and the contest between nanny and governess:

Nanny had disapproved of Violet, but disapproved of Cassandra even more. She had always loved her boys and was not above setting the girls against one

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

another; whether they were dead or alive. It delighted her to bring Cassandra to the edge of despair about Violet.<sup>98</sup>

The contrast between Nanny and Cassandra brings into focus their disparity. This vexed literary governess-nanny relationship sheds light on the cultural relationship of the middle and working classes. The contention between the two emanates from the nanny figure: she is symbolic of the old order. The governess meanwhile, gauche and anxious to please, is a representative of the new, encroaching and expanding middle class.<sup>99</sup> The governess is largely oblivious to the inherited behaviours that underpin the operation of the household's structure and lives in quixotic hopes for her own future, whilst the nanny seeks to retain and rebuild these inherited behaviours, preferring the past to the present. They are not to be reconciled. The nanny – hitherto insulated from change, and discrete from the remainder of the servant body, is seen to be pitted against the governess, an agent of transformation in the novel.

Taylor's Nanny in *Palladian* remains profoundly separate from her fellow servants, despite the homogenising nature of ideology and the principle of abstract labour that suggests that capitalism renders all employment equal.<sup>100</sup> Her difference ensures the division of the servant group, facilitating Marian's patriarchal domestic power, whilst leaving her isolated within the servant community. This isolation however seems as much the outcome of her own attitudes and behaviour as the product of any superiority established by the position of 'nanny'. The behaviour that distinguishes her is deliberate:

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> In *A Wreath of Roses* (1949) Elizabeth Taylor makes repeated use of the adjective 'governessy'. In the novel, Frances (the painter) was once governess to the bewildered, baby-smitten Liz. Frances says, whilst thinking about her earlier art: 'An English sadness like a veil over all I painted, until it became ladylike and nostalgic, governessy, utterly lacking in ferocity, brutality, violence'. Elizabeth Taylor, *A Wreath of Roses* (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 34. It is evident that Frances has rejected her earlier incarnation – governess – as well as her earlier art. She associates the two together, using the expression 'governessy' pejoratively. The relationship between the former-governess and former-pupil and life model plays out, each with their new-found equality and interdependence.

<sup>100</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 125.

Nanny feigned eccentricity as Hamlet feigned part of his madness, and for more or less the same reason, so that she could speak her mind, set herself apart from humanity and tell the truth, keep her integrity in words, at least, and have every allowance made.<sup>101</sup>

Construing her in Shakespearian terms, Taylor ascribes the character 'acting' qualities. Her 'feigned eccentricity' ennobles her and serves to emphasise her deliberate attempt to apply distance in her inter-relationships within the household, having 'set herself apart' from the other servants. Whilst she is separated from the remainder of the servant body, the Nanny in *Palladian* is treated with deference by the other servants and respected by the family. Nanny looks back at her life, reflecting on her status within the servant body and the household as a whole:

She was not a cook, not a housekeeper. She only stayed because they were all frightened of her and might as well pay her wages ...Her life had woven itself into this house....She had known it would be the last job in the long sequence of nursery life. A good life. With authority and ritual. There had been interesting confinements, plenty of male children, involved and interesting feuds with governesses, midwives, housekeepers and fathers, even death.<sup>102</sup>

She considers her many relationships with governesses, and the reader learns that Cassandra is not the first governess to experience her antagonism. The 'governesses, midwives, housekeepers and fathers' might seem to Nanny to be of a suitable caste to quarrelsomely engage with. Death – at the end of the list – is another 'character' with whom she has had dealings. The source of the tropes of inevitable loss and grief is given his place, and a personified part in Nanny's performative, ritualistic narrative. Death is an area in which she specialises, having extensive experience of the correct behaviours it should elicit in those remaining behind. Sophy's death provides an example of Nanny constructing an identity that serves to protect and perpetuate class and by extension, familial relationships and structures, even as these disintegrate. At Sophy's funeral Nanny provides a benchmark for both relatives and servants. For example,

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<sup>101</sup> Taylor, *Palladian*, p. 67.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

'only Nanny redeemed them, her hands clasped, her walk impressive, her sealskin coat so funereal.'<sup>103</sup> Her opinions are sought and upheld as iconically correct for what is an exceptionally serious occasion requiring impeccable manners: "We shan't go to a funeral smelling of spirits,' as Nanny had said."<sup>104</sup> Nanny adds gravitas to the funeral, contrasting with both the family (Aunt Tinty) and the new working class (Adams), in the graveyard:

With immeasurable dignity, Nanny lifted a white handkerchief, bordered with grey, and toughed one cheekbone, then the other. Tinty snivelled into the screwed-up pink affair. The next time Nanny would use her handkerchief would be as the earth struck the coffin-lid. Adams's boots rang hollowly over the stone and gratings as he clanked down the aisle.<sup>105</sup>

Contrasting handkerchiefs illustrate the differentiation between the family and their Nanny: the family is in disarray, 'screwed-up', whilst Nanny manifests the 'immeasurable dignity' of the old retainer. Adams (husband of the char) makes a hollow sound as he walks signifying the emptiness inherent in the latest re-imagining of the working class, meanwhile the old order, represented by Nanny, is substantial and resilient. Following the revelations at the end of the novel, and Marion's marriage to Cassandra, Nanny continues in her position. In spite of the changes he has wrought, and his feeling of being 'encumbered' by a 'Nanny so old and venomous',<sup>106</sup> Marion would not expect Nanny to leave the household. The implication is, like Nanny Hawkins in *Brideshead Revisited*, that she will remain long past her useful working life, even until her own death.<sup>107</sup> In Nanny's final scene in the novel she is appositely asked for her opinion, by a family member, on the correct wine for the married couple's return. The language around her response is replete with ambiguity:

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>107</sup> There is evidence that this is a fictional trope. In terms of documentary support, the idea is refuted by Katherine Holden as part of a 'romanticised view of old retainers'. Holden goes on to posit that the 'view that nannies were looked after in old age by the families they cared for hides a more complicated picture.' See Holden.

'How thoughtful of you, Nanny. What do you think about the wine?'  
'Madeira would be suitable,' said Nanny, who fancied a glass of this. 'It's a wine no one could take exception to a young girl drinking.'<sup>108</sup>

Nanny is selfish, opinionated, and continues in her disapproval of the new young mistress. She does, however, endure, in a characterization that offers a mechanism whereby it is possible to explore the implicit contradictions in the familiarity and security of the household pecking order and thereby the class system. Any egalitarian denial of this status-driven household superstructure is pointless, as Nanny works to re-establish and rebuilds it, which just goes to show that whilst there are those working for it, the exchange relationship will continue to reestablish itself. In *Palladian* Elizabeth Taylor depicts a situation where despite the broad renegotiation of class and class relationships, social ranking persists.

In the narratives of Waugh and Taylor servants are depicted who are satisfied with their position and desire their circumstances to continue unchanged. In these examples it is the servant-keepers who are changing, rather than the servants, a counter-intuitive notion that runs against that expected contemporary narrative which envisages a working class that is at once united and striving for the transformation of the establishment. However, these fictional nannies have a double-function, as they work both for and against the maintenance of the established order, supporting the continuation of the structures of domestic service, whilst simultaneously denying and disavowing their place within them. Nanny Hawkins and Taylor's Nanny operate to confront the changing social and political reality through complex forms of refutation, renunciation, and even reverence of the established domestic systems that go so far to support class, they do so in ways that are also subtly subversive of the new organized systems of the household that were emerging in the household of the 1940s.

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<sup>108</sup> Taylor, *Palladian*, p. 188.



## Chapter Four: The Manservant – social and technological progress

This chapter argues that manservants in these two fictional examples serve a paradoxical function of transgression and simultaneous reinforcement of social order, and as such they replicate the effects of the technology they manipulate.

I contend that whilst as servants their bondage yokes them to servitude, the machinery they deploy traps them likewise. In these narratives these writers depict transgressive manservants whose complexity both chips away at and props up the influence of the employer. Each of the servants employs the anxieties of the servant question to acquire their status, and then proceeds to contravene established conventions of domestic servitude and wider societal norms: Green's butler Raunce is a scopophiliac and thief, whilst Bowen's chauffeur Prothero is a murderer. In their behaviour, and the construction that each character creates around their role, each servant employs new technologies or subsists in a significant and specific relationship with technological development. As a chauffeur, Prothero is one of a new type of servant whose arrival marks the end of the carriage-servants,<sup>1</sup> meanwhile Raunce serves at a point in the development of the servant question when his stereotype has been culturally reconstructed technologically through the popularity of the 'what the butler saw'. As cultural critics such as Joanna Bourke suggest, we might expect technology to support a narrative of improvement for servants and the working class;<sup>2</sup> in the work of these

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<sup>1</sup> See Lethbridge, *Servants*, pp. 134-135.

<sup>2</sup> See Bourke, who discusses how advances for the working class in developments such as stove technologies (p. 57), cleaning technologies (p. 76) and communication technologies, including the car (p. 114). Bourke does observe that these technologies did not alter male dominance over the home, a position supported by Cynthia Cockburn, *Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change* (London: Pluto, 1983); also of interest here of course is the 1973 exposition Raymond Williams, *Technology Television and Cultural Form* (London: Psychology Press, 2003). Bourke's work tends to be

writers however, it is demonstrated that technology functions as a means of transgression and disavowal for the manservant. Furthermore, despite the allure of transgressive mechanization and technologies, these are practically limited, with the power of ownership continuing to reside within the one who holds the power in the exchange relationship. Any narrative of technological and social and cultural transformation taking place within the structure of the household becomes not only disadvantageous but problematic to all participants.

The first narrative featuring a transgressive manservant whose complexity both reinforces and repudiates the governance of his mistresses is Elizabeth Bowen's 1934 short story 'The Disinherited', which is dominated by the character of Prothero, chauffeur to Mrs Archworth and her niece Davina. The story's thematic apprehension over the deterioration of a reliably configured social structure is paralleled by the decay of the natural world and order. An era is coming to an end, represented in the novel by the incomer Marianne Harvey, recently settled in a newly built home on an up-market estate.<sup>3</sup> The middle class enclave is situated away from the 'old' village itself and what 'had been the manor house' owned by Davina's elderly aunt, Mrs Archworth, who 'had by now disposed of all other property,[but] still looked on herself as patroness of the village.'<sup>4</sup> A third significant female character in the story is the upper-class hanger-on, Davina. In his murderous duplicity, enunciated in his relationships with these women, the chauffeur Prothero proceeds to

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dismissive of servants – in her analysis of the working class they do seem to be 'a class apart'.

<sup>3</sup> Elke D'hoker notices that the characters in the story are introduced specifically in relation to the kind of home in which they live, see D'hoker, Elke, 'The Poetics of House and Home in the Short Stories of Elizabeth Bowen', *Orbis Litterarum*, 67, 4 (2012) pp. 267-289, pp. 269-270. As a condition of home-ownership in the desirable estate on the outskirts of the village Marianne 'undertook not to keep chickens...or hang out clothes'. In agreeing to this promise the incomers undertake *not* to behave in a *working class* manner.

<sup>4</sup> Bowen, *The Collected Stories*, p. 377.

expose the fragility of 'social boundaries and, by extension personal identity' in the story.<sup>5</sup>

Bowen and Green employ the subtextual mechanism of the servant question to depict the means by which these men acquire their status, and proceed to wield it transgressively to threaten the established order. Prothero conveys the economic scarcity of menservants in applying for his post with Mrs Archworth,<sup>6</sup> with a flawlessly plausible stolen identity and references providing the documentary evidence required to achieve the position.<sup>7</sup> He reflects:

After a bit I came back to England and began to put Prothero's references into action. I was anxious to lie low, so applied here. The old woman considered herself lucky.<sup>8</sup>

References provide him with the identity of a former chauffeur, they attest to the quality of his 'character', and inspire trust in the potential employer.<sup>9</sup> Two meanings of 'character' in class resonate with servants and with the situation of Prothero: firstly character refers to the mask of servility that must be worn in the presence of power, whilst secondly character is the 'statement in which one employer described to another... the habits and qualities of a servant'.<sup>10</sup> The advantages such character confers accrue a value that may be construed in terms of currency because of its transferability.<sup>11</sup> In addition, ironically and crucially, he uses the anxious undercurrent of

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<sup>5</sup> Stewart, Victoria, "Violence and Representation in Elizabeth Bowen's Interwar Short Stories", *English*, 58, 221 (2009), p. 147.

<sup>6</sup> Figures for male indoor domestic servants working in private homes show a decrease from 45,000 in 1911, to 31,000 in 1921, but a rise to 37,000 in 1937. By 1951 however, indoor male servant numbers fell to 9,000. From Guy Routh, *Occupation and Pay in Great Britain 1906-60* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 33. Note these figures are for indoor servants, and there is some confusion as to whether the chauffeur was considered an indoor or outdoor servant in these censuses. They are, then, more reliable with respect to the argument concerning the butler.

<sup>7</sup> Lethbridge describes the necessity of a character reference from an employer, to secure a position in service, see Lethbridge, *Servants*, pp. 64-65.

<sup>8</sup> Bowen, *The Collected Stories*, p. 397.

<sup>9</sup> Todd suggests that 'To cast doubt on a servant's trustworthiness was not simply to suggest they were unfit for their job, but to slur their character.' See Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England*, p. 148.

<sup>10</sup> See Beverley Skeggs, *Class, Self, Culture* Routledge (London: Transformations, 2003), p. 124. Also see Robbins, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> Liz Stanley describes just such an operation of 'the currency' of character in *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 42.

the servant question that makes Mrs Archworth pleased – ‘lucky’ – to have secured herself a man.<sup>12</sup> Despite society’s overwhelming gendering of the domestic service industry, the demand for males to fulfil certain roles of the household remained strong throughout the early decades of the twentieth century. Domestic service had become so firmly feminized that as a result of nineteenth century’ ridicule of male servants, fewer working class men would consider a service position.<sup>13</sup> As well as there being less likelihood of males entering service, there was a further significant reason for such preference for female over male servants. Female servants were seen as being more biddable and more likely to be grateful for their position than their male counterparts.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, there was also a moral imperative implicit in keeping female servants, with which a good Christian household should engage.<sup>15</sup> A contemporary example, Mary Scharleib’s 1923 essay entitled ‘The Moral Training of Young Girls’, expressed anxiety over the possible misuse of the independence that opportunities for employment outside the domestic sector offered the young female worker.<sup>16</sup> She opined that ‘wise superintendence’ was

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<sup>12</sup> Socio-economic factors underpinning the servant question in relation to menservants date back to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when males became significantly more expensive than female servants. This was due to a tax imposed on employers for each individual male servant in their employ, a legislative measure taken by government to redirect those able bodied men, who were now unable to find work in domestic service, into military service fighting for their country in the Napoleonic wars. The premium applied to their service meant that employers were less likely to take them on and concomitantly the make-up of the servant body was irrevocably altered: the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the increasing feminisation of service. Menservants as a ‘luxury’ is ‘emphasised by the fact that until 1937 a 15s a year tax had to be paid by employer for each male employee’. See Horn, *Life Below Stairs*, p. 45. ‘Excise duty’ was payable on [male servants] from 1777 to 1937’, as explained by Woollard, p. 3. Also worthy of noting - the French Napoleonic Wars began around 1792. See <http://europeanhistory.about.com/od/napoleonicwars/a/A-Timeline-Of-The-Napoleonic-And-French-Revolutionary-Wars.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Delap, *Knowing their Place*, p.1.

<sup>14</sup> Often employers would take on ‘fallen women’ and girls from institutions, who would then frequently be expected to work for nothing, or effectively for their food and a roof over their head. Such appalling exploitation often backfired as young women from institutions were typically unhealthy (so unable to work as hard as the employer had hoped) and unhappy! See the chapter on the Lady’s Maid.

<sup>15</sup> The Christian imperative of servant keeping was considered in the Introduction.

<sup>16</sup> Selina Todd notes a ‘fear of working class independence’. See Todd, ‘Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950’, p. 195.

needed 'to prevent her from going astray'.<sup>17</sup> The inference is that a maid could be kept 'on the right track' by her employers. Service was a means of social reform for young women.<sup>18</sup> This was not the case for young men.

Bowen depicts a wily chauffeur, Prothero, taking advantage of that contemporary economic scarcity of male servants, secure in the knowledge that he will not easily be dismissed, for a replacement would be difficult to find. When Prothero is first introduced as regards his relationship to his employer, it is in terms of ownership – the ownership of the servant class by their masters. The old established servant, 'cook', is known by the nomenclature of her role, not by her own name.<sup>19</sup> The contrast with Prothero is conspicuous: 'Her cook was "my cook" but he remained "the chauffeur"'.<sup>20</sup> The use of the definite article rather than the possessive pronoun connotes a contrast between the mistress's ownership of 'my cook' and the self-possession of 'the chauffeur'. Asserting his self sets the chauffeur up in opposition to his servant status, which insists that his identity is subject to the possession of his mistress.

Prothero's chauffeur role serves to support an interrogation of the idea of positive progress through technological transformation. By the 1930s engineering and manufacturing developments had combined to create phenomenal advancements in the mechanisms of travel.<sup>21</sup> Cars grew in popularity if not affordability, with their use widely espoused by rich, leisured individuals.<sup>22</sup> Domestic service,

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<sup>17</sup> Mary Scharlieb, 'The Moral Training of Young Girls' is reproduced in Marchant, James, ed., *The Claims of the Coming Generation* (London: Kegan Paul, 1923), pp.124-6.

<sup>18</sup> This is discussed in the Lady's Maid chapter.

<sup>19</sup> This topic – the nomenclature and naming of servants, is another that resonates throughout this thesis.

<sup>20</sup> Bowen, *The Collected Stories*, p. 380.

<sup>21</sup> Modern travel is a significant literary trope in Bowen's 1932 novel *To the North*. The title alludes to the legend on a roadside sign, whilst the central characters are obliterated in a car crash at speed in the closing pages of the book.

<sup>22</sup> It is worth stating that very few cars were on the road in the 1930s. Even in 1951 only some 14% of British households had access to a car or van. For statistics see: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/8995/vehicles-summary.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/8995/vehicles-summary.pdf)

particularly in sizeable households, altered irrevocably in tandem with the nascent automobile industry, and with the hastening discontinuation of many outdoor roles – ostler, footman, stable-lad.<sup>23</sup> However, these same developments also spawned a novel position, that of the chauffeur.<sup>24</sup> As the horse-drawn chaise became an anachronism, so too the servants involved in its upkeep and use became redundant. ‘According to the Census of 1911, the number of chauffeurs and coachmen was almost equal, yet by 1921 the coachman was almost redundant and chauffeurs in private service numbered 5,200.’<sup>25</sup> Mechanical skills were a requirement for the job; practically these were the type of skills that might have been ‘picked up’ in military service,<sup>26</sup> or learned in an urban environment; this diverged markedly from the traditional work of the liveried footman or ostler whose skills were embedded in their roles and had often been understood and passed from one generation to the next.<sup>27</sup> It was feasible for male outdoor servants such as the chauffeur to become valuable experts for the household through their mechanical knowledge.<sup>28</sup> Usurping a role from earlier menservants associated with horses, positions the chauffeur as an agent of technologisation and modernisation.<sup>29</sup> The chauffeur figure works against the notion

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<sup>23</sup> Lethbridge, *Servants*, p. 134.

<sup>24</sup> Horn, *Life Below Stairs*.

<sup>25</sup> Lethbridge, *Servants*, p. 134.

<sup>26</sup> As Prothero implies in Bowen’s story.

<sup>27</sup> Much of the former work of an ‘outside’ servant engaged by a large house centred upon the gardens and the physical exterior of the house, with an additional service group maintained to support the estate itself. The chauffeur’s tasks were largely undertaken outside the house, often in spaces that had formerly been stabling and yard areas. This appropriation served to distance the chauffeur from the remaining household. Gardeners and nurserymen saw to those areas of domesticated environment closest to the ‘big house’; meanwhile gamekeepers, foresters and ghillies saw to the needs of the wider estate, including the sporting interests of the landowner. See Delap, *Knowing their Place*.

<sup>28</sup> Jane Hamlett, *Material Relations: Domestic Interiors and Middle Class Families in England 1850-1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 86.

<sup>29</sup> The chauffeur was typically male and was a figure largely distinct from other servants, working out-with the walls of the main house. The gendering of the chauffeur role is an intriguing case, for during the First World War many young women, irrespective of class, worked as chauffeurs. Peter Craddick-Adams notes the establishment of the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps in 1917 that offered jobs for ‘women to serve as chauffeurs, clerks, telephonists, waitresses, cooks, and as instructors.’ See P. Craddick-Adams, ‘Women at War: ‘She soldiers’ Through the Ages’, BBC History, War and Conflict (2005),

that domestic service was an anachronism in the early twentieth century. He is instead a revisionary agent, representing a modern kind of servant, who possesses an innovative set of skills.

However, the relationship between technology, domestic service and the transformation of social structures is not straightforward.<sup>30</sup> Whilst accepting that technological developments were altering the world of domestic service,<sup>31</sup> these texts by Henry Green and Elizabeth Bowen attribute negative, transgressive potentialities to technology, thereby serving to complicate or critique any narrative of effortless social transition. Modernist movements had celebrated the car as offering mechanized possibilities for the enhancement of human capacity;<sup>32</sup> the car is plainly the main instrument of Prothero's advancement as well as a telling motif in the story.<sup>33</sup> Manifesting the combined modern fetishes of conspicuous consumption and travel,<sup>34</sup> the car presents Prothero with a number of chances for opportunistic and heinous behaviour. More generalizable technologies of the home have proved less attractive for critics to investigate, although mechanisation unquestionably has the

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[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/wars\\_conflict/home\\_front/women\\_at\\_war\\_10.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/wars_conflict/home_front/women_at_war_10.shtml)  
J) Women also worked as drivers in the WRAF (Women's Royal Auxiliary Force). Following the war, however, with the increase in private car ownership amongst the wealthy, and the re-establishment of gender roles in peacetime employment, the garage became the province of the male servant.

<sup>30</sup> Ruth Schwartz Cowan cites the central dilemma – the impossibility of distinguishing whether the absence of servants gave rise to the increase in technologisation of the home, or vice versa. See Ruth Schwartz Cowan, 'The "Industrial Revolution" in the Home: Household Technology and Social Change in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century', *Technology and Culture*, 17, 1 (Jan, 1976), pp. 1-23, available at [http://econ2.econ.iastate.edu/classes/econ321/Orazem/cowan\\_household\\_tech.pdf](http://econ2.econ.iastate.edu/classes/econ321/Orazem/cowan_household_tech.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> This question is considered by a number of social historians, amongst them Lethbridge and Horsfield, both of whom counter the position of Bourke. (See introduction.)

<sup>32</sup> See Armstrong. p. 86.

<sup>33</sup> Cars (or any other vehicle) are frequent motifs in Bowen's writing, where they are inevitably significant as symbols of change – for instance Matchett's taxi ride in *Death of the Heart* (referred to in the chapter on the Housekeeper); also the train journey opening of *To the North* (1932) followed by the negligent speeding car deaths that end the novel. David Trotter calls *To the North* 'knowingly a novel of modern life'. See too Trotter, p. 73. Armstrong creates a debate over technology and modernism and the means by which technologies, even such as prosthetics, are employed in reconstructing selves – but his study focuses on 'high' modernists and as a result Henry Green and Elizabeth Bowen are neglected. See Armstrong.

<sup>34</sup> Deborah Parsons identifies the impetus for a journey, for travel, and links it to commodification. (She also discusses *To the North*.) See Parsons, pp. 70-72.

propensity to alter the character of domestic tasks,<sup>35</sup> making them quicker and eliminating the element of drudgery, arguably improving the lives of the working man and woman. Debate has been sparked though, regarding the uptake of labour-saving devices such as the washing machine and vacuum cleaner, with some cultural critics questioning the impact of such developments, attesting that the prevalence of domestic servants in wealthier British households delayed their introduction and rendered their impact negligible;<sup>36</sup> Lethbridge asserts the nebulous quality of Englishness as a detractor for early adoption, saying that: ‘So deep was felt to be the Englishness of the master-servant relationship that domestic technology was far slower to catch hold in Britain than in America or Continental Europe.’<sup>37</sup> Notwithstanding, the manufacturers of such technologies nevertheless observed the link between their products and the domestic servant, which they strived to exploit. One Manchester department store even claimed that ‘vacuum cleaners will solve the servant problem.’<sup>38</sup> As a result, early vacuum cleaners and similar technologies bore ‘typical servant’ names,<sup>39</sup> such as the ‘Betty Anne’ and the ‘Daisy’.<sup>40</sup>



Figure 1: This advertisement from the Daily Mail’s 1920 Ideal Home Exhibition shows the ‘Our Susan’ mop, being used by a smiling maid, who has been objectified to such a degree that a mop-head is seen protruding from the top of her head.

<sup>35</sup> The physical results of mechanisation were reified by modernist artists and writers such as the (Italian) Futurists. Again, see Armstrong.

<sup>36</sup> Hamlett, p. 117.

<sup>37</sup> Lethbridge, *Servants*, p.7.

<sup>38</sup> Such was the strapline of a 1919 Baxendales advert in the *Manchester Guardian*, as cited by Todd, *The People*, p. 43.

<sup>39</sup> This ‘naming’ of household technologies after the servants who might use (or not) the product, ties back to the notion that the servants’ names were often selected by their employers (see the chapter on the Lady’s Maid). Naming connotes ownership and in this instance ironically double connotes ownership – i.e. here is a product to which we have given that name that you also chose to give to your servant.

<sup>40</sup> Lethbridge, *Servants*, p.187. Delap refers to the ‘Our Susan’ mop (pictured in an advertisement shown in Figure 1). See Delap, *Knowing their Place*, p. 113.



**YOU CAN AFFORD IT**

THE AUTO-MAID is a Cleaner that has been tested, proved and accepted as a necessity by every Modern Housewife. It is very light on current, and the most delicate fabrics can be effectively freed from dust without injury. Owing to our economies in selling, we are able to offer these new De Luxe Models at a price to suit your pockets.

NEW DE LUXE MODEL  
CASH PRICE

**£7-7-0 Complete**

or Deferred Terms can be arranged. On receipt of £11:1:0 we will forward Machine to your address, when your payments will be seven monthly instalments of £1:1:0 each, making £8:8:0 in all.

**AUTO MAID**  
ELECTRIC VACUUM CLEANER

A FULL TWELVE MONTHS' WRITTEN GUARANTEE IS GIVEN WITH EVERY CLEANER. Should any Machine require attention after this period, SPARE PARTS ARE KEPT IN STOCK.

Write Now:

**MOORE & CO.,**  
51 ST. PAUL'S STREET, LEEDS, YORKS  
Also 51 CLYDE PLACE, GLASGOW




Figure 2: This later advertisement is for the 'Auto Maid' vacuum cleaner. The nomenclature emphasises that the appliance is a replacement for the human maid, with added reliability in its 'automatic' qualities. It also brings to the fore the discussion of the 'robotic' qualities of the servant: the alternative nomenclature is the 'automaton'.

Nomenclature offered a means whereby the tools of a newly-technologised world could be overwritten by the ideology of the old order. Certainly in the earliest

advertisements the maids, rather than their mistresses, were pictured using the models.<sup>41</sup> It mattered little. Employers saw no necessity for purchasing expensive labour-saving equipment only to give an advantage to those below stairs;<sup>42</sup> 'the more labour-intensive the house was seen to be, the more it was seen as upholding the values of the old world order, for human effort was on the whole considered vastly preferable to modern amenities';<sup>43</sup> finally social historian Margaret Horsfield asserts that 'the exchange of maids for machinery in the household probably never happened.'<sup>44</sup>

The situation was sharply differentiated for the chauffeur. Those technologies that were solely for use in the domestic interior conferred less social capital on their users than status-fuelling

<sup>41</sup> And in Figure 1 the maid and the model are seen as conjoined.

See Delap, *Knowing their Place*, p. 41.

<sup>43</sup> Lethbridge, *Servants*, p. 7; in addition Lethbridge observes that 'too much newness became regarded as vulgar', p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> Margaret Horsfield, *Biting the Dust: The Joys of Housework* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), p. 75. Horsfield asserts that early appliances were advertised with the emphasis on helping the household to keep servants. (See also Adrian Forty's excellent *Objects of Desire*.)

technologies associated with the patriarchal realm beyond the doors of the home; domestic technologies were also perceived to be 'safer' than the car. For, the motorcar was envisioned as a machine that was attractive in and of itself, and conspicuous proprietorial consumption rendered the item a status symbol for the wealthy servant-keeper. Certain qualities of the automobile made it the perfect vehicle for misbehaviour.<sup>45</sup> Bowen's fictional vehicle is the property of old-school mistress Mrs Archworth, whose preference is to sit in the back seat of the car, issuing commands to 'her' chauffeur. Class determines the significance of spaces inside the car, similar to the rooms and demesnes of the house; here the servant is separated from the employer by a sliding glass screen.<sup>46</sup> The chauffeur Prothero, whose service position it determines, drives the car most frequently. Others implicit in the car's use demonstrate the changing appropriation of the machinery and its movement between upper class, servant and middle class. The daughter of the house, Davina, takes it occasionally without permission; in Davina both the foibles and inadequacies of the younger generation of the ruling classes are apparent: she is 'the fag end of the Bright Young People'.<sup>47</sup> The narrative suggests that for her 'to earn was out of the question'; as a result the lazy girl subsists in an 'agony of impatience', pending the arrival of a rich suitor or the permanent departure of her aunt. The car offers Davina the chance to leave the house in search of the pointless entertainment of the rich. In a central section of the story she appropriates the car, for exactly this purpose, but crucially her driver is her new middle class 'incomer' friend Marianne. Davina insists that Marianne drives - significantly she prefers to be driven by her new middle class friend than by the

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<sup>45</sup> One can drive 'badly', however, one is unlikely to use a Hoover with malicious intent.

<sup>46</sup> This same dichotomy is revisited several times by Bowen, for example at the end of *The Death of the Heart*, with Matchett isolated from the taxi driver as she speeds to save Portia, as well as notably in the short story 'The Demon Lover' where again a female passenger is imprisoned in the back seat at the mercy of an unknown and terrifyingly Other taxi driver.

<sup>47</sup> Stewart, p. 148.

chauffeur.<sup>48</sup> The aristocratic youth rejects the accepted, comfortable former master-servant dichotomy in favour of a new relationship in which the malleable middle class performs an erstwhile servant function. Technology that infers the possibility of class mobility actually confers regression or stagnation.<sup>49</sup>

Prothero, who as sole male and manservant in the Archworth household ought to represent a point of safety, instead disrespects the established order and behaves appallingly towards his mistresses. But, again confounding expectations, the upper class are seen to desire, and even require, bad behaviour on the part of their subordinates:

He was forbiddingly faultless, a careful driver, he did not grumble, make love to the maids or expect beer. Mrs Archworth could never be certain why she did not like him better, or why his proximity while he was tucking her into the car, his way of receiving orders, even the set of his shoulders and back of his ears as he drove, should fill her with a resentful uneasiness.<sup>50</sup>

The collation of 'forbiddingly faultless' expresses the duality of the aristocracy's position. Alarming the domestic powers that be, 'faultlessness' suggests that by achieving perfection in their duties the lower orders might be aggrandized to something akin to equality with their masters. They require a degree of embryonic dissent or 'fault' in their subordinates in order to substantiate, or bolster, the superiority of their position.

So, the perfection displayed by Prothero's appearance and his quiet demeanour and behaviour is problematic. His role-playing is so convincing, his qualities so excellent, that his mistress has cause, counter-intuitively, to doubt him. A true member of the working class could be put up for criticism by their 'betters' which is what, in effect, renders their superiors 'better': perfection in an 'other' is threatening. Prothero's obsequious appearance cannot mask a behaviour that is

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<sup>48</sup> Davina is furthermore a poor driver: an additional framing of the inadequacy of aristocratic youth.

<sup>49</sup> See Schwartz Cowan, pp. 1-23.

<sup>50</sup> Bowen, *The Collected Stories*, p. 380.

unnatural to him; the mistress senses the difference between a true servant and an excellent mimic. Despite his outward credibility, a subtlety in the relationship between mistress and servant that exposes him:

His face was always shadowless, abstract, and null; a face remembered as being unmemorable. The only look he gave you was level and unmoving. Though she got all she paid for, she could not feel he was hers.<sup>51</sup>

It seems that in Mrs Archworth's case, the aristocracy looks for 'character' in their servants.<sup>52</sup> Character implies foibles and failings, both of which can be used by the structures of the household to create manageable subservience. 'Character' is a conflicting opposite to the lack of personality suggested by the 'shadowless' face of Prothero. An 'abstract' face is unknowable, unpredictable, and provokes class fear. Such a 'shadowless' visage is indicative of self-control: the self-possession behind a class-constructed carapace of 'flat peaked cap and blue collar'. Impassive features combined with the ubiquity of uniform allow the servant the leisure of anonymity, whilst radiating a powerful threat of otherness to his 'owner'.

However, despite the uniform that he dons to appear servant-like, Prothero is unable to 'pass' comprehensively as one of the servant class and hide his iniquitous nature from the eyes of the old, established and experienced mistress. The trope of 'passing' is adopted from the theory of Franz Fanon and Nella Larsen's Harlem Renaissance novel *Passing*;<sup>53</sup> Fanon and Larsen use the term to describe how someone of one skin colour might 'pass' as having an identity associated with a different colour.<sup>54</sup> Expounded here it

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Character in this instance is differentiated from the 'character' that a mistress supplies by way of a reference for a servant, as discussed earlier in the chapter.

<sup>53</sup> Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2008); Nella Larsen, *Passing* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004).

<sup>54</sup> Both are discussed together, for instance by Steven Belluscio, *To be Suddenly White: Literary Realism and Racial Passing* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006), and Steve Pile, 'Skin, race and space: the clash of bodily schemas in Frantz Fanon's *Black*

conceptualises that an individual might 'pass' as a servant, and even 'pass' as honest.<sup>55</sup> Mrs Archworth dislikes Prothero's 'proximity' and is 'resentful' in her uneasiness about the servant: whilst his actions and his clothing are those of a servant, she has experience enough of managing domestic help that she perceives another quality in this man. That 'proximity while he was tucking her into the car', is not the closeness of a regular servant. His intimacy, including the exceptional physical closeness of the 'back of his ears while he drove' inculcates her 'resentful uneasiness'. Resentment is an inappropriate response for a mistress towards a servant, representing a dissonant reversal, one of many that Bowen operates in this story. The fraudster is incapable of concealing his non-servile nature from one who has been familiar with domestic servants since childhood, from one who thoroughly comprehends the Servant Problem. Her lifetime's experience as a mistress gives Mrs Archworth an innate understanding of the expected characteristics of a chauffeur, and by identifying the lack of true servility behind his mask of subservience she sees something of the personality he seeks to obfuscate. Prothero fails in completely 'passing'; Mrs Archworth recognizes an inconsistency but cannot decipher the possible truth about her servant. She simply considers that "There was something unlikely about him, and she mistrusted the odd."<sup>56</sup> She has an innate mistrust of 'otherness'; this combines with her experience of servants, to suggest that Prothero is not what he seems:

His manner had not that alacrity to which she was accustomed; always on the polite side of surly, he was at the same time unsmiling and taciturn.<sup>57</sup>

This is a further demonstration of Mrs Archworth 'doubly knowing' the nature of her two-faced manservant. He has two sides, 'polite' and

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*Skins, White Masks and Nella Larsen's Passing*, *Cultural Geographies*, 18, 1 (2011), pp. 25-41.

<sup>55</sup> See Elaine K. Ginsberg, *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (New Haven: Harvard University Press, 1999); Belluscio.

<sup>56</sup> Bowen, *The Collected Stories*, p. 380.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

yet 'taciturn', and she perceives them both. Likewise, although his mistress reduces him to an object – an object - in the exchange relationship, reflecting that 'she got all she paid for', through maintaining his 'abstract' demeanour Prothero is able to resist commodification, for Mrs Archworth 'could not feel he was hers'.

So, whilst he works against the strictures of his position and class, and his attitude is recognizably not that of a desirable servant in the eyes of his employer, the supply and demand issues central to the servant question mean that Mrs Archworth must keep Prothero on, and be glad. Interdependent and complex, the mistress-manservant relationship becomes further problematised by technology.

Mrs Archworth's car is the epitome in commercialism, which when employed by the psychopathic, greedy Prothero, suggests the insidious infiltration of commodification and new money into British society in the early decades of the twentieth century. Nicholas Daly expresses this notion succinctly, saying that: 'demonized commercialism focuses anxieties about the power of new money to disrupt traditional status hierarchies.'<sup>58</sup> Adding the catalyst of the young aristocratic upstart Davina into the crucible, Bowen's chauffeur exposes a three-way relationship between commercialism, new money and sex. Their stand-off reveals this:

The two stood looking up; the staircase creaked again, and Prothero still said nothing. Davina advanced with a nervous swaggering movement and put one foot on the stairs. She began: 'Look here –'

He said, uncivilly: 'Well?'

She dug her hands into her pockets. 'I want some more money,' she said with a casual air.

He shifted his cigarette. 'What,' he said, 'now? Tonight?'

'Naturally,' said Davina...[....] He turned back into his room, and Davina, with automatic swiftness and energy, went springing upstairs after him...[....] before the last stroke finished Davina was down again. She caught Marianne by

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<sup>58</sup> Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 28.

the elbow and ran her across the yard. They paused by the lamp a minute; Davina held a crackling note close up to Marianne's face. 'That is that,' she said.<sup>59</sup>

By paying her for kisses Prothero exploits Davina's frustrated and misplaced sexual desires, feeds her hunger for money, and turns her into his prostitute. He also reverses the correct flow of capital from mistress to servant, disrupting the configuration and order of status as Daly suggests,<sup>60</sup> in undermining their social contract by paying the mistress for her 'services rendered'. Fetishisation of the servant's uniform combines with the power relationship of mistress and servant to exacerbate the deviance of their liaison. However, like her aunt, Davina senses something skewed, concealed beneath Prothero's behaviour. Her resulting attempts to blackmail him go horribly awry: her flaws are magnified to the detriment of her aristocratic primacy:

'Well?' said he.  
'What about that message?'  
'What about that money?'  
'That's no way to talk - whoever you are.'  
'It was good enough for you last night - whoever I am.'  
She said contemptuously: 'I was in a hurry.'  
'Oh come,' said he, 'we had quite a pleasant chat.'  
His light eyes and her dark eyes met implacably.<sup>61</sup>

In this attempt to confront a transgressor through the use of further violation, selling her kisses in a dangerous conflation of class, sex and money, Davina's moral superiority is questioned and negated. The parallelism of their dialogue, their use of identical lexis and the similar transgressive meanings that they infer to one another, demonstrate that they operate on the same level.

Their similarities connote a connection between them, which is then realised in their eyes meeting 'implacably'. They reach an impasse: a draw. She makes the mistake of thinking that she can blackmail him, but he double bluffs her and chooses to withhold his

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<sup>59</sup> Bowen, *The Collected Stories*, p. 382.

<sup>60</sup> Daly, p. 28.

<sup>61</sup> Bowen, *The Collected Stories*, p. 406.

sexual favours: the reversal of Davina's sexual subservience passes power back to Prothero. According to Stewart, the ending implies that these characters reach a position of equality; that Davina and Prothero 'achieve if not a rapprochement then a stalemate'.<sup>62</sup> He tells her 'You keep your place, Miss Archworth and I'll keep mine.'<sup>63</sup> Stewart goes on to interpret this 'stalemate' as marking the ending of the story and as a reflection upon class, on 'place':

Although these comments imply a neutralisation of any threat that Prothero might have posed to Davina, they also serve as a reminder that keeping one's place is difficult in a society in which that place is being encroached upon both literally and figuratively. Not only do political and economic uncertainties threaten to upset accepted notions of what one's 'place' might be, but the violence characteristic of wartime refuses to be contained, spilling over into a peace that, in the early 1930s, was already beginning to look fragile.<sup>64</sup>

As the critic notes, the interaction between Prothero and Davina, incorporating the intensified antagonism of the immoral chauffeur, depicts an amplification of class anxieties. Prothero has taken his leave of Davina, turning his back on her and the 'hasty sale of her kisses', in a rejection that emphasizes both his position of strength with respect to his young mistress, and his desire to assert his own identity. However, I contend that the story's most critical inferences are made in the following lines, rather than in that 'stalemate' stressed by Stewart. The passage continues:

She went to the archway and called up the hollow staircase: "Who are you?"

"My own man," he said and shut his door vigorously.<sup>65</sup>

In the forcefulness of his parting words and the action of closing the door on the past, Prothero attempts to reject his role as servant by asserting his identity. Yet that identity is a falsified one. The 'chauffeur' remains under the roof of his mistress, and the car belongs to Mrs Archworth: his identity remains firmly fixed in the servant-

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<sup>62</sup> Stewart, p. 150.

<sup>63</sup> Bowen, *The Collected Stories*, p. 406.

<sup>64</sup> Stewart, pp. 150-151.

<sup>65</sup> Bowen, *The Collected Stories*, p. 407.



master dyad and out-with his control. He is not free to eschew his appropriated position, or transcend the challenging notion of 'place'.

Prothero can on one hand be interpreted as an embodiment of those threatening 'political and economic uncertainties', whose potential is rendered menacing through a propensity for violence that 'refuses to be contained.'<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, by thoroughly considering the narrative's subtexts exploring the servant question and the contemporary technological transition, Bowen's representation can be interrogated a degree further than Stewart's argument. Because the employer *owns* the technology and grants its use, and despite his protestations of selfhood, the servant-master dialectic is critical to Prothero's continuing existence and therefore no discernible negotiation of class takes place. Extending Stewart's reading to take in Prothero's final assertion of his identity amplifies a number of points from her analysis, but critically adds a final tenet: class will persist. Bowen's moral tale is one in which progress is unpredictable and even proceeds along lines that may be amoral: furthermore her characterisation challenges assumptions of class, particularly criticising the incarnation of a feckless new upper class. The old is presented as trustworthy and moralistic but anachronistic, preferring to remain within its self-appointed boundaries, unseeing, fearful and reactionary. Prothero, meanwhile, is representative of a possible new and contentious working class, who consider themselves empowered to assume and assert their independence through their control and rejection of sexual and financial gratification: a prospect surely terrifying to the old order. Technology is an enabler of malevolence and disavowal, rather than a straightforward agent of improvement in the working life of the servant. The cultural and technological advances Bowen depicts in this story shy away from any narrative of positive progressive ubiquity. Hierarchy hangs on by a thread. Fortunately for Mrs Archworth she owns the car.

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<sup>66</sup> Stewart, pp. 150-151.

Bowen and Green's writing careers ran parallel for three decades. Reviewing Green's autobiographical novel, *Back*, she suggested that he was: 'nearer than almost any other to the spirit and what one might call the central nerve of our time (though there are, as you may at once protest, a dozen others who seem more widely topical).'<sup>67</sup> Green's resistance to any straightforward periodization has made him slippery for literary critics,<sup>68</sup> although Mackay, who attested to his difficulty, later declared him to be an 'early postmodernist'.<sup>69</sup> His most recent critic, Marius Hentea, returns to the topic of Green's status as a modernist, identifying the presence of both realist and modernist elements in his work, saying that, 'By straddling two literary worlds, modernism and realism, that have long been considered inhospitable and contradictory, Green's fiction raises the question of how opposed these two poles are.'<sup>70</sup> Although such debates are useful in comprehending the underlying points of contention amongst cultural criticism of this period, the reading suggested here eschews such classifications and nomenclature, instead considering servant representations against class contexts in order to reveal textual ideology that questions assumptions of social transformation.

Henry Green's 1945 novel focuses upon a household of servants, shipped to Eire from wartime England to maintain an ancestral country house.<sup>71</sup> It has been argued that 'all of Green's books deal with situations of communion and isolation, within and across

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<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Bowen's review of Green's *Back*, *Tatler*, 27 November 1946. See Hentea, *Henry Green*, p. 128, also quoted by Feigel, who writes at length on Bowen.

<sup>68</sup> For example, Green is excluded from the taxonomy of modernism by Michael Levenson, in his 2011 *Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. For a discussion of the difficulty of placing Green into any specific 'movement' see Marina Mackay, *Modernism and World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 97.

<sup>69</sup> Marina Mackay, 'Is your journey really necessary?: Going Nowhere in Late Modernist London', *PMLA*, 124, 5 (2009), pp. 1600-13, p. 1605.

<sup>70</sup> Hentea, *Henry Green*, p. 129.

<sup>71</sup> Kiberd's suggestion that the British framed Ireland as a 'foil to set off English virtues' resonates with Green's setting. See Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of a Modern Nation* (London: Random House, 2009), p. 1.

boundaries of social class.<sup>72</sup> The servant group in this novel is certainly isolated, as the mistress and her daughter make only occasional visits to the household in Eire, leaving the domestic arrangements largely to the oversight of the newly promoted butler, Raunce. Anxieties over household ordering, appearances, deception and duplicity play out in a narrative in which the servant question predominates. Having employed the economic anxieties of his mistress to achieve his status, Raunce proceeds to further threaten domestic security and continuation through his transgression, resulting in a narrative that, like 'The Disinherited', problematises the immediate post-war account of positive social advancement.

The availability of a quality butler resonated as a particularly challenging 'servant question' for the upper class through the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>73</sup> Socio-historical evidence delineates the decreasing male servant population, which fell from 0.63% to 0.59% of the population in one decade alone, from 1851-1861. In the same time period female servants as a percentage of the population rose from 4.47% to 4.91% demonstrating that female servants outnumbered males by more than eight to one;<sup>74</sup> by the time of the Second World War those men who remained in domestic service were in high demand.<sup>75</sup> The relationship between conscription and the supply of servants provides the socio-historical context to *Loving*, and additionally helps to determine the setting of the novel. Set in a castle in English ownership in neutral Ireland, the male servant characters work in surroundings beyond the reach of the

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<sup>72</sup> John Russell, *Henry Green: Nine novels and an unpacked bag* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1960), p.11.

<sup>73</sup> Pugh, *We Danced All Night*, p. 86.

<sup>74</sup> Leonard Schwartz, 'English Servants and their employers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', *Economic History Review*, 52, 2 (1999), p. 249.

<sup>75</sup> Although those men who remained in service tended to be those deemed too old, or unfit, for the draft. By 1942 all men between the ages of 18 and 51 were eligible to be called up for service. Servants were not in one of the exempted groups. Women between 20 and 30 were also called up for war service.

British authorities.<sup>76</sup> Green's butler Raunce is understood to be using the Irish location of his position specifically to avoid the draft.<sup>77</sup> The cowardice implicit in Raunce's choice to remain in Eire is critiqued when his young pantry-boy Albert, the servant to whom he is teaching the ropes, disappears to join up.

Domestic fluidity in the family of the employer and amongst the servant body illuminates the highly and acutely circumstantial nature of social development. Demonstrating this, the peculiarities of servant supply and demand(s) during the Second World War become an issue not only discussed by the mistress of the house, but also a driver in the morally questionable lengths to which she goes in order to maintain her dominant social place. Servant scarcity is a pressing issue for this mistress of the house, Mrs Tennant, for whom the servant question means that 'everything now is the most frightful dilemma, always.'<sup>78</sup> It is a driving factor in Raunce's ascendance to the position of butler: with servants brought from England to Eire, and increasing anxiety over the Irish, the mistress has no option but to make him butler following Eldon's death. As she describes, 'Things are really becoming detestable in these big houses.' In the certain knowledge that back in England servants were not exempted from

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<sup>76</sup> Whilst Eire was a neutral nation, Northern Ireland also offered a bolt-hole for those avoiding the draft, as the province remained outside British conscription legislation. The setting, and the absence of significant, articulate Irish voices in the novel, led Marina Mackay to accuse Green of complicity with colonialism. See MacKay, *Modernism and World War II*, p. 106.

<sup>77</sup> An example from a social documentary source of the time describes another butler 'passing' as something he was not, in order to avoid the draft. One of the Mass Observation contributors from 1941 was a National Panel diarist who had taken on a wartime role as a female gardener in a servant-depleted country house. She comments on the conscription-avoidance of the house's butler in her entry for 25 April:

Great amusement today as the butler turned out in a brand new boiler suit and cap and is to learn to work the water pump from the engineer. He is usually dressed a la butler and very pompous. We understand it is to avoid military service and be called an engineer and essential to the water plant.

The boiler suit and cap provide this butler with the means to pass as an engineer – someone who could not be spared for war duties. Source of quote above: Calder, Angus and Dorothy Sheridan, *Speak for Yourself: A Mass-Observation Anthology 1937-49* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), p. 170. Mass Observation was a sociological qualitative data collection movement started in the 1930s by Tom Harrison. Just how many men fled England for Ireland to avoid conscription is not known.

<sup>78</sup> Henry Green, *Loving* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 185.

National Service, by providing work in Ireland for an entire household the mistress is complicit herself in providing the opportunity for her male servants to avoid conscription. She exempts herself from criticism on moral grounds by attesting:

In a way I regard this as my war work, maintaining the place I mean. Because we're practically in enemy country here you know and I do consider it so important from the morale point of view to keep up appearances. This country has been ruined by people who did not live on their estates.<sup>79</sup>

It is the mistress's duty then, to keep her estate running, at whatever cost, including her collusion in enabling the male staff to avoid conscription. With the morals of the old order making way for the necessity of morale, in this 'keeping up of appearances' Mrs Tennant, like others in her class, is willing to sacrifice everything else.<sup>80</sup> The war creates unlikely scenarios and clusters of selfish complicity, in this example exposing the mis-behaviour of servant and mistress alike, amplified by their conspiracy. Critic John Russell insists that Green's representations of rich and working class share a fundamental similarity, suggesting that both cohorts 'try too hard to get too much'.<sup>81</sup> In this novel mistress and employees conspire in the preservation of class.<sup>82</sup>

Raunce presents an additional complication to any account of social transformation, since from the outset his position relies on his immutability.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>80</sup> See Earle Labor, 'Henry Green's Web of Loving', *Critique* (Fall, 1960), pp. 29-40, p.33.

<sup>81</sup> As Russell says: 'It would be an injustice to Green to suggest that he deals categorically with the working classes and the rich, placing one in a promising and the other in a chilling light. Some of his working-class people exhibit the same basic fault as their wealthier counterparts. They try too hard to get too much.' See Russell, p. 97.

<sup>82</sup> Servant-mistress complicity is one example of an attempt to evade any slippage towards the 'feared lack of control always inherent in the master/servant relationship', see Wilson, p. 5.

Raunce's butler-inheritance resists all external impetus for change: the Tennant family's butlers have endured through generations.<sup>83</sup> We picture a comic cultural convention that recurs, receding into the distant past; when one butler dies, the senior footman is swiftly promoted into that position, to replace him.<sup>84</sup> Context speaks of a butler who might see out his whole life in the service of his employers: the novel depicts this process, and the transition from butler-in-waiting to butler, emphasizing the prospect of one 'Arthur' becoming the next 'Mr'. Mrs Tennant, the seldom-seen lady of the house, hails Raunce with her specially designated footman signifier, sourced from the experience of decades of servant keeping:

'Oh yes I rang didn't I Arthur,' she said and he was called by that name as every footman from the first had been called, whose name had really been Arthur, all the Toms, Harrys, Percys, Victors one after the other, all called Arthur.<sup>85</sup>

Naming each and every footman 'Arthur' establishes that signifier to represent the signified footman; it is a system understood by the servants, who by virtue of their servitude belong to the speech community of their mistress Mrs Tennant. The mistress-employer's surname is also a powerful signifier, connoting the transient 'tenancy' of Mrs Tennant.<sup>86</sup> Green's contemporary Rosamond Lehmann

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<sup>83</sup> Hentea's analysis considers Green's generational writing, and his sense of writing within an era, suggesting he was 'concerned with being faithful to the times he lived in.' Hentea, *Henry Green*, p.8.

<sup>84</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro's 1992 novel *The Remains of the Day* interrogates the passing from one generation to the next, in service, with Stevens' father employed in a lesser capacity in the house in which he is butler. The father dies, during what Stevens perceives to be a critical meal at which his presence is required. Stevens misses the occasion, and finds in the course of the novel that his misplaced duty and servility have left resulted in a life of sterility. John Brannigan comments on the novel and notes this species of local colonialism. See Brannigan, *Orwell to the Present*, p.81.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* Note Green's comma use. He frequently runs clauses together in this manner 'she said and he was called by that name as every footman from the first had been called'. Meaning is thus encapsulated in a flowing synergistic whole, with commas for emphasis between the names, showing the list of different identities (proper nouns) eradicated by the naming of the mistress. (The same effect is also achieved by retaining the 'y' at the end of 'Harrys, Percys'. Each was a single identity, a 'Harry' rather than conflating the individual into a group by using the usual plural of 'y' in 'Harries'. This 'conflation' is precisely Mrs Tennant's goal in naming her 'Arthurs'. Conflation arguably reduces – thereby rendering ease of control.

<sup>86</sup> See Hentea, *Henry Green*, p. 41.

commented on the relationship between dialogue and class in *Loving*, pointing out that:

on the Servant's Hall side the class language of circumlocution, ambiguity, rhetorical flourish, of deviously approach to the end in view; all the verbal taboos and traditional tags and saws; on the drawing-room side the habit of incoherence, tentativeness, over-emphasis, the obsessive modish portmanteau words. Rarely do any of them speak out with certainty and clarity. Even to their own.<sup>87</sup>

Lehmann indicates that language is used as much to obfuscate as to clarify in the novel, although it is always employed with recognition of the status of the interlocutors. Intriguingly at this early point in the novel, in his dialogue Raunce adeptly employs the simplified traditional relationship of butler and mistress for his own benefit. Using the powerful hidden agenda of the servant question he threatens to leave in order to achieve the change in signifier that must be negotiated with his employer and class superior, Mrs Tennant:

'Might I speak with you for a moment Madam?'

'Yes, Arthur, what is it?'

'I'm sure I would not want to cause any inconvenience but I desire to give my notice.'

She could not see Violet because he was in the way. So she glared at the last button but one of his waistcoat, on a level with her daughter-in-law's head behind him. He had been standing with arms loosed at his sides and now a hand came uncertainly to find if he was done up and having found dropped back.

'What, Arthur?' she asked. She seemed exasperated. 'Just when I'm like this when this has happened to Eldon?'

'The place won't be the same without him Madam'....

Her daughter-in-law's silence seemed to imply that all effort was to butt one's head against wire netting. Charley stood firm. Mrs T. turned. With her back to the light he could not see her mouth and nose.

'Very well then,' she announced, 'I suppose we shall have to call you Raunce.'

'Thank you Madam.'

'Think it over will you?' She was smiling. 'Mind I've said nothing about more wages.' She dropped her eyes...<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Rosamond Lehmann, 'An Absolute Gift', *TLS* (6 Aug 1954), p. xli.

<sup>88</sup> Green, *Loving*, pp. 9-10.

In this exchange we see Raunce negotiate over his name (signifier) and thereby his role (signified). Change in one determines change in the other. The control of the name rests with the employer, whilst Raunce uses his only bargaining tool – the threat of withdrawing his labour – to negotiate some power. Green describes a butler who uses the contemporary economic scarcity of the male servant for personal empowerment.<sup>89</sup>

Considering both the context of production of literature featuring the figure of the butler, and those literary representations themselves, such characterisations tend to bolster rather than destabilise domestic order, whilst class is self-consciously addressed through a reversal of expectations regarding the intellectual capacities of master and servant. Historically the butler occupies a unique position in the make-up of the household and the servant body, occupying a 'place' at the head of the servants;<sup>90</sup> meanwhile the distance between the butler and his employer is less than the corresponding gap between the other servants and their master or mistress, chiefly because the butler was empowered to hire and fire household staff.<sup>91</sup> Such a singularity of position, between employer and staff, extends to expectations with respect to his behaviour. Lethbridge attests that the butler 'led by example, representing the moral and social values of the drawing room to those beneath him.'<sup>92</sup> This cultural context resonates with that most reputable, and popular, of literary butlers – Jeeves – although Wodehouse's most famous creation works in a deceptively straightforward manner to shore up the established, comforting composition of his milieu.<sup>93</sup> Contradicting the indicators of social change, the comedic butlers of these literary

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<sup>89</sup> However, Raunce's complicated relationship with authority is simultaneously apparent, as he also presents himself as deferential, calling the mistress 'Madam?' several times, almost to excess.

<sup>90</sup> Horn, *Life Below Stairs*, p. 60.

<sup>91</sup> Lethbridge, *Servants*.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>93</sup> Wodehouse's infamous Jeeves made his first appearance in a short story published in 1915, 'Extricating Young Gussie' and butlered for the last time in the 1974 novel *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*.



exemplars are seen to sustain their roles.<sup>94</sup> The butler represents a crucial point of interaction – he answers doors, passes letters and messages, arranges transport and oversees the day-to-day running of the household.<sup>95</sup> Although the requisite servility of these menservants continues to prop up class, the complex, troublesome interdependence between master and servant renders their interrelationships querulously humorous. In both Barrie's *Admirable Crichton* and with Wodehouse's creation Jeeves, the butler works to expose the inadequacy of the upper class, but in neither does the butler manifestly transgress against his employer: he does not challenge his place in the social structure. Bertie is Jeeves' superior in class terms, although his inferior in intelligence and common sense. Hamlett believes this feature accounts for the popularity of PG Wodehouse's Jeeves novels, attesting that this 'was partly based on the social reversal of the incompetent employer and masterly valet'.<sup>96</sup> Similar reversal pertains to the situation of Bullivant, the butler in Ivy Compton Burnett's *Manservant and Maidservant* (1947).<sup>97</sup> Bullivant supports the superiority of his master and mistress, but above all he supports the unerring, unchanging continuation of domestic service. This is succinctly demonstrated in his idea of a servant's necessary characteristics: 'His duty and his simple respect will suffice.'<sup>98</sup> Critic Bruce Robbins, specifying a link between these two clever but traditional butlers, purports that Bullivant:

exhibit[s] powers of worldly-wise perspicacity and sturdy eloquence that even Jeeves might find it hard to beat on a good day.<sup>99</sup>

Even though in Wodehouse the master has become the 'stooge' of the servant, each party continues in his respective position. The

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<sup>94</sup> In the 21<sup>st</sup> century butlers still represent a significant number of the domestic service positions advertised in *The Lady* magazine.

<sup>95</sup> See Lethbridge, *Servants*, pp. 52-53; and Horn, *Life Below Stairs*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>96</sup> Hamlett, p. 153.

<sup>97</sup> Published in 1947, but set in an unspecified period resembling the late-Victorian or Edwardian era, Compton Burnett's novel was titled *Bullivant and the Lambs* for a North American audience deemed less *au fait* with the inferences of servant dynamics and the British class system.

<sup>98</sup> Compton Burnett, *Manservant and Maidservant*, p. 94.

<sup>99</sup> See Robbins.

*appearance* and operation of the established norms of the household remain unchallenged and unchanged, despite the intellectual superiority of the employee. Similarly to these other literary examples, Raunce is on the one hand exploiting the servant question in a straightforward attempt to improve his situation.<sup>100</sup> Green's butler is keen to see the delineation of the pecking order work in *his* favour, looking to succeed in establishing himself as a worthy head of the servant body. In a number of key scenes in *Loving*, servant mealtimes are the setting for significant social interaction; the butler diligently manages the domestic social ordering of the household throughout these points of convergence. In preparation for the meal at the outset of the novel, immediately following the death of the former butler, Raunce identifies the necessity to assert his primacy, saying to himself 'this time I'll take his old chair. I must.' ...At the head, empty, was the large chair from which Mr. Eldon had been accustomed to preside.<sup>101</sup> Appropriating the tools from the mahogany sideboard with which to serve the group, Raunce takes his place in Eldon's old chair.<sup>102</sup> He stands to carve, and passes the plates around, against a dialogue in which the more senior of the female staff, Agatha Burch, remonstrates with the butler over his lack of respect for the dead Eldon:

'With Mr Eldon not yet in the ground. But I'll tell you one thing,' she continued, her voice rising, 'you'll never get a Mr. out of me, not even if there is a war on.'<sup>103</sup>

There is resistance to the swift shift in social order, most notably to Raunce's elevation. The household's aging, ineffectual housekeeper Miss Burch refuses the titular alteration that confers his new butler

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<sup>100</sup> Critic Rod Mengham, discussing the novel, observes 'no advantage to the ruling class'. See Rod Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time: The Writings of Henry Green* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 116.

<sup>101</sup> Green, *Loving*, p. 14.

<sup>102</sup> Bourdieu, in discussing social space and symbolic power, describes how interactions such as this 'can mask the structures that are realized in them.' From Pierre Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Power', *Sociological Theory*, 7, 1 (Spring, 1989), pp. 14-25, p. 16.

<sup>103</sup> Green, *Loving*, p. 17.

status - 'a Mr'.<sup>104</sup> The final clause reiterates the wartime servant supply question, purporting the necessity to 'make do' with whatever was at hand (i.e. Raunce). Bickering and gossiping to one another, the older servants are averse to adaptation of the group.<sup>105</sup> Through the course of the novel the housekeeper and nanny go on to debate Raunce's suitability for his position. Agatha expresses her complaints to the nanny, Miss Swift, concerning the behaviour of the butler:

"Mrs Tennant will have fires lit to keep the rooms right for the pictures. And d'you know what I found? Why Edith and that man, the impudence, sat back in the armchairs they'd drawn to the fender. As if they owned the castle....'Your cheek my man' I said... 'There's right and wrong,' I says, "and there's no two ways about which this is."<sup>106</sup>

Steeped in the belief in a correct code of behaviour that she believes a butler should display, the elderly servant points out Raunce's appropriation of the mistress's sitting room and fireplace, and his association with the maid, as actions beyond the pale. Although Raunce has established himself at the head of the household, he struggles to win the favour of all of the members of the group.

In addition to wrangling with the domestic structure of the servant body, more like the transgressive Prothero, and less like the butlers Bullivant and Jeeves, whose superior intellects gained them very little, Raunce exploits transgressive tactics of 'passing' in subversion of the popular narrative of acceptable social and cultural revision. 'Passing' is fundamentally the behaviour of an individual that allows them to assert their membership of an alternative cultural grouping. It concerns the creation or imposition of identities, their rejection or adoption and the boundaries that can be established and

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<sup>104</sup> Marina Mackay comments on the appropriation and misappropriation that occurs during the novel, especially in dialogue. This example would support her argument. See Mackay, *Modernism and World War II*, p. 108.

<sup>105</sup> This bears comparison to the complaints of the Nanny in Elizabeth Taylor's novel *Palladian* (1949), who makes her feelings about the incoming governess known to the char. (Mind you, she also disapproves of the char.) See the chapter on the Nanny.

<sup>106</sup> Green, *Loving*, p. 122.

gives her to understand the worth/wealth he might accrue through passing as honest, despite a subtext that insists on the immorality of his behaviour. He is using his position, that of the traditional trustworthy butler, to furtively thief from his employer, with passing 'a constituent feature of class antagonism':<sup>115</sup>

'While I hold down this job I can put by something all the time.'  
'What do you put by?' she asked not looking at him; there was a short silence during which she seemed to listen intently.  
'Why a bit here and a bit there,' he said.  
'And I don't suppose it's worth the small risk there is in it,' she broke out sudden.  
'I don't know love but maybe there's two or three hundred a year one way or another all told.'  
'Pounds?' she asked making her eyes big.  
'Lovely British Bradbury's' he answered.  
'Oh Charley,' she said in admiration, 'so that's what you're on to?' <sup>116</sup>

The 'British Bradbury' to which Raunce refers was a currency only available in pound note form, from 1914-1928. His ironic mention of the Bradbury's emphasises the dishonesty in Raunce's behaviour: these notes were developed precisely to prevent fraud. Bradbury's were Treasury notes,<sup>117</sup> created to assure the bearer that they would hold their value, accruing nothing less and nothing more, against the background of a volatile gold market and unscrupulous banking activity. Raunce's recourse to a reliable currency, stolen nonetheless from his employers, to underwrite his future with Edith, is profoundly ironic. Green references a currency that is symbolic of trust and the assertion of capitalist primacy;<sup>118</sup> putting the currency into the hands of the transgressive Raunce, subjected to the economic melee of the

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<sup>115</sup> Hitchcock, p. 7.

<sup>116</sup> Green, *Loving*, p. 118.

<sup>117</sup> Named after the Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, John Bradbury, whose signature was on the notes. See [https://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight\\_objects/cm/others/£1\\_treasury\\_note.aspx](https://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/cm/others/£1_treasury_note.aspx)

<sup>118</sup> For discussion of capital in a modernist setting – and especially good on Conrad – see Carey James Mickailites, *Modernism and Market Fantasy: British Fictions of Capital 1910-1939* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). For detailed information on the gold standard and the Bradbury Committee and the introduction of the 'British Bradbury' see Robert W.D. Boyce, *British Capitalism at the Crossroads 1919-1932: A Study in Politics, Economics and Industrial Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 283-4. And Sidney Pollard, ed., *The Gold Standard and Employment Policies between the Wars* (London: Methuen, 1970).

servant question, underlines the spuriousness of faith in both the exchange system,<sup>119</sup> and in capitalism's capacity for self-correction.<sup>120</sup> The honesty of the butler is merely an act of passing – and by adopting this 'passing' performativity Raunce challenges the capital basis of the mistress-manservant exchange relationship and simultaneously the pedagogy underpinning the mistress-butler dyad.

Structures of domestic order are menaced by a more threatening form of crime: one which exemplifies his separation from the continuing narrative of societal advancement – his voyeurism. Green's butler takes up the unconditional access granted to the traditional butler, in order to spy on the household. This is apparent in a humorous scene when the employer Mrs Tennant, unable to forsake the subject of her missing ring, attempts a confrontation of the dipsomaniac cook Mrs Welch, to discern whether Raunce's pantry boy Albert might be the culprit. In a moment of high comedy, after berating the cook for her drunkenness, the mistress exits the kitchen, whereon she finds Raunce positioned outside in the act of listening at the door:

As she came out of that swing door which bounded Mrs Welch's kingdom she found Raunce waiting bent forward in obvious suspense and excitement. 'It's been recovered Madam,' he announced. 'What has, Arthur?' 'Why your sapphire ring Madam.'<sup>121</sup>

In an uncomfortable and unnatural position, Raunce is caught eavesdropping; he then lies to the mistress under cover of his unstated but unquestionable semblance of honest trustworthiness. In point of fact the ring has been stolen to comic effect several times in the course of the story, a truth that is withheld at all costs from 'Mrs

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<sup>119</sup> To completely destroy any lingering belief in the equable quality of the financial exchange rate system see Matt Hampton, 'Hegemony, class struggle and the radical historiography of global monetary standards', *Capital & Class*, 89 (2006), pp. 131-164.

<sup>120</sup> In the introduction to his book Arthur Seldon posits and then explains fully the notion that capitalism is a self-correcting system, see Arthur Seldon, *The Virtues of Capitalism* (Indianapolis, IA: Liberty Fund Publishing, 2004).

<sup>121</sup> Green, *Loving*, pp. 180-181.

nakedness whilst unobserved or distanced is known to his loved one Edith, because he has clearly boasted to her about the sights he has seen during his time as a butler. The cultural resonance of ‘what the butler saw’ is especially apparent in one particular episode of the novel. Edith enters the mistress Violet’s room, to find her naked with her lover in bed beside her. Shock, followed by prudery and then prurience, reverberates quickly through the gossiping servant community. Edith brings the revelation to Charley Raunce, presenting it to him a manner that divulges as much about his sexual tastes as hers:

‘Well aren’t you glad?’ she went on after a minute, ‘for me I mean,” she mocked.

‘I can’t make you out at all,’ he answered.

‘Why there’s all those stories you’ve had, openin’ the door and seeing that when you were in a place in Dorset and lookin’ through the bathroom window down in Wales and suchlike oh I’ve heard you or Kate has and now it’s come to me. Right a’bed they was next to one another. Stuff that in your old smelly pipe and smoke it.’ She began once more to force her body on his notice, getting right up to him and then away again, as though pretending to dance. Then she turned herself completely round in front of his very eyes. He seemed ill at ease.<sup>128</sup>

Edith recounts a suggested list (‘and suchlike’) of voyeuristic opportunities that Raunce has described, fashioning himself as the butler of the ‘What the Butler Saw’, a viewer and purveyor of sexual gratification. Whilst she is on one hand accusing him of voyeurism, she simultaneously delights in her own opportunity to ‘see and tell’, relishing the reversal of roles. Notably however, and presumably in contrast with Raunce’s opportunities in Dorset and Wales, Edith is *not* able to witness her mistress *en flagrante* without herself being seen – the crucial determinant of a voyeur. Seaside penny arcade machine technologies left the butler outside the room, looking in through an aperture, in a situation that resembled his position in the household: privately viewing from the outside something to which he was not invited, in an act that served to further distance and isolate him. Meanwhile, in the cultural artefact of the What the Butler Saw we

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<sup>128</sup> Green, *Loving*, p. 73.

witness the reinforcement of a central tenet of class: the latent sexual desires of the masses being exploited by capitalist entrepreneurship purveying the technology of the What the Butler Saw equipment, through which they commodified a comedic construct, reasserting their domestic hegemony on the basis of the manservant's deviance.

As well as occupying a position that ascribes to a cultural stereotype newly framed and facilitated by technology, Green's butler is complicated, too, in terms of the light his role throws upon social transition. Closing the novel with a final servants' meal, this becomes a comedic off-duty feast for the group, in which both passing and mimicry are taken up as forces to re-establish class cohesion.<sup>129</sup> Marius Hentea identifies this 'carnavalesque' dinner at the end of the novel, noting that 'Raunce here navigates serious questions of morality with humour.'<sup>130</sup> Following the visit of the insurance inspector (who comes to investigate the disappearance of Mrs Tennant's sapphire cluster ring),<sup>131</sup> gathered round this 'carnavalesque' dinner table, the servant group uses mimicry to deconstruct and defuse the perceived threat from outside. As the group's leader, Raunce takes the dialogic initiative:

'If it has ended,' Raunce remarked. 'A sewer rat like him should never be permitted to harass honest folk. Is that right or isn't it? What'th that you thay. Lithping like a tothpot,' he added in a wild and sudden good humour.<sup>132</sup>

Ironically referring to the servants as 'honest folk' and the inspector as a tospot, Raunce encourages bad behaviour in the form of mimicry to ripple through the assembled servants. First Kate takes it up, 'You

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<sup>129</sup> Marius Hentea points to the servants' dinner as an example of an ensemble scene, positing that 'throughout his novels Green uses ensemble scenes to provide a moral and thematic centre' See, Hentea, *Henry Green*, p. 117. To an extent Raunce's individualism is trumped by the community. The novel manifests a feature required/expected of the 'collective novel' that we might be led to expect from fiction dealing with class. David Trotter calls *Living* (but not *Loving*) a 'collective novel', see Trotter, p. 203.

<sup>130</sup> See Hentea, *Henry Green*, p. 120.

<sup>131</sup> Earle Labor suggests that Mrs T wins out over Raunce when the ring is returned to her. I find this rather a reductive reading – there are no winners in the novel, as we learn that the servants split up and return to England, whilst the house is burnt to the ground. See Labor, p. 37.

<sup>132</sup> Green, *Loving*, p.190.

don't they he thpoke like thith thurely,' then Mary with 'If he'd 'a lithped at me I'm dead thure I'd a lithped back.' Eventually almost the whole group is united in laughter:

All wore a look of agony, or as though they were in a close finish to a race over a hundred yards. 'Jethuth,' Raunce moaned.<sup>133</sup>

This extended use of mimicry has been employed by a subordinate group to undermine an establishment figure. The initiation of humour both denigrates the power of the outsider and emboldens and unites the group.<sup>134</sup> Intriguingly the irony of the 'honest folk' continues following the interlude of mimicry and hilarity, with the revelation that the cook Mrs Welch (notably absent from the group and thus excluded from the group's mimicry and bonding) is an alcoholic. Raunce asserts that she has been 'Fiddlin' 'er monthly books.' The dramatic irony of this revelation, and such an assertion from the dishonest and now hypocritical butler, is shocking. Reconsidering Hitchcock's first tenet of Green's appropriation of 'passing, this is an illustration of passing offering 'ambivalence' towards the identity of class in a hierarchical structure.<sup>135</sup> The ambivalence that passing offers in a class situation,<sup>136</sup> particularly one in which humour is also stimulated, enlivens the social historian's notion that 'class consciousness was formed by a sense of exclusion as well as inclusion'.<sup>137</sup> Mimicry serves both to interpret and interrogate hierarchy:

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, p. 194.

<sup>134</sup> Marina MacKay agrees that humour helps to cement the community. See MacKay, *Modernism and World War II*, p. 108.

<sup>135</sup> See Hitchcock, p. 5. This idea, that identity is a problem for the domestic servant, is again negotiated by Kazuo Ishiguru in *The Remains of the Day* (1989). Critic John Brannigan notes that the butler Stevens 'sees his whole life as a servile, futile lie.' Brannigan goes on to attribute implications of a national allegory to his character, citing examples of repression and colonialism. See Brannigan, *Orwell to the Present*, p. 81.

<sup>136</sup> For a generalizable definition that extends passing more inclusively to class and sexuality, Werner Sollors suggests passing is simply the 'crossing of a line that divides social groups'. See Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), and also Belluscio.

<sup>137</sup> Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950', p. 196.



What is interrogated is not simply the image of the person, but the discursive and disciplinary place from which questions of identity are strategically and institutionally posed.<sup>138</sup>

Mimicry considers the individual whose appearance, or in this case speech, is being aped, and poses questions concerning their identity, and the source, or influence that lies behind that identity, the ideology.<sup>139</sup> In mimicking the insurance inspector Raunce has not only marked the inspector's identity as Other, but he has questioned the principles governing his identity. Prothero similarly attempted to mimic the behaviour of a genuine chauffeur, although in doing so his established, experienced mistress recognized his mimicry for what it was. Furthermore, over the course of the meal Raunce's predominance has been established, as 'all the others listened to Raunce with deference'.<sup>140</sup> The servants have come not only to join in with bad behaviour that the butler initiates, but also to listen to, and even to respect Raunce's opinions. The carnivalesque interlude has for been useful for Raunce in supporting him in re-iterating his ascendancy at the head of the servant group. This notion is more typically associated with the governing group's use of spectacle,<sup>141</sup> or carnival, as a means of permitting dissent and chaos to reign within a limited, controlled time period, following which the dominant authority reasserts control, finding itself more absolutely empowered than before.<sup>142</sup> Whilst the servants are in thrall to Raunce's leadership,

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<sup>138</sup> Bhabha, Homi, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 125.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Green, *Loving*, p. 211.

<sup>141</sup> Guy Debord quotes Machiavelli to make the point that the careful management of age-old customs associated with the subjugated people's freedom is an extremely powerful technique, because 'no matter what the ruler does or what precautions he takes, the inhabitants will never forget that freedom or those customs – unless they are separated or dispersed.' See Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press, 2004), p. 93.

<sup>142</sup> See Greenblatt. In *Class in Britain* Cannadine describes ceremony, and the way that it was revived in the interwar years to shore up hierarchy, which 'associated with the British throne expressed and articulated a view of the world in which continuity and stability, rank and order were maintained against the disruptive and levelling social regimes which seemed in power everywhere else... new-old royal ceremonials were invented to augment the 'traditional' dramatic representations of the social hierarchy'... (This with the funeral of George V, Silver Jubilee, public royal weddings e.g. Duke of York in 1923) ...'Royalty and hierarchy might have collapsed elsewhere in Europe, but in interwar Britain, they both adapted and thrived.' p. 141.

and by the end of the novel a single community is in the ascendancy over the formerly separate servant hierarchies, a challenging relationship between the manservant and mistress remains. Like Mrs Archworth with Prothero in Bowen's 'The Disinherited', Mrs Tennant has the intuitive knowledge of the old-established servant-keeper, which suggests her manservant is not quite what he seems to be. Mrs Tennant's fear and suspicion of Raunce has not been allayed over the course of the novel. She asserts the servant question as a means of expressing this:

'We don't have to live with the servants. Not yet. It's they who condescend to stay with us nowadays. No but you're not telling me that they pass all their meals in utter silence. He eats with them you know. Of course Raunce was lying...'<sup>143</sup>

So – despite his success at taking on the role of head of the domestic servant structure, Raunce does not appear to have achieved Jeeves' trick, of being more clever, or perhaps more duplicitous, than his employer. It is intriguing to note Hamnett's caution regarding the result of such reversal in Woodhouse. She suggests that 'the extent of the reversal was always limited, and usually both parties were mocked for their foibles.'<sup>144</sup> Raunce and Jeeves are similarly deferential, cynical and worldly wise. But the *Loving* butler's deliberate acts of transgression are not comically victimless; he deliberately defies, deceives and thives from the employing class. The deviant Raunce systematically falsifies the account books that he now possesses. Furthermore, he resolves to blackmail the Captain, who has been caught in bed with young mistress Violet, so that he can be 'at the receiving end of some very special money.'<sup>145</sup> Aligning peeping and blackmail, the butler becomes doubly transgressive against his social betters. Green does not hold Raunce up to be mocked, as is the case with the butlers of Woodhouse and Compton Burnett, but rather to expose him as an untrustworthy hypocrite, thief

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p.189.

<sup>144</sup> Hamlett, p. 153.

<sup>145</sup> Green, *Loving*, p. 129.

and voyeur, capable of using the servant question to both couch his duplicity and lever his own advantage.

However, to return to the culturally resonant mechanical representation of the butler-voyeur for a moment, this technology *does* hold the manservant up for mockery, and asserts the unassailable features of the class system; just as the barriers to social mobility remain in place, so too does the door that separates the voyeur from the viewed act, ergo the butler prevented from the act that might fulfil his sexual desires by the door through which he spies. Rising consumerism and the commodification of sexuality in the form of early cinematic pornography, together with the particular qualities of the traditional stereotypical butler, made the role uniquely vulnerable to such appropriation. The butler, once chaste or even asexual, is a distinct locus for that reversal towards sexual deviance in the form of scopophilia. From the 1880s the 'What the Butler Saw' technology reduced this aspect of the servant question to sexual fun. In asserting the barrier between the servant and the fulfilment of his desire the butler's class aspirations can be controlled by the domestic establishment. In the process, the male servant has been made to appear both foolish and pitiful, for the sexual act itself eludes him: what he sees is exciting, but he is non-participatory. The 'non-participation' of the What the Butler Saw stereotype is rehearsed, ironically, in the butler Raunce, as he and Edith choose to remain chaste until they can be wed. Despite his transgressive behaviour, at the close of the novel Green's butler exits the castle with his loved one, enabling them to capitulate to the postulated societal norms of the 1940s.<sup>146</sup> Raunce is a literary representation of the tension identified

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<sup>146</sup><sup>146</sup> Green commented to Terry Southern in an interview, concerning his inspiration for the novel. Green attested that the entire book came to him from the first-hand testimony of a butler's pleasure in his job, lying in bed of a Sunday morning 'eating toast with cunt fingers'. See Terry Southern, 'The Art of Fiction: Interview with Henry Green', *The Paris Review*, 19 (Summer, 1958). Accessed at: <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4800/the-art-of-fiction-no-22-henry-green> In this, admittedly evocative image, what is shown is not the act of sex, it is the subsequent moments, the pleasure of a previous transgression enjoyed at leisure afterwards.

by social historian Todd, who cites the butler as an example of a servant in whom 'deference and defiance'<sup>147</sup> might be seen to co-exist. The mechanical peep-show butler, who was firmly established by the time of the novel's production, supported the cultural hegemony in asserting a new, transgressive stereotype in order to overwrite the ideology of the past. The old order of the traditional and comprehensible, but anachronistic was thereby reworked for modernity, in a decadent, transgressive form, which Green's literary representation problematises and eventually eludes. For ironically Raunce's sexual self-denial offers a kind of redemption to the servant both at the end of the day and the end of the novel;<sup>148</sup> breaking away from the scopophilic butler of his namesake machine, he is free to begin life outside service alongside his loved one. 'The certainty of his material and social position is sacrificed for more fulfilling objectives.'<sup>149</sup> Rejecting the norms projected by the employer in order to retain their servants and maintain their comforting continuation of heredity, privilege and class, allows this non-conformist butler to conform in a new societal setting: no longer entirely a class apart.

We might expect technology to support a narrative of improvement for servants and the working class; in the work of these writers however, it has been demonstrated that technology can be instead an enabler of transgression and disavowal for the manservant. The servant question, in these cases predominantly the economic issues of inadequate supply and excessive demand, enables Prothero and Raunce to behave unacceptably, exploiting the weakness of the employer's position. Linking sex, class and money, Prothero creates a combination that enables him to state finally that despite his status – as a murdering fraudster – he is his own man. Raunce admits his

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<sup>147</sup> Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950', p. 197.

<sup>148</sup> The structure of a number of Green's novels work within the unity of a single day, *Loving* is an example of this.

<sup>149</sup> Oddvar Holmesland, *A Critical Introduction to Henry Green's Novels: The Living Vision* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 140. Edith and Raunce's escape implies 'their symbolic rejection of a static order (associated with the ring)'.

voyeurism, which ultimately seems more natural than sinful, and takes pleasure from his loving relationship with Edith, supported by the cash he has thieved from his mistress. Transgression has therefore given these manservants the license to abstain from class. In terms of technology the chauffeur, Prothero, both represents and wields a symbol of powerful societal transformation. He is the agent of transformation, again demonstrating a position of primacy over his employer. Raunce does not wield technology himself, but stands at a pivotal juncture with respect to the shifts of modernisation; his domestic position is mockingly described and commodified to feed the economic requirements of the employer and the crafted salaciousness of the masses.

So, despite the allure of transgressive mechanization and technologies, which give rise to a narrative of class re-configured and working practices transformed, these technologies are practically limited because their ownership continues to reside within the circle of exchange, held and controlled by the ruling class. Technology is created, manipulated and managed by the powerhouse of industrialization, and its inherent ownership is the moneyed class. In the examples in this chapter it is the employer who provides and owns the car. Furthermore, the forces of progressive industrialization identify and appropriate early cinematic technology and provide this to the masses, simultaneously undermining any socio-economic strength the butler might possess by rendering him pitifully scopophilic and thereby controllable. Any account of technological and social and cultural transformation working positively for the lower members of the domestic establishment becomes not only disadvantageous but problematic to all participants.

## Conclusion: A Class Apart

It is my contention that certain literary fiction written during the period from 1920-1950, when read with attention to the servant question, reveals an underlying attitude to class that is otherwise obscured, even in documentary accounts. British domestic life was under siege:<sup>1</sup> the constituent parts of the servant question were conspiring to transform the household, from the macro-economic concerns of the supply of and demand for labour, down to the intricate details of domestic people management, such as deference and duty. Employers were asking the servant question, not their employees: the topic had become a class-predicated concern because of its importance in maintaining the domestic social equilibrium for the rich and privileged of the country, of necessity it was the issue of servant supply and demand that went on to be discussed in parliamentary committees, which were in their turn dominated by individuals from that same environment.<sup>2</sup> Concomitantly, the two terms, 'servant question' and 'servant problem' were conflated, into a term completely inflected with the sensibilities of the governing class.<sup>3</sup> So, the era from 1920-1950 becomes a socio-historical point of tremendous strain and fracturing of relationships, with all servant roles requiring renegotiation for the safe continuation of the

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<sup>1</sup> There is some unease over the domestic hierarchy demonstrated in literature according to Elizabeth Maslen. See Maslen, 'Women Writers in World War II', pp. 625-635.

<sup>2</sup> And 'are' still dominated by similar tenets.

<sup>3</sup> It may be that this only seems to be the case due to the socio-historical evidence on the subject, which is exaggerated by the presence of documentary material from the middle class media – e.g. the *Daily Mail*, and later the earlier, established middlebrow women's magazines e.g. *Good Housekeeping*.

structures of domestic hierarchy.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, I have made the case throughout this thesis that considering an account of the historical and social context pertaining to each servant role is critical, in order to thoroughly inform and illuminate a close reading of the narrative examples. These narratives have come to be revelatory with respect to our 'class apart'. Fiction shows a situation between the mistress and her servant that is no longer about supply and demand, or even the management of staff, but instead resonates with all the complexities of intimacy, dependency, trust and trespass, and Christian duty, informed all the while by the troubling vested interest of both sides in maintaining the established ordering of society, heredity and privilege.

Close analysis of servant representations, against the socio-historical context of the servant question, indicates that these writers were authoring a literature that reads against our expectations of literature of the time – a literature of resistance. Having set up the context of the servant question, carefully considering the social, political and cultural forces that fed and fostered it, the examples selected from the literature coalesced to expose four specific servant roles that could be identified as relevant and revealing with respect to class.

The lady's maid figures of three short stories, Katherine Mansfield's 'The Lady's Maid', Elizabeth Bowen's 'Oh, Madam...' and Mollie Panter-Downes' 'Cut Down the Trees' were considered separately and together in the first chapter, which began by expounding the notion of bought intimacy in the maid-mistress relationship. It was found, particularly in the Mansfield story, that intimacy did not sit comfortably with the fundamentally financial basis of their relationship. Mansfield's maid is a complex figure, as

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<sup>4</sup> Women servants negotiated inequalities in ways that proved threatening to middle class lifestyles – meaning that class relations were not static. See Todd, *The People*, p. 190.

elements integral to her subjugation, for example the closeness of her relationship with her mistress(es) and infantilisation, additionally feed into the interdependence of the domestic service dyad. Both women are subdued through the concept of Christian duty, although the choice that Ellen makes, to stay with her mistress, narrated through the analeptic technique of the story predicates a life in service over marriage. Even though changing circumstances have meant a development in their relationship, the mistress and maid are nevertheless interdependent, whilst the vulnerable Ellen remains in the power of the unspeaking employer, and the critical nature of their continuing inter-reliance in an unseen future is emphasised. The capitulation of Mansfield's maid gives way to the maid's anxiety in Bowen's narrative, as she struggles to maintain appearances in a world transformed by the Blitz. In Bowen's narrative, which employs the same stylistic technique of free indirect speech to give voice to the maid, intriguingly we come to understand that the mistress, who has both social and physical mobility, is less invested in the London house than her maid. Bowen's working class maid creation manifests as fearful and dependent; the mistress meanwhile has the wherewithal to transform her life. The third of these maids is Panter-Downes' elderly, intransigent and reticent character. Abandoned with her mistress to struggle with the exigencies of wartime Britain, Dossie resists the transformation in her environment that her mistress embraces. Generational change complicates the story, being offered up as largely positive and certainly unavoidable for the upper class; in ideological terms the new order must be welcomed in by the old, temporarily at least, in order for the allied forces of goodness to win the war over the unspeakable. Dossie however, stows away the items from the past, refuses to eat with the mistress, and thereby passes on the ideological message that the working class must be cajoled into correct action by the progressive, persuasive actions of their employers and their betters. Any notion that the working class maid was desirous of an end to their life in service, and sought



independence outside the mistress-servant dynamic, is firmly rebuffed by the underlying resonance of the servant question in these three stories. The mistress alone takes up personal agency. Each of these three short stories concerns ideas of bought intimacy, reliance and interdependence operating in the coupling of mistress and lady's maid, and relies on the received idea that the lady's maid had a special affinity with her mistress, whilst illustrating developments historically demonstrated to be taking place in domestic service through the period. Interdependence in Mansfield's story, becomes the dependency of the maid in Bowen's, then appears as complete reliance and resistance to change in Panter-Downes – simultaneously we see an increasingly self-confident and assertive mistress in the second and third stories. Any newly-negotiated 'closeness' between the two women is without foundation when it comes to the lady's maid, and the wider servant body, whether in the form of familiarity or the perceived class 'levelling' of wartime, because they are perpetually bound up in and reduced by financial expediency. The interests of the established domestic order are served by ensuring that the servant carries on in her role; this serves to deflect attention away too from the mistress's own lack of independence, and her fear of class change and the advent of an inhospitable world in which one must make one's own tea. The representations refute the idea that class fear exists amongst the upper classes, instead asserting that any fear that exists remains fixed within the perception of the lower orders.

In each of the two literary examples of housekeepers – Elizabeth Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* – the agency of the housekeeper ultimately operates to further the interests of a domestic structure created, controlled and maintained by the employer. A close reading of *The Death of the Heart* reveals a complex housekeeper representation, with Matchett acting in the interests of the continuation of the family Quayne, but critically under her own direction rather than that of her employer. Although

Matchett behaves as a mistress manqué, she repays the trust of her employers by acting as a facilitator, and then as proxy for their authority. Matchett facilitates the continuation of the employer's influence, and its reestablishment in the context of threatening generational change. Whilst a similar concern regarding the persistence of household order is evidenced in du Maurier's housekeeper depiction, the domination of heredity and privilege in the domestic environment is an acute concern of the novel. Here the housekeeper teaches the precarious, unsophisticated new generation of mistress the requirements of her role; in effect the housekeeper has an educative and elucidatory function for the employing class. However, the trust bestowed on Mrs Danvers has been misplaced, her trespass is too great to be forgiven, and the see-saw swings in favour of the newly-educated and empowered Mrs de Winter. The housekeeper demonstrates further, as did the lady's maid, that there is vested interest on both sides, not just on the side of the employer, in the persistence of the implicit structures of the domestic establishment. Poised at the top of the servant pyramid, excluded from the polarised communities of the household, the housekeeper is both a trusted figure and potentially a trespasser in the domestic hierarchy, making her the individual best placed to carry out the necessary negotiation and collusion that will guarantee their mutual future. With each of these depictions of the housekeeper working to maintain the current state of affairs – whether by facilitating and acting as the substitute for authority, or in an educative and elucidatory function – we see that each capitulates to capital.

The nannies chosen for analysis are complicated but are finally also the adversaries of transformation: they operate as denial and disavowal of the dominant social structure, but simultaneously behave in defence of the continuing equilibrium of the household to protect and perpetuate class. Evelyn Waugh's Nanny Hawkins in *Brideshead Revisited* operates to shore up the family through nostalgia and the preservation of memory, whilst she is party to fictive familial

relationships that undermine her self-affirmation. These forces serve to lock both employer *and* servant into the structures of the past. *Palladian*, Elizabeth Taylor's 1946 novel, features a second nanny who performs an intricate double function, similarly to Waugh's Nanny Hawkins, who works to construct a new role for herself in a mutable environment. Through complex denial and disavowal, expressing personal discomfort with the ongoing generational changes and the upheaval in domestic service, Taylor's Nanny confronts the transforming social and political reality. Whilst she is subtly subversive of the new forms of domestic influence seeking dominion over the household, in the end she acts to protect the familial relationships and structures that are disintegrating around her.

Manservants included Bowen's murderous chauffeur, Prothero, from her short story 'The Disinherited' and Raunce the Butler, a critical character in Henry Green's novel, *Loving*. I offer both similar and differentiated readings of their narratives with respect to class. Technology has a significant presence in each of the examples analysed, its agency linked intriguingly to transgression; each presents the threat of modernisation and mechanization, exacerbating the potential future vicissitudes of social structures. Trust and trespass, thematic concerns of the housekeeper, are prominent, although transfigured now by the forces of modernisation. Chauffeur Prothero, employed on facetious false references, makes use of the technology of his mistress to further his cause. The social upheaval of generational change recurs, with one mistress following another, but despite the gauche inexperience of youth both old and new servant-keepers retain their distrust of the heinous Prothero. For him 'passing' as honest, before the scrutiny of decades of class-conscious perspicacity, is troublesome, as it is for Raunce the butler in Green's novel. The mistress's car affords Prothero the opportunity to evade justice, but remains the property of his employer Mrs Archworth. In the case of the butler, technology is the means whereby the proprietor is able to reduce his role to that of a controllable, laughable

politicization and the voice that this awakening provides. Tellingly, for the inhabitants of Hanky Park<sup>7</sup> rather than these radical friends of Larry's who live outside their community, domestic service represents another world altogether. The old midwife, Mrs Bull, recalls how taking a position in the countryside, outside the stultifying poverty of Hanky Park helped her to recover psychologically from her first bereavement:

'Ah'd ha' gone barmy if Ah hadn't tuk a job I' service up I' the country. Bein' away tuk me right out o' meself an' got me out o' me sorer twice as quick.'<sup>8</sup>

Service is not at all comparable to the lot of the typical working class character of the novel, it is instead an escape, and also an avoidance of the reality of the day-to-day struggle or 'sorer' that just might, if experienced through the politicized eyes of the likes of Larry and Sal, become ennobling. In this working class novel, domestic service is not merely apolitical, but is capitulation with the bosses to maintain their preferred social order.

In the reading of the servants in examples from the period 1920-1950, the servant question has been invoked to expose the workings of class. The servants in these narratives of Bowen, Green, Taylor, Waugh, Mansfield and Panter-Downes, lady's maids, housekeepers, nannies, a butler and a chauffeur, have been shown to be in thrall to the collective structures of societal ordering, and also to be reluctant with respect to social mobility. Class was not fully being negotiated in this period, in fact little change was visible. For example intimacy, such as that between the lady's maid and her mistress, meant that class confrontation was unlikely. The nanny showed that culturally constructed mechanisms such as nostalgia could be employed to discourage the desire for change. In terms of the socio-historical context any transformation in the make-up of domestic life – that is, the move towards homes without servants - was a fairly gradual business. The influence of technology was only slowly felt,

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<sup>7</sup> In what could be termed a 'collective' novel.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

and whilst there was a move to smaller homes, the shortfall in multiple-servant establishments was mitigated by an increase in single-servant households, fed as well by middle-income families desiring help in the home. Why was there such a discrepancy between the expectations of change and the reality of domestic life? Through the newly-available political management of social policy and the media, the establishment had contrived to alter the public discourse about class, changing it from the vernacular of us and them towards the suggestion of hierarchy.<sup>9</sup> As a result there was a widespread belief in a change that had not really taken place – and that certainly had not taken place within domestic service. Any transformation of society was superficial; the governing ranks would not permit their disempowerment through genuine class change. I contend that the literature supports this perspective. Servants desire subservience; they find comfort in the familiarity of the system of household ranking-by-status. In the process, authority itself is portrayed as being less immutable, more malleable and thereby equipped for the future. Britain would be safe in their hands. In this sense the narratives read in this thesis go to make up a literature of resistance, in refutation of the overwhelming narrative of the time, progressing instead the notion that class must persist with its boundaries intact, as its hegemony is desirable and necessary for the smooth, successful operation of society.

The transformation of domestic service continued from the 1950s onwards, when a sharp decline in service was finally felt, with demand increasing for smaller homes and a national imperative to house its citizenry. Domestically the emphasis shifted towards the housewife, whilst servants left to work in the growing service industries, the hotel and catering trade, and to similar roles in the public sector (schools, hospitals). The domestic service industry had become a sector of the wider service-industry-based economy. But what became of the servant figure? Personal carers in the private and

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<sup>9</sup> See Cannadine, *Class in Britain*.

public sector now attend to people's intimate needs, whilst advertisements in *The Lady* speak of a continuing demand amongst the wealthy, for suitable individuals with impeccable references to take up highly paid positions as nannies and butlers and chauffeurs. The servant of the early twentieth century has meanwhile been transcribed into the Heritage Industry, metamorphosed into the homely inhabitants below stairs of countless period dramas. The heritage industry flourishes during times of economic flux or social change, and the governing social structure of old is still able to find opportunities to advantageously present its hegemony. For, popular culture returns once more to the imaginary of domestic service in the big house – *Upstairs, Downstairs* of the 1970s becomes *Downton Abbey* of the 2010s.<sup>10</sup> The imagery is not updated, but, as the public is led to suppose, represents a 'historical snapshot'. Heritage as an industry, visitors to stately homes, membership of heritage bodies, a widening enthusiasm for ancestry research<sup>11</sup> – all connote nostalgia for childhood and a simpler time. For the establishment this favourably presents a period when people were to an extent 'born' into their class with little class mobility available to them, and a desire to find safe common ground with past ties in a time that reeks of chaos.

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<sup>10</sup> Notice the use of 'Down' in both titles – meaning that the new incarnation references the earlier one, whilst both reference the polarity of the servant/master relationship, up vs down, above vs below.

<sup>11</sup> Degrees are now available in this subject. See Hewison; Smith, *Uses of Heritage*; Dicks, pp. 30-44, and Wright, *On Living in an Old Country*, and *A Journey Through Ruins – The Last Days of London* (London: Hutchison Radius, 1991).

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