

Virago Modern Classics: Uniting Women to Change Literary Culture

Submitted by Jean Harris, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, May 2023.

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Abstract

Five years after their establishment in 1973, Virago started their popular fiction reprint range, republishing, in 1978, Antonia White's 1933 novel, *Frost in May*. The Virago Modern Classics (VMCs) became a mark of feminist credentials for women during the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), but there has been no research investigating why novels written during the interwar years, as many early VMCs were, had any relevance for second-wave feminists in the 1970s and 1980s. Basing my research on the Modern Classics section of the Virago Archives in the British Library, and focusing on the files for the republished authors, I investigated reasons for the popularity and iconic status of republished interwar novels among second-wave feminists.

The first chapter situates Virago as a component of the feminist movement, which emphasised sisterhood to empower women. Both Virago's working practices and their creation of an audience for the VMCs reflected the importance of uniting women, and of enabling women to challenge dominant patriarchal values in publishing. The second chapter investigates Virago's business model, looking at Carmen Callil's unique determination to combine feminism and profit through Virago Press. The VMCs were targeted at an audience of non-radical middle-class readers, reflecting the values of both the Virago team and the WLM. Maintaining profitability whilst disseminating the values of the WLM allowed Virago to compete in a mainstream market and to evolve in the face of changing feminist movements. Chapter 3 contains an analysis of the paratextual elements of the VMCs, demonstrating how the books were branded and marketed to a specific audience. Virago subverted male-

dominated advertising practices and used new introductions and covers to develop a market for their books, creating a community of readers based on commonalities between the interwar writers and the WLM readers. Chapter 4 is based on analysis of the novels of four VMC authors, assessing their presentation, and examining how their content was made relevant to WLM readers. Virago promoted active reading and rereading, encouraging feminist interpretations of books by a new generation of readers. Rereading enabled understanding of the overlaps between two groups of women.

By situating Virago within the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s, the thesis demonstrates how Virago created an audience for its reprint range, based on commonalities between generations. Empowering women by uniting them enabled challenges to male-dominated literary culture, giving (some) women a voice and a literary history.

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Virago Modern Classics: Uniting Women to Change Literary Culture

Introduction

When my friends and I – all greatly influenced by the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) – were at home with babies in the 1980s, we retained our sanity and feminist credentials by scouring each other’s bookshelves for dark green spines. We constantly exchanged Virago Modern Classics (VMCs) and swapped recommendations for new ones. It was at this time that I discovered E. H. Young, Rebecca West, Rosamond Lehmann and Radclyffe Hall, among others. Years later, I started to wonder why interwar novels, often written by upper-, or upper-middle-class women had any relevance for us and our feminist beliefs in the 1980s, and why we were so keen to read them. When I started to research for answers, I found surprisingly little written about the success of Virago and their range of republished novels. I was left asking why republished books, particularly those from the interwar years, were so popular with a generation of women influenced by the campaigns and theories of the second-wave feminist movement? What did we have in common with these writers and their lives? Eventually, the dearth of work on the Virago Modern Classics encouraged me to undertake my own research, working from my position as a reader of the VMC range during second-wave feminism.

Virago has defied predictions of failure, mostly from men: original Virago member Ursula Owen laughingly explains that, at their first press conference,

having produced ten books, a male journalist asked how they were going to find enough books for next year (*Virago: Changing* 00:13:49-00:14:02). Donna Coonan, editorial director of the Modern Classics until early 2023, has brought over 200 new titles to the range since 2005 and she refers to the availability of books to republish. In a 2021 interview she explains that the VMCs were established in order to “demonstrate the existence of the canon of women’s writing” (*Ourshelves* 00:01:40-45). The range was designed to counter the inequality in writing by republishing books that had been “ground breakers and bestsellers of their time [but were] allowed to go out of print” (Coonan *Ourshelves* 00:03:03-16). Coonan argues that this is still happening so she is able to continually add to the list, addressing the issue of “writers who are incredible but have been unfairly neglected” (00:03:20-25). The new releases in 2022 include work by the African-American writer Ann Petry (1908-1997), and the Indian novelist Attia Hosain (1913-1998). Whilst these publications may appear to reflect Virago’s growing awareness of intersectionality and current political trends, both authors had previously been issued as VMCs: Petry in 1986, and Hosain in 1988. But in the years between the first VMC in 1978, and 1990, of 363 republished novels only four authors were Black and one was Indian. (See Appendix). All other VMCs were by white writers of different nationalities but mainly English-speaking. The Black authors were Zora Neale Hurston, with two books published as VMCs, Dorothy West with one title, Ann Petry, with *The Street*, and Paule Marshall, with one VMC. The only Indian writer in this time period was Attia Hosain with two titles as VMCs. I will argue that the VMC titles during the years of my investigation (1978-1990) reflect the WLM’s focus, based on the lives of white, middle-class women. My thesis

demonstrates that, in order to highlight the relevance of the interwar VMCs, Virago was able to draw attention to the commonalities between two generations of women – the new readers and the writers of these reprinted books.

Virago's challenge to the literary status quo through the VMCs consisted of establishing a readership and developing connections between women writers of the interwar period and women readers of the 1970s and 1980s. The links between these two groups of women have not been fully analysed, in spite of the success of the Modern Classics during their first decade. The VMC imprint started in 1978, five years after the establishment of Virago Press. Virago created the market for the VMCs, comprised of women like the Virago team themselves – white, middle-class, non-radical feminists. I draw on the Virago archive to show that they branded the VMC range in a way designed to be attractive to a wide, but specific, range of contemporary women readers. The Virago team commissioned new introductions that emphasised the relevance of the themes of their republished books to a new generation of readers. The introductions were written by contemporary writers who reflected the interests and backgrounds of the Virago team – and of the intended readers. The Virago Modern Classics section in the British Library Virago Archive contains valuable information on why particular books and authors were chosen or rejected, and, sometimes, why specific writers were approached to provide new introductions. It also demonstrates the relationships that developed between Callil and some of the novelists whose books were republished as VMCs.

Virago and the WLM

In order to contextualise and analyse the success of the Modern Classics range of books, I based my research on Virago as a fundamental component of the second-wave feminist movement. Feminist publishing was a reaction to the aims of the Women's Liberation Movement. In addition to specific demands, such as equal pay for women, women were asking to be listened to, through culture as well as other social structures. Women were also asking for the freedom to make decisions independently of men, including the freedom to choose which writers could be published. Virago's Modern Classics range emphasised the importance of reprints to the Women's Movement during the most active period of the second-wave – the mid-1960s to the mid- or late-1980s. The novels became a means of reading shared experiences and ending the silence surrounding women's lives, as well as learning about women's literary history and heritage. The VMCs demonstrate the importance of cultural production for enabling women to know and understand their history. My research focuses on the period from 1978, to coincide with the start of the VMC imprint, until 1990, when feminism moved out of the second-wave.

The separation of feminism into waves is discussed in detail in essays collated by Gillis, Howie, and Munford (2007). Whilst conceptualising feminism into different periods, or waves, emphasises each wave's focal point – such as the first wave's campaign for women's suffrage – Gillis et al raise the difficulty of articulating “mythical time with historical or linear time” (xxx). Defining feminism through different waves can suggest that the waves are in conflict with each other, rather than viewing them as parts of a continuing campaign which

evolves over time. Janet Spencer highlights the limitations of the periodisation of feminism, explaining that “Female to female inheritance has [...] always been problematic in a patriarchal society in which the legacy passed from male to male is understood as natural and of central importance. [...] Culture – including the culture of political organisations – is still subliminally understood as a male property passed on from father to son” (in Gillis et al 299). My research is based on the years defined as the second wave; this period of the women’s movement brought about major changes in cultural production, and while I recognise the above limitations of the periodisation of the women’s movement, concentrating on the second wave enables me to consider Virago’s project of challenging cultural production during the 1970s and 1980s.

I base my study of the VMCs on the books republished during the peak years of the second-wave feminist movement, 1978 to 1990, demonstrating the overlaps between the demands of the women’s movement during the years of the WLM and those of the interwar years. Moving away from sisterhood, by the 1990s feminism in the third wave became more individualist and more concerned with intersectionality. The feminist movements that developed after the second-wave are generally defined in relation to, and in opposition to, the second wave, but defy clear definitions, highlighting the limitations, discussed above, of the periodisation of the feminist movement. The third-wave feminist movement criticised the second-wave, and “emerged in the mid-1990s. It was led by so-called Generation Xers who, born in the 1960s and ’70s in the developed world, came of age in a media-saturated and culturally and economically diverse milieu” (Britannica.com). Riley discusses the impact of third-wave feminism on

Virago's publishing project. She explains that third-wave feminism attempted to avoid "the traps of identity politics, separatism and essentialism" (105). Snyder's essay on third-wave feminism discusses the difficulty of clearly defining it as a movement as it is sometimes presented as no more than an opposition movement to the second-wave. She suggests that one of the differences between the second- and third-waves is their starting point: "unlike their mothers' generation, who had to prove themselves, third-wavers consider themselves entitled to equality and self-fulfilment" (178). Snyder's work highlights a major concern of the third-wave – the rejection of claims that all women share the same, or similar experiences, and she argues that third-wavers "continue the efforts of second-wave feminism to create conditions of freedom, equality, justice" although they have different tactics (192).

Virago's working practices reflected the importance of sisterhood, central to the second-wave feminist movement, through the all-female workforce and advisory team. But it is important to recognise that sisterhood mainly existed between white, educated women. Brian Norman, writing about the anthology of writing from the WLM, *Sisterhood is Powerful*, comments on an early black feminist organization called the Black Women's Liberation Group of Mount Vernon, active in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He explains that in the entire volume, "Mount Vernon group's statement occupies two-and-a-half pages of the 650-page anthology *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, and is one of only three entries by black-identified women in a collection of fifty-seven entries, fifteen historical documents, and two introductory essays. All texts by black women are grouped together" (40). Similarly, Thomlinson analyses the many reasons for the

predominance of white, educated women in the WLM. Although she points out that there was involvement by Black women in the movement, she discusses the “exclusivity of the activist networks that constituted the WLM (an exclusivity that functioned in terms of class and age as well as race)” (32). Her arguments are mirrored in the work of Gillis et al, who criticise the periodisation of feminism: “the wave model has ‘drowned out’ the history of black feminism in its disregard for the influence of race-based movements on gender action” (xxv). Thomlinson suggests that many women involved in the WLM already knew each other, often through university, and points out that, at the first WLM conference in 1970, “whilst Black and working-class women were certainly present at Ruskin, the conference seems to have been overwhelmingly attended by white, middle-class (or middle-class through education), university-educated women” (34).

The relationships that developed between the staff at Virago and their advisory team reflect the influence of sisterhood on their business practices. My analysis of the content of some of the repurposed interwar books indicates that sisterhood was also an important element in many of the novels, an aspect that was emphasised in the process of republishing. Writer and academic Sarah Lonsdale additionally draws attention to sisterhood between several interwar VMC writers. She suggests that many writers, including E. M. Delafield and Rose Macauley, were “linked through writers’ informal networks and through reviewing books for [...] the feminist weekly review *Time and Tide*” (*Female*

Friendships 2020)¹ Lonsdale argues that friendships between writers impacted on the content of their novels, encouraging them to focus on issues that directly affected their lives. Wallace's earlier work on sisterhood discusses the concept as more complicated than straightforward support, considering the impact on women's writing and the concept of women's rivalry. Wallace demonstrates that many interwar writers used "versions of the triangle plot to explore relations between women" (*Sisters* 7). She further suggests that relationships of sisterhood "are distinguished by a complex tension between similarity and difference, closeness and separation, friendship and rivalry" (9). Virago's promotion of sisterhood (although not recognising the exclusivity or complexity of the concept) in their presentation of the republished books emphasised key points of relevance to second-wave feminists' interest in building relationships based on sisterhood and enabled them to develop relationships of commonality between two generations of women.

My thesis will demonstrate how, through its imprint of republished fiction by women, Virago challenged the exclusivity of the literary canon, as discussed by F. R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition* (1948), and the male domination of literary culture. Male domination of literary culture was also challenged by Elaine Showalter, who explained in 2008 that she had written *A Literature of Their Own* in 1977 as a reaction to having studied English at university, where the required reading included virtually no women. In 2020, Mercedes Aguirre contends that the second-wave feminists' emphasis on the recovery of women's writing "has

¹ Online research papers have no page numbers throughout, unless provided.

happily transformed the literary canon and the curriculum” (in Russell and Jolly 197). But Donna Coonan suggests that in spite of the interventions of feminist publishing the problem of the academic curriculum has not yet been totally resolved. Coonan describes the beginning of the VMC list as a response to “inequality in writers and in voices” (*Ourshelves* 00:02:33-40). But discussing the reading list for her university course, she states that on the list of “the books that were studied as books that everybody had to read, there were very, very few women [...] – I think probably Virginia Woolf was the only woman” (00:02:48-00:03:01). In her discussion with Coonan, interviewer Lucy Scholes agrees that the attitude of academia still seems to be “put Virginia Woolf on a course and you’ve covered women” (*Ourshelves* 00:03:02:04).

In spite of their concerns about academic curricula, the availability in bookshops of books written by women has grown and continues to grow, with the Penguin Modern Classics range now publishing books by VMC writers such as Sylvia Townsend Warner, Audre Lorde, and Willa Cather. The increased availability of books by women demonstrates a change in the publishing world and the situation described by Callil in 2008: “In the publishing world of the 60s and 70s, women rarely had the opportunity to choose which books to publish, and paperback lists, particularly, reflected this” (“The Stories of Our Lives”).

My search for work and discussions on the Virago Modern Classics (VMCs) found a very limited amount of written work specifically on Virago Press, or even on women’s publishing houses in general, and little focusing on the range of Modern Classics, although Virago became known for this carefully curated

range of reprints. Much information is only found in newspaper articles and on the Virago Website, which offers information on its history, its authors and on its Virago Modern Classics list. Dale Spender's 1989 *The Writing or the Sex*, although not explicitly focusing on Virago, debates the notion "that men have been in charge of according value to literature" (1), a situation challenged by feminist publishers. Spender argues that women have been excluded from debates about the canon and the curriculum, and have been under-represented in literature and literary production.

Simone Murray, in her 2004 *Mixed Media – Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics*, highlights the lack of academic work on women's writing. In her analysis of several feminist presses, Murray is critical of feminist theoretical debates that do not discuss the importance of feminist publishing, arguing that "feminism is ignoring a rich source of potential theorising on its own doorstep" (8-9). Murray contends that feminist debates disregard the political and commercial importance of women's presses in raising awareness of feminist publishing's contribution to cultural and literary studies. Catherine Riley, in her 2018 published PhD thesis, *The Virago Story: Assessing the Impact of a Feminist Publishing Phenomenon*, further investigates the lack of academic analysis of women's publishing and literary production through a detailed analysis of Virago. D-M Withers' 2021 book specifically on the VMCs, *Virago Reprints and Modern Classics: The Timely Business of Feminist Publishing*, is a valuable resource that I refer to in my discussion, offering an analysis of the reproduction of books that have been forgotten or are no longer in print. Their

work considers the ways in which reproduced books are made relevant and timely for a new audience.

Murray's work summarises the lack of analysis of feminist publishing in academic theories, commenting that "feminist publishing begins to take on the trappings of a phantom discipline – commented upon as much for its absence as for its contribution" (22). Murray's study counteracts this absence through her analysis of several different feminist publishing houses, including Virago, Sheba, and The Women's Press. In response to the campaigns of the WLM, these publishing houses were all established during the 1970s and early 1980s with the aim of promoting women's writing and increasing diversity in publishing. The different presses did not always share the same ideological beliefs; nor did they follow similar types of feminism or working practices. Murray states that her general objective is to "explore the variety of feminist print activity, and to demonstrate that, far from there existing an archetypal feminist press, the market in feminist books is now sufficiently large and diverse to support a multiplicity of approaches" (26). The different approaches were not long-lasting, and most of the feminist publishers disappeared. Virago proved to be viable and long-lasting, partly, as I discuss, because it remained rooted in the establishment of mainstream publishing and was therefore able to adapt to changes in society and react to developments in feminist ideals. Virago's longevity is also linked to their change from total independence to being part of a conglomerate, as documented by Riley, whose work is discussed below. Riley explains that, as well as operating independently, Virago "has come under the umbrella of two different publishing groups – first in 1982 with its sale to Chatto,

Bodley Head and Cape, and then (after buying back its independence in 1987) in 1995 when it was sold to Little, Brown, the umbrella group within which it still sits" ("The Message" 236).

Murray's work on the lack of academic debate on feminist publishing follows the earlier arguments of Dale Spender, who recognised that feminist publishing of the late twentieth century lacked adequate academic analysis, arguing that "the issue of whether women have actually moved into [publishing] must remain primarily a philosophical one for there is surprisingly little data available" (*The Writing* 42). My investigation of the publication, presentation, and readership of the VMCs builds on debates discussing the lack of analysis of feminist publishing by situating the VMCs as an important cultural response to second-wave feminism. Through republishing fiction by women, Virago developed links between generations, emphasising sisterhood whilst ensuring that women's writing was prioritised. Second-wave feminism stressed the importance of women's writing and my examination of Virago's role in curating the VMC range of books evaluates their place in ending the silence surrounding women's literature – the silence that emanated from the lack of study of women's written work, compounded by the difficulty of obtaining publishers for women's writing.

Apart from the Hogarth Press, founded in 1917 by Leonard and Virginia Woolf, and a limited number of publishing houses that promoted women's work, women had, until the advent of new feminist publishing houses in the 1970s, little say in the choice of books to publish, leading to the literary dominance of

male interpretations of society and of women's roles in society. Withers and West (2023) draw attention to a notable exception to the model of male publishers in their article on Norah Smallwood (1909-1984), arguing that she "carved out a reputation for herself as a tough negotiator, a fierce defender of her authors' work, and a woman who did not suffer fools gladly" (61). They also discuss her important role in influencing another generation of women publishers, including Carmen Callil and Gail Rebeck of Random House, explaining that these (and other) female publishers "tread upon the ground Smallwood stood, and the space she created in the publishing industry" (82). Diana Athill's *Stet: An Editor's Life* (2000) outlines her life as an editor from the second world war to the 1980s. During these years, Athill published many well-known post-war writers, including Molly Keane and Jean Rhys, and was a founding director of the publisher Andre Deutsch. Elizabeth West's 2022 book "*The Women who Invented Twentieth-Century Children's Literature*" investigates the roles of the women involved in reframing ideas about children's literature, emphasising the women's willingness to experiment and to question ideas on children's literature. These are notable exceptions within the publishing world, but the general picture is of an industry dominated by men and male values, as I discuss below referring to Norrie's work on the publishing industry, and to *Women in Publishing's* interviews with women working in publishing, as well as Lindsey Claro's more recent work on the publishing industry.

My work is building on Murray's discussion of feminist debates that fail to take account of the political and commercial importance of women's presses, by demonstrating that Virago's founder, Carmen Callil, was acutely aware of both

the political and commercial value of women's publishing. The VMC range acted to combine political and commercial interests for the publishing house by ensuring that women's writing was made accessible whilst being profitable to Virago. Profit was important to Callil as it enabled the long-term publication and dissemination of women's writing, presenting a continuing challenge to the male domination of literature and literary production. Being profitable also allowed Virago to compete with mainstream publishing houses, and to avoid being marginalised.

Where Murray compares several feminist publishers, Riley's work offers an in-depth discussion of Virago from its establishment, enabling her to analyse changes to the publishing house over four decades. Riley emphasises the importance of feminist publishing "*as itself a moment of feminist praxis*" (*Virago* 1). She argues that much of Virago's importance lies in its ability to exist and compete in the male dominated worlds of publishing and profit: "Virago sets an example through its female workforce enacting their own – very successful – methods of doing business" (160-1). Both Murray and Riley recognise the importance of feminist publishing but differ in their opinions of Virago's working practices. Murray agrees with feminists who criticised Virago for combining profit and ideology, arguing that capitalism and feminism are mutually exclusive, as capitalism depends on the exploitation of women as subordinate to men. Riley's view allows for different understandings of feminism, stressing the importance of challenging male dominated social structures.

I suggest that the arguments of both Murray and Riley can apply to the particular success of the VMC imprint. Virago pursued the dual aims of changing literary culture and competing in the male-dominated business world. The editorial team managed to combine being part of mainstream publishing with presenting an ideological and a practical challenge to male-dominated social values. In support of Murray's argument, Virago can be criticised for being exploitative, offering low wages and expecting long hours from staff, as well as using feminism for profit. But Riley points out that Virago is the only survivor in England of the feminist presses established in the 1970s and 1980s, and that its existence demonstrates the continued success of both women's writing and of women as publishers. (In Wales, Honno press, established in 1986 and still in existence, "is an independent co-operative press run by women and committed to bringing you the best in Welsh women's writing" (www.honno.co.uk)). Concentrating on the ongoing success of Virago, Riley highlights the significance of the Modern Classics. She argues that "the Modern Classics were a crucial aspect of Virago's work in a political as well as commercial sense, a deliberate attempt to counter the historical pejoration and suppression of women's writing" (44). Whilst agreeing with Riley's argument on the political importance of the value of revaluing work by women that had gone out of print, I will argue that her work does not adequately explain the popularity or the financial success of the reprint range.

Margaretta Jolly has conducted a major four-year research project on feminist publishing – *The Business of Women's Words: Purpose and Profit in Women's Publishing*. It investigates "the ways that feminists' ethical and socialist

economic strategies related to creative and entrepreneurial successes” (*Business of Women’s Words* website). Her work analyses the complex relationship between ideology, politics, and economics within feminist publishing. Jolly considers the similarities between Virago and The Body Shop, discussing them as businesses which were “both set up in sitting rooms with little capital and no business training” (“The Making of *Mamatoto*” 319). Both business organisations were based on combining profit and purpose and Jolly explores their collaboration, which resulted in Virago’s publication of the Body Shop book, *Mamatoto*, in 1991. The necessity of being profitable companies meant that both Virago and The Body Shop faced significant challenges and risks; Virago needed to “establish a market with a tiny team, little capital and high expectation from the feminist community”, whilst The Body Shop faced difficulties in sourcing ethical cosmetic ingredients and “guard[ing] formulas while being transparent about suppliers” (321).

Significantly, neither business viewed profitability and political aims as mutually exclusive and, in their own ways, they both challenged the practices and values of male-dominated capitalist ventures. Jolly explains that her study “examines how activists called upon cultural and creative business activities to help promote their aims despite feminists’ general antipathy and sometimes hostility to capitalist methods and ideologies” (*BOWW* website). This is particularly pertinent to Virago and the VMCs: Virago’s project of becoming profitable and using capitalist business methods to sell feminism led to many criticisms from feminists and other feminist publishing houses. The criticisms underline the diversity and lack of agreement amongst second-wave feminists. Although the

ultimate aims were common to all WLM followers, there was disagreement on how to obtain them. Feminists such as Germaine Greer understandably criticised the marketing industry for its exploitation and objectification of women, arguing that feminists should have nothing to do with sexist and exploitative practices such as profit-making and advertising. In *The Female Eunuch*, in 1970, Greer discusses surveys suggesting that “the image of an attractive woman is the most effective advertising gimmick. She may sit astride the mudguard of a new car [...]: she may lie at a man’s feet stroking his new socks; [...] whatever she does her image sells” (60). In contrast, Jolly “highlights the continuities of feminist publishing as both activist and business activity” (“Purpose, Power” 327). Jolly sees the establishment of feminist publishing houses and magazines as important ways of gaining control of the means of cultural production. Maintaining the means of production necessarily involves making a profit for the continuation of a business, but the aim is maintaining the business in ways that benefit women and challenge male-dominated practices.

The difficulty of becoming a financially successful all-female publisher is discussed in Withers’ 2020 article “Enterprising Women: Independence, Finance and Virago Press, c.1976-93”. The article focuses on Virago’s two episodes of re-structuring as an independent company and draws attention to the complexity of overcoming “barriers that have historically hindered women’s participation in business” (“Enterprising” 479). Virago’s emphasis on the need to be profit-making gave them a unique position within feminist publishing and Withers argues that Virago’s success was made possible because of Callil’s contacts, enabling her to “access social and financial capital that have

historically prevented women from becoming successful entrepreneurs” (“Enterprising” 481). Callil recognises the importance of her contacts for the initial success of Virago: she admits to “asking every friend I had for help: they all gave it to me, men and women alike” (in Simons and Fullbrook 184). Withers’ discussion draws attention to the inequalities in society that have stopped women from being able to run profitable companies. The interesting point from Withers’ and Jolly’s work is their demonstration that, while Virago was criticised by other women for competing in a male-dominated business world, it was, at the same time, hampered by the male-domination of the “financial resources and professional knowledge” (Withers “Enterprising” 484). These resources were “largely concentrated in male hands” (484) and Callil was able to utilise her many male contacts in the publishing world to overcome the difficulties and obstacles that prevented many women from succeeding. Overcoming obstacles from male businessmen and criticisms from more radical feminist groups indicates the scale of Callil’s achievement in establishing a female-led publishing house that has evolved sufficiently to still be in existence, celebrating its fiftieth birthday in 2023. Writing about Virago’s business success in *The Evening Standard* in 1998, Joan Smith concludes that their success “vindicated the notion that women are just as able as men to survive in competitive fields like publishing” (in Add MS 88904/2/13 – all references to Virago archival material are in this format with details in the ‘works cited’ section).

As seen in the differing views expressed by Murray and Riley, the combination of feminist ideology and profit is a contentious area, largely depending on definitions of different feminisms and their aims. Jolly describes Virago as “a

social movement initiative, which took the form of a business” (*Mamatoto* 319). Virago as a feminist publisher has been analysed by Murray and Riley, and the variations in their financial independence are discussed by Riley, Jolly and Withers, but the particular significance of Virago’s curated range of republished novels lacked investigation before the publication of Withers’ book on the reprints, even though it has been very successful in enabling Virago’s continuing existence. Withers investigates the ways in which “books that have fallen out of taste and favour [are] resituated by publishers, and recognised by readers, as relevant and timely” (*Reprints* Abstract). Following on from Withers’ research, my focus is specifically the importance and relevance of repurposed interwar literature by women to a generation of women influenced by second-wave feminism. I focus on the ways in which Virago resituated the books in order to make them relevant to the WLM readers, developing commonalities between two generations of women. I will argue that Virago’s success was built on their creation of a middle-class, white, non-radical (defined below) audience for the reprints and, crucially, on their development of links between two generations of women. Virago created commonalities between the interwar writers and the intended WLM readers who made up Virago’s target audience. In doing so, Virago built upon the strong sense of sisterhood that was fundamental to second-wave feminism – bringing many women together to empower them. The VMC readers reflected the values of the Virago team themselves, sharing similar socio-economic, cultural, and racial backgrounds. Virago operated by using aspects of male-dominated publishing practices to advance feminist ideas, focusing on brand image and promotional campaigns which were aimed at giving some women choice through products that could

give them a voice and empower them. Virago subverted advertising, which, as I discuss, had used and objectified women as possessions of men, wholly dependent on men. Uniquely, Virago became a feminist press that was part of the establishment of profitable mainstream publishing while, at the same time, promoting an ideology of non-radical feminism.

Whilst Virago aimed the VMC range at the predominantly white, middle-class women of the WLM, it is important to recognise the diversity of the women in Virago. The Virago team, although all white, came from diverse backgrounds and largely shared outsiders' views. Goodings, a Canadian, contends that Callil, whose father was Lebanese, "being from Australia, recognized a fellow colonial not bowed by British traditions" (*A Bite* 7). Similarly, Goodings suggests that Ursula Owen saw herself as an outsider, reflecting her German-Jewish origins, although she adds that her background was "combined with an English Bluestocking education" (8). In spite of the diversity of their backgrounds – Kate Griffin is from New Zealand and Alexandra Pringle is Jewish – they nevertheless shared and perpetuated the values and cultural perspectives of the white middle class, combined with an ability to evaluate British values with non-British outsider views.

An ongoing debate in feminism during the WLM years was between liberal (or non-radical) and radical feminist approaches. Liberal feminists supported progress through reform of the existing social structures, including the promotion of legal changes, such as equal access to voting rights, and laws to ensure equal pay. Mackay defines liberal feminism, "also called equal-rights

feminism”, explaining that “it can be distinguished by its focus on reform, rather than explicit revolution” (57). Whilst Mackay admits the difficulty of defining the different types of feminism, her 2015 work points out that “there has not been much support for radical or revolutionary feminism thus far” (58). Feminists viewed patriarchy and patriarchal institutions as the reason for women’s subordination, sexually, politically, and economically, arguing that patriarchy shaped all aspects of women’s lives. Radical feminists argued for confrontational methods in order to abolish patriarchy. In terms of social and political change, Virago promoted non-radical methods, challenging the publishing industry by establishing an all-female publishing house, by producing work by women, and by women making all decisions on publications and their presentation. Virago, as a publishing house, reformed patriarchal institutions by demonstrating that women were capable of running a business organisation and making publication decisions whilst being financially viable. They exemplify change rather than revolution. I refer to Virago, and Callil, as non-radical rather than liberal feminists because the company, and Callil, resisted overtly aligning themselves with any branch of feminism, but Callil’s approach to feminism and publishing is based on liberalism, avoiding radical methods of challenging patriarchal attitudes.

Although Virago became part of the mainstream publishing world in the sense of moving away from less popular, niche publishing endeavours, I will demonstrate that it did not become part of mass market publishing. I take mass market to mean products “intended to be bought by as many people as possible, not just by people with a lot of money or a special interest”

(Cambridge dictionary online). Building on the work of Bourdieu in order to assess how Virago developed the VMCs for a particular audience rather than a mass market, and how they conceptualised their market, I will show that the VMCs have always attracted, and been designed to appeal to, a specific market of women, in spite of Callil's avowed intentions of being aimed at both women and men. In 1973, Callil wrote to Marsha Rowe and Rosie Boycott (the founders of *Spare Rib* magazine) explaining her philosophy and aims for Virago Press. One point included was the aim of producing "Books for men and women" (Add MS 89178/1/2).

The marketing campaigns designed for the VMCs, as I discuss in Chapter 3, were aimed at women making their own choices about what to buy, rather than pre-WLM advertising campaigns aimed at men and their control over all financial transactions and decisions. Virago recognised the importance of treating women as independent consumers, although in the late 1970s, there were still very large numbers of women living as financial dependents. Virago's recognition of women's ability, and desire, to make decisions on purchases was, at the time, innovative and indicative of social norms that were beginning to change, and the aims of the WLM played a pivotal role in enabling women's roles to diversify. It is, however, important to recognise that Virago's market was very specific, and their promotional campaigns were designed for a particular sector of society.

Interwar feminism and second-wave feminism

Recognising and understanding the overlaps and commonalities between two generations of feminists requires an awareness of previous feminisms, and of the aims and arguments of earlier feminist movements. The campaigns of the WLM during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s are comparable to feminist campaigns during the interwar years, and I will indicate the main points of commonality between feminism in these two periods in order to understand why Virago's project of republishing interwar novels was so important to second-wave feminists. After the First World War, the Six Point Group was established in 1921 by, among others, Lady Rhondda, who was also the founder of *Time and Tide* in 1920, which I discuss in relation to the contributions of E. M. Delafield and Winifred Holtby in Chapter 4. Rhondda had been involved in her father's newspaper business, gradually taking over the running of the company. In terms of her feminism, "Rhondda viewed her entrance into the business world not as a departure from feminist concerns but rather as another way of contributing to the women's movement" (Mellown 8). Rhondda's views on being involved in the public arena of work and running a company are comparable to those of Callil in setting up Virago to further the cause of feminism by participating in traditionally male-run business ventures. Both women promoted the importance of women's independence and their public involvement in society. Mellown comments that, as a businesswoman, Rhondda "demonstrated female ability in an area where few other women of that time had the opportunity to follow her" (12). Indicating social changes, several other feminist publishers were established by women in the wake of Callil's venture, where

Rhondda's example could not be emulated by many others at a time when employment options for women were very limited.

Joannou describes the 1920s as a decade that lacked cohesive feminist campaigns after the intense campaigning that led to partial success for women's suffrage: "Organised feminist activity was at a low ebb, and, in many respects, the 1920s were inauspicious years for women" (*Ladies* 78).

Rhondda's aims in setting up the Six Point Group reflected the advances in feminist demands, and the diversity of demands after the partial suffrage granted to women in 1918: "Rhondda now called for a united effort that would concentrate on a few key reforms" (Mellown 10). The group emphasised the importance of boosting women's self-esteem and of changing conventional attitudes to women's roles, and she "inaugurated the Six Point Group [as] an organisation designed to draw women together" (Mellown 10). The Six Point Group "was Britain's leading equal rights feminist organisation during the interwar years" ("Celebrating the Centenary of the Six Point Group"). The issue of *Time and Tide* from November 1920 set out the demands of the organisation for "satisfactory legislation for child assault, the unmarried mother and her child, the widowed mother, the guardianship of infants, equality in the civil service, equality of teachers' pay" ("Celebrating the Centenary"). The demands of both the Six Point Group and the WLM developed from post-war social and political situations and their impact on women's rights. Kent discusses the way in which the outbreak of the First World War ended the campaigns for women's suffrage as women supported the war effort and the men who went to fight. Although the suffrage movement had attracted much support, Kent argues that, after the

War, it “never regained its prewar status as a mass movement”, partly because Parliament had granted the vote to women over thirty in 1918 (4). There was also a national desire to return the country to a pre-war state of peace, including pre-war domestic and family situations, which impacted on gender issues.

Some gains for women were made after World War One, in addition to partial suffrage; these gains included increasing the amount of money a father had to pay to support his illegitimate child, opening the legal profession to women, and admitting women to Civil Service entrance exams. In spite of these gains, Kent discusses the loss of confidence in feminist campaigns after the war. She attributes this to the mass loss of men’s lives, which emphasised maternity and the importance of women becoming mothers. Beddoe describes the interwar situation, writing that “women were needed as mothers to bear and raise children in a generation tragically depleted by the First World War” (4). She compares the pressure on women to fulfil their gendered roles as wives and mothers to the expectations placed on “womenfolk of Germany under Nazi rule” (4); the threat posed by the imminence of another war and the Nazi ideology was recognised by Holtby and other feminists as I discuss in Chapter 4. During the war years, women were seen as workers rather than as mothers, as part of the war effort, working in munitions factories or in other necessary war work. Post-1918, women’s lives and roles were debated, leading to two types of feminisms: women who wanted to be mothers and wives, but with better conditions than pre-war, and those who wanted to remain in the world of employment and to be treated as equal to men in terms of pursuing careers. These different interwar feminisms, which Wallace describes as “a self-

conscious division between ‘Old Feminists’ such as Lady Rhondda and Winifred Holtby, and ‘New Feminists’ such as Eleanor Rathbone” (*Sisters* 42) are discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to the views and writing of Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby.

By the 1930s it was becoming evident that another major war was inevitable, and, as during the First World War, feminist campaigns became less important in the face of a national threat. A pre-First World War sense of sisterhood that had developed during the campaign for suffrage “is lost at this point, as women constructed themselves instead as ‘sisters’ to their soldier ‘brothers’” (Wallace, *Sisters* 23). Similarly, after being relegated to the background during the Second World War, feminism again became a prominent mass movement from the 1960s. Several factors combined during the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s and led to the development of the WLM, which started in America. Jolly, in the introduction to her 2019 oral history of the WLM, *Sisterhood and After*, suggests that “the WLM revived the fight for women’s rights which had withered fifty years after the vote was won, bringing a new emphasis on personal, political and social autonomy” (2).

Bruley’s 2017 work asks which women became feminists in the 1960s and 1970s, and what factors made them feminists. As with the post-war situation in the 1920s, Bruley contextualises the WLM within the “post-1945 settlement [which] was predicated on the notion that a return to ‘normality’ meant the restoration of the male ‘breadwinner’ norm and the dependent housewife/mother” (68). Both Jolly and Bruley discuss the impact of the baby

boomers in the UK; increased numbers of children and new labour-saving aids to housework, led to “a starker gendered division of labour (which) redomesticated mothers” (Jolly *Sisterhood* 63). Wallace points to rising standards of living in the interwar years, and this is mirrored in Bruley’s description of baby boomers experiencing higher living standards, rising expectations, and the ability to enjoy greater access to higher education. Bruley conducted a series of interviews with women born between 1939 and 1955. She concludes that several factors contributed to the rise of the feminist movement in the late 1960s and the 1970s, and she discusses the impact of such factors on women’s experiences. One point Bruley focuses on is “the growing sense among women during the 1960s of empowerment and a realisation that through collective action they could produce meaningful change” (69). The understanding of the importance of collective action stemmed from awareness of collective movements across the world, such as the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in the US and the mass student protests in 1968. Whilst some women’s actions were influenced by their mothers’ sense of frustration at the lack of opportunities for work outside the home, others reacted against familial expectations of gender roles: one interviewee “first began to think about gender difference when her father chose to send her two brothers to boarding school, but not her or her sister” (71). Bruley notes the prevalence of experiencing higher education among the interviewees, who found both education institutions and the world of paid work were “deeply imbued with sexist practices and culture” (72). The above factors, suggests Bruley, led to women’s sense of empowerment and their growing resentment at their “lack of equality in law rendering them second class citizens” (74).

The growth of the teenage market and youth culture were important factors in the development of the second-wave feminist movement and Jolly comments that “young women could turn the mainstream cultures of teenage rebellion to their own interests” (*Sisterhood 70*). Youth rebellions and protests occurred across many countries, giving young people of both genders the confidence that they could act and be heard. Callil described the importance of the events in 1968: “1968 was a turning point: Paris, Grosvenor Square, the anti-apartheid movement, the underground press of Oz, Frenz, International Times” (“The Stories”). In America the cause of feminism was related to anti-Vietnam protests and the peace movement, in addition to the Civil Rights movement, whilst in the UK, women were largely responsible for the Greenham Common protests, as the threat of nuclear war encouraged people to “step up and take responsibility for themselves” (Goodings *A Bite* 98). Feminist writing also impacted upon women’s ideas: in America Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* was published in 1963; in the UK Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* was published in 1970, and Sheila Rowbotham produced several books during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Bruley also mentions the fiction of Doris Lessing, whose novel, *The Golden Notebook*, was published in 1962, and Bruley suggests that “these texts were not absorbed in abstract but related to the women’s own experiences” (75).

Women’s experiences were, even in the 1970s, still very restricted by discrimination when it came to borrowing money, obtaining a mortgage, or applying for jobs, which were advertised by gender, and Jolly points out that “marriage was still idealized as the high point of a woman’s life” (90). Bruley and Jolly draw attention to the situation of women during the 1960s and 1970s, and

these factors can be compared to those affecting women's lives in the 1920s. The sense of losing the freedom and opportunity to be in paid employment after both wars impacted on women, making many of them resent being restricted to the home and to family duties. The development of both the Six Point Group and the WLM can be understood as having their roots in women's social and legal restrictions, living in societies that viewed women as second-class citizens. The Six Point Group and the WLM, with its focus on liberal feminist approaches, were attempts to change and improve women's lives through legislation. Auchmuty and Rackley write, in 2021, that "the Six Point Group is important for recognising the potential of law to change attitude – that legal change is the starting point, not the end of the matter" (The Law Society Gazette). Auchmuty and Rackley also explain that the Six Point Group was open to criticism for its appeal to professional women, and "it is true that its membership was dominated by educated middle-class women". The WLM and Virago were open to the same criticism,

Against the background of discrimination and gendered expectations in the 1960s and 1970s, the WLM produced seven demands. The full list of demands put forward are: "equal pay, equal education and job opportunities, free twenty-four hour nurseries, free contraception and abortion on demand, financial and legal independence, an end to discrimination against lesbians and women's right to define their own sexuality, freedom from violence, and sexual coercion" (www.oxfordreference.com). Like the demands of the Six Point Group, the WLM's demands addressed women's rights both within the home and the workplace, and as Jolly points out, "campaigns around women's domestic

labour were at the heart of the movement” with a focus on women’s dependence on a male breadwinner (*Sisterhood* 92). The ideals and aims of second-wave feminism developed from the values of collective action and the social concerns of the WLM. Collective action in the WLM manifested itself as sisterhood. I discuss the concept of sisterhood, and its limitations, throughout this thesis in relation to the marketing and branding of the VMCs.

Wallace argues that, during the interwar years, “rivalry between women was encouraged and even manufactured within the dominant discourses as a way of distracting women’s attention from the real competition – between men and women for political power and jobs” (*Sisters* 12). Similarly, third-wave feminism (and post-feminism) are put forward as a backlash to the WLM, with the media proposing that feminism was no longer needed, resulting in many young women refusing to call themselves feminists in the 1990s and early 2000s. But, as Jane Cholmeley of *Silver Moon* bookshop complains “you can’t be ‘post’- something that hasn’t happened” (Paton). Writing in *Bitch* magazine in 2005, Rachel Fudge describes the problems associated with the post-feminist media image:

“painting ours as a postfeminist world gets everyone in power off the hook; it pretends that everything is peachy and suggests that if, for you, it isn’t, then the problem lies with you and your personal choices, not with any larger systems” (in Farrugia, 20). This description shows the fundamental difference between second-wave feminism and the feminisms that succeeded it; where the WLM was based on a belief in the importance of sisterhood and collective action, later feminisms were more individualist movements, and this is especially true of post-feminism. Publishing, in particular Virago’s republishing project, was a

collective movement based on the values and views of second-wave feminism, rather than the individualism of the feminisms that succeeded the WLM.

As third-wave feminism sought to include globalism and post-colonialism, “at Virago, efforts were made to diversify the editorial staff as well as support more BME women” (Riley 108). Being less radical, and founding a publishing house that competed with mainstream publishers, enabled Virago to develop a model that was able to evolve and to continue providing books for changing types of feminisms. Responding to the emergence of new identities that blurred the binary male/female definitions, Virago began the Virago V series in 1998 with Sarah Waters’ *Tipping the Velvet*. Goodings discusses the ways in which the new range of books “reflected bold women’s writing and views” (*A Bite* 191). Withers and Riley associate the ability to change with Virago’s adoption of “different business structures and investment strategies” (Withers “Enterprising Women” 480). Both Withers and Riley have documented the financial changes in Virago and their periods of independence. Virago’s ability to evolve also involves their publishing decisions in response to changes in society and in feminist arguments. The original VMCs were clearly based on concepts of sisterhood and women’s challenges to financial dependence, but Virago was able to develop the model in response to different feminist demands, eventually publishing VMCs that reflected wider gender issues and the lives of women in different cultures. This is in contrast to the limited number of VMCs by women of colour in the period from 1978 to 1990, as shown in the Appendix.

Recent work on Virago includes Lennie Goodings’ 2020 *A Bite of the Apple*.

Goodings was not a founder member of Virago but joined in 1978 with a part-

time position, after working in a different publishing office in London and writing to Callil asking for work. She had “[no] hope that I would become the publisher” (*A Bite* 3). Goodings became Publishing Director in 1992, remaining as the Publisher and Editorial Director after Virago’s sale to Little, Brown in 1995, and was appointed as Virago Chair in 2017. She offers an insider account of the publishing house from its early years until her retirement. She describes Virago’s aims as “bringing feminist ideas to a mainstream culture” (47). The VMCs are seen by Goodings as a “symbol, era-changing and catching the mood of the time” (72). The VMCs, more than any other Virago publications, enabled the publisher to combine ideology and profit. The curated range of republished novels ensured Virago’s financial security – republishing, being cheaper than publishing new books, assisted in their financial success.

In order to combine ideology and profit, and to develop the VMCs as a means of connecting two generations of women, Virago had to prioritise their financial situation. The financial benefit of republishing books had been recognised by Allen Lane in the 1930s when he introduced the Penguin paperback as a range of cheap and accessible fiction and non-fiction reprints. The books were a means of “realising his vision to make quality books available to all at low prices” (Penguin website, timeline). Vike Plock’s work on Penguin discusses the first titles produced in the new Penguin range of paperbacks in 1935, six of which were provided by Jonathan Cape “in exchange for hefty royalties” (241). These titles include E. H. Young’s 1925 *William*, later republished as a VMC in 1988. Virago’s cover notes draw attention to the main character, William’s, acknowledgement “that marital harmony can be a social illusion”, focusing on

the book's relevance to second-wave feminists' questioning of the institution of marriage. In contrast, Penguin's readers, according to Mass-Observation research discussed by Richard Hornsey, "were more likely to be male than female" (815). Penguin's first publications included several women writers in addition to Young: Mary Webb, Agatha Christie, and Dorothy Sayers among them. In contrast to the Penguin readership, the VMCs, as I discuss, were designed to attract a predominantly female readership, although the readers of both paperback imprints "were found to have left-wing sympathies, to be generally educated to secondary level, and to overwhelmingly come from the middle or artisan classes" (Hornsey 814-5).

There are clearly points of overlap between the Penguin paperback range and Virago's Modern Classics, but also some fundamental differences. Virago took on board the idea of republished paperback fiction but, rather than envisaging the books as a cheap alternative to competing hardback fiction, the VMCs were reprints with a definite and clear political purpose. As Withers points out, Virago's early financial constraints necessitated careful budgeting. "Establishing a profitable backlist at appropriate speed and scale was [...] a financial necessity. Reprinting old books was a cost- and time-effective way to do this" (*Reprints* 10). In contrast to the cheap Penguin paperbacks, because of their larger size and glossy covers, the VMCs were more expensive than other paperback novels, offering a bridge between hardbacks and cheap paperbacks, but the look and the price was meant to attract the educated, middle-class women readers targeted by Virago. Withers describes the larger size books, known as trade paperbacks, as "the new and chic way of publishing.

Unhampered by the cheapness and ephemerality associated with mass-market paperbacks, trade paperbacks were nonetheless affordable” (*Green Spines*) – although, I would add, not to the poorer readers who were not part of Virago’s intended demographic. Withers also suggests that publicity helped to develop “a notion that Virago titles were worthy of the reader’s time, attention and, of course, money” (*Reprints* 3).

Design and branding were important to both Penguin and Virago for developing a recognisable and distinctive product. Discussing the famous penguin logo, which Hornsey describes as a mascot rather than a colophon, Hornsey argues that Lane was continuing a 1920s development of brand mascots which had come to dominate advertising in Britain. The use of a mascot, an anthropomorphic character is, for Hornsey, linked to the concept of brand characterization. He suggests that using a brand character “allowed [Lane] to appropriate the utopian dynamics of mass consumption. [...] Penguin’s mascot became one of mid-century’s most notable harbingers of social democracy” (818). Although Penguin started to use imagery and colour on their covers, the iconic penguin remained a visible symbol of the brand, always included on the front covers. Virago’s apple followed this pattern of visibility. In contrast to Penguin, Virago’s paperbacks were not cheap imprints and they perpetuated an elitism among the book-buying public. In this they reflected the WLM’s lack of inclusiveness, as I will demonstrate. Rather than using a mascot figure as their logo, Virago’s apple was symbolic of a challenge to literary culture. Described by Murray as the “wryly anti-Edenic bitten apple logo”, it was indicative of the political content and aims of their reprints (35). Virago’s paperbacks were both

political and elitist: a complete contrast to Lane's idea to "re-issue and mass-produce an eclectic list of ten attractively presented, best-selling titles and offer them for the lowest possible price" (Plock 241).

Virago's reproduction and presentation of women's writing emphasised the association between non-radical feminism's promotion of sisterhood and reading in order to become familiar with the lives and experiences of other women. The Virago team actively read and interpreted the interwar novels as having feminist content, encouraging the same reading process in new readers. There were some notable feminist writers whose books were republished as VMCs, including Rebecca West, Winfred Holtby and Vera Brittain, all of whom campaigned for feminist causes. (Some of Holtby's work is discussed in Chapter 4). Many other VMC writers did not follow feminist campaigns, but all the VMCs were presented in similar ways, highlighting their interest to the second-wave feminists of the 1970s and 1980s, and demonstrating the similarities between the WLM demands and those of the interwar Six Point Group. Both movements emphasised the need for financial improvements for parents and for women in paid work through legislation, and this is perhaps the most important similarity between the demands of the WLM and those of the Six Point Group – they both pursued their aims through non-radical means, seeking change through legislation, rather than through radical social changes. The Six Point Group Campaigned "by traditional constitutional methods: deputations to the appropriate government ministers, public rallies and letters to major newspapers" ("Records of the Six Point Group"). Their campaigns are reflected in the WLM's practices: Harriet Harman discusses the legal challenges

associated with the WLM and the Labour Party. “The Labour government was officially saying, for the first time, that women had the right to be treated as equal to men, and had passed a law to back it up” (18). The WLM worked largely through politics and marches, such as marches and protests demanding changes to the abortion laws. The two movements also realised the importance of bringing women together, to share ideas, to support each other, and to campaign.

Archives, libraries, and women’s history

A brief consideration of archives and lending libraries aids our understanding of the ways in which women’s cultural history has been hidden, indicating some of the reasons for women’s writing being forgotten and left to go out of print. Nicola Beauman, the founder of the reprint publisher Persephone, wrote *A Very Great Profession* (published by Virago in 1983). Her discussion of the importance of lending libraries to interwar women indicates the ways in which books by women were grouped together as “the woman’s novel” (5). She takes, as the focus of her study, the importance of the lending libraries to interwar women. Many of the novels mentioned by Beauman, and available from the lending libraries, were written by women: “to anyone interested in the fiction written in the period between the wars it soon becomes clear that there *is* a category of fiction written for women – ‘the woman’s novel’” (5). Discussing the heroine of *Brief Encounter*, the starting point of her study, Beauman adds that “It would be safe to conclude that it was either a Light Romance or a Family Story that Laura had in her basket” (13). Labelling these novels as “the

woman's novel" or as "Light Romance" is suggestive of their exclusion from the literary canon, perhaps explaining why so many novels written by women had been allowed to go out of print, leading to a dearth of women's voices in literature until Virago took on the project of reprinting many novels that were no longer published. Letting women's writing go out of print led to the silencing of women's perspectives and voices. It is this silence that has contributed to the lack of analysis of women's publishing. The WLM aimed to change male literary dominance, giving women writers the opportunity to reinterpret society by challenging male perceptions through their writing.

Like Beauman, Nicola Humble's 2001 work on middlebrow novels recognises that grouping women's writing together under one label contributes to its disparagement and to women's fiction being ignored. Her work is an attempt to understand the concept of the middlebrow and to see the value of middlebrow novels, most of which were written by women. Humble emphasises the themes of "the feminine middlebrow and its readers [...]: class, the home, gender, and the family" (3). The VMCs under discussion in this thesis clearly fit into Humble's description, particularly the domestic novels of Young and Delafield, and she offers a consideration of several authors included in the VMCs. The VMCs I discuss were also written during the time period that she locates as being the years during which the feminine middlebrow was produced – from 1918 to the mid-1950s. I look in detail at the work of Rosamond Lehmann, E. M. Delafield, E.H Young, and Winifred Holtby, chosen because of the diversity of their styles and because they each had several books as VMCs, indicating their popularity with readers and with Virago. Like the majority of VMC writers during

the time period of my study they are all white. Most republished authors were English-speaking, and I have chosen four English (as opposed to Scottish, Welsh or Irish) authors as they are representative of the majority of VMC writers during my period of study. They also present a range of genres, which include romance, the domestic novel, and the diary format, helping to avoid defining them under the one category of women's writing. I have avoided using the term middlebrow for the VMCs for two main reasons. Firstly, Humble emphasises the importance of the reader for our appreciation of the middlebrow: "the issue of textual pleasure", recognising the role of the middlebrow novel for the readers "in the negotiation of new class and gender identities in the period from the 1920s to the 1950s" (5). Whilst my work is largely based on the questioning of gender roles and identities in the novels, my concern is with the new generation of readers during the WLM, rather than with the readers that are the focus of Humble's discussion. Secondly, grouping the books together under one label risks ignoring the important differences between the writers I investigate and I wish to stress the differences in their approaches.

In accordance with second-wave feminism, particularly the views of Sheila Rowbotham, who was heavily involved in *Virago* and was a member of their advisory group, the republished novels contributed to giving women their literary history. The books challenged both the limited amount of available published work by women and the dominance of male views on history and cultural history. Woolf commented on the lack of women's cultural history, and Showalter draws attention to the dearth of women's published work, resulting in women being unable to understand their own literary history (Woolf *Room 47*,

Showalter *Literature* 10). Mercedes Aguirre, in her article “Recovering Women’s Writing”, refers to the importance of making known women’s literary history, particularly for women writers, for whom “identifying their foremothers and recovering their histories has served to defend their own right to write” (in Russell and Jolly 197). Republishing also allows for the rereading and reinterpretation of novels. The value of rereading was discussed by feminists such as Adrienne Rich. Rich advocates rereading for giving women the opportunity to reinterpret books, and to gain a new understanding of their social and cultural history. Aguirre also argues that the rediscovery of forgotten writers “has helped force a rethinking of the twentieth-century literary canon” (in Russell and Jolly 199).

Virago’s curation of a range of republished fiction needs to be analysed in order to assess its importance both in promoting women’s literary history and in contributing to Virago’s success. Withers’ recent book on the VMCs investigates the repurposing of a book for a new audience, asking, “how can the book be presented as timely?” (2). Withers argues that reprinting fiction was timely for the publisher, for the forgotten writer, and “for the reader, who utilised historical frameworks to adopt a text, published in a different time, as belonging to their own” (14). Republishing women’s interwar novels for women influenced by the largely white, middle-class WLM was clearly a timely decision, fulfilling the demand from second-wave feminists for books that provided their literary history.

Withers emphasises the importance of Virago's design for the VMCs, suggesting that the covers, consisting of details from paintings, helped to make the books relevant to the time. Their argument situates the design of the imprint within the trend for heritage or "retro cultural goods" during the 1970s and 1980s (*Reprints* 5). They suggest that the VMCs were successful because "as feminist texts, their political purpose was legible" (5). Suggesting that the VMC novels are feminist texts tends to conflate feminist writing and women's writing. My discussion will build on Withers' argument to demonstrate that the majority of the books, rather than being overtly feminist, succeeded because Virago made them relevant, using introductions and cover comments to establish commonalities between two generations of women. Withers' arguments on timeliness are important, contextualising Virago within the WLM, and my study emphasises the role of the publisher in (re)presenting the books as timely and relevant. Virago republished many books that, although promoting the lives of women, were not categorised as feminist novels. For example, the books of Rosamond Lehmann, which I discuss in Chapter 4, portray the lives of women, but her portrayals can be problematic for feminists.

As Callil recognised, the cultural knowledge of women's history, including the history of feminist campaigns, and the literary representations of women's lives was limited at the time of the WLM. Much knowledge of women's protests and campaigns was passed down to other generations through oral remembrances, or letters and diaries. Hesford questions the interpretation and dissemination of women's histories, asking "how has the history of women's liberation been produced; what stories have been constructed and disseminated as memories

of women's liberation [...]?" (6). She suggests that personal accounts of feminists can make known the events that have been relegated to footnotes by a patriarchal society which has derided the WLM as a movement of man-haters, an idea nicely parodied by Virago's choice of name and logo. Brown and Seitz also raise the issue of women's history, arguing that, "for the most part, it is an unwritten history of millions of private lives, whose voices, those that were recorded at all, are scattered and buried in journals and letters" (in Morgan 3). Hesford, and Brown and Seitz, also question the limited nature of information about women's campaigns in a society that does not promote recognition of black women's struggles, even though many feminist arguments stemmed from anti-slavery fights in America (Brown and Seitz 18-23).

Withers discusses the transmission of feminist ideas and knowledge through "the practical organisation of memory resources and their dissemination through popular culture, libraries, archives, museums and the internet" (*Transmission* 5). As discussed below, and as challenged by feminists and feminist publishers, culture, libraries, archives, and museums present male histories and male interpretations of events, and the limited amount of published female writing and archival collections make it more difficult to transmit feminist movements across generations. Rowbotham emphasised the intergenerational notion of feminism, of learning from history, and of younger women learning from their mothers and from the older generation of women. But Withers points out the sometimes conflicted nature of intergenerational feminist debates, and they discuss the conceptualisation of generational thinking "especially through differentiating the activism of so-called second- and third-wave feminism" (*Transmission* 66).

Riley's analysis of third-wave feminism (discussed above) points to the criticisms they put forward, aimed at the WLM generation, which partly centred on the lack of diversity in the WLM and its aims; feminism became a dirty word for some young women. Given the difficulties involved in disseminating feminism across generations, owing to the limited availability of written work on women's histories and lives, the significance of Callil's project needs to be recognised. Callil challenged the lack of women's cultural history at a time, the 1970s, when archival documents were easily lost and there were no digital records available to provide information; reprinting forgotten novels as VMCs was a major step in providing women with the histories of previous generations of women. The creation of the Virago archive is a way of challenging the historical lack of archival work by and about women, and republishing books written by women of an earlier generation represents an important means of readers accessing fictional accounts of women's lives. As discussed, Rowbotham and Showalter both commented on the lack of women's available cultural history, leading to WLM women wanting to find out how previous generations of women lived and wrote. The title of Rowbotham's *Hidden From History* refers to the ways in which women have been written out of history and cultural history; the WLM was based, in part, on the desire to reclaim and recover their hidden histories. Callil's project is an important part of this project.

Archival evidence has, historically, been dominated by material by, and about, men. Joan Wallach Scott writes that, until the 1970s, "historians searching the past for evidence about women have confronted again and again the phenomenon of women's invisibility" (in Kleinberg, 5). S. Jay Kleinberg further

argues that women's invisibility influenced society's view of history. She highlights the importance of women's studies for "challeng[ing] the form and emphasis of traditional history by the use of gender as a category of historical analysis" (vii). In *A Room of One's Own*, in 1929, Woolf had written on the lack of available information about women's history, reading and writing; Scott's view indicates that, until the 1970s, women's history and literary history remained invisible. Accepted views of history and understanding of world events have, until the WLM, been based on male views, and exclude the ways in which women were affected by, or influenced, historical events. Archives, like publishing and history, gave accounts through male eyes and events. Wallace's study of women's historical fiction suggests that the lack of records of women's lives and women's exclusion from history have led "some women historians [...] to write novels instead" (*Historical Novel 2*). Second-wave feminism campaigned to end women's silence and invisibility, and to challenge the accepted hegemony of male-dominated history and literary history. Withers' article, "Recovering traditions, Inspiring Action", discusses the establishment of The Feminist Archive in 1978, describing it as "the first archive in Britain to specifically collect materials from the various feminist movements that blossomed from the 1960s onwards" (in Russell and Jolly 187). The Feminist Archive represents an important step in the growing awareness of the lack of women's archival material and the dominance of men's viewpoints and values. Callil's decision to donate the Virago papers to the British Library archival collection can thus be seen as part of second-wave feminism's aim of presenting women's perspectives on the culture and history of the twentieth century. In an undated memo from 1982, Callil wrote to members of the Virago

team, asking them to “keep whatever you think a student of women’s history in 2000 would like to know about us” (Add MS 89178/1/71). Callil had become aware, after discussion with Reading University, that Virago’s archives would have future interest and value for reclaiming women’s history. Helen Buss and Marlene Kadar suggest that feminist challenges to the literary canon have enabled a revaluation of all women’s writing, leading to “the increased use of archives to rescue a female tradition in writing” (1). Archives play a valuable role in reclaiming women’s place in history, just as the VMCs reclaim women’s literary history. The VMCs gave women information about both their literary history and the historical period during which they were written, becoming a form of archival documentation for second-wave feminists. My discussion situates the VMCs as a response to the WLM. Acknowledging the significance of archival studies for reclaiming women’s histories, I use the Virago archive to analyse the importance of the VMCs as part of women’s cultural history and as a challenge to the male domination of literary history. The VMCs and Virago’s archival material both represent historical documents that chart women’s lives and their history.

The Virago Archives are held in The British Library in London and in the University of Reading. The archive papers in Reading contain “records pertaining to the founding of and early business operations of Virago Press” (collections.reading.ac.uk). Many of the papers at Reading relate to Virago’s finances, and they include receipts, cheque book stubs, invoices, bank records and statements. There are also Production Records and sales records for the years 1977-1982. Although there are some author files – such as Cathy Porter

– most information relating to the Virago writers relates to royalties and sales information, including Virago Monthly Profitability printouts. Reading also has information on exports. The British Library houses the majority of the Virago archive, as explained by Eleanor Dickens, archivist: “The British Library Contemporary Archives and Manuscripts Department holds the archive of Virago Press, as well as the recently acquired personal papers of Callil herself. A truly contemporary collection, with material spanning into the 2010s” (Eleanor Dickens, “In Memory of Carmen Callil”).

The British Library Virago archives include the VMC files, Greater Access to Publishing, Publicity Materials, Promotional Materials, Virago Anniversary Papers, memos, and photos from film adaptations as well as of book covers. Unfortunately, due to the recent cyber-attack, as explained on the British Library website (May 2024) I am unable to provide a complete list of the Virago papers held in the British Library, but a large proportion of these papers consist of VMC author files. The author files provide the main component of my archival study although I also refer to files on promotions and memos, which are detailed in the bibliography. My decision to base my research on the author files in the British Library collection arose from my interest in exploring how Virago chose and presented some of the VMC writers to their reading public. The author archives also indicate some of the links between various writers, reflecting the sense of sisterhood that underpins much of the WLM and Virago’s project. I wanted to investigate how Virago made the VMC writers relevant to WLM readers and the ways in which they emphasised commonalities between the interwar writers and the readers of a different generation.

Archival analysis and research have the benefit of not relying on people's memories, but an archive can only offer a partial account of history. Steedman argues that "the archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past" (68). Kadar agrees that archives are "incomplete" and compares them to literary texts, describing archival records as "a complex site of influences and representations" (in Buss and Kadar 115). Like literary texts, archives can be interpreted in different ways, according to the contextual knowledge available. The Virago company papers were donated to the British Library by the company, and her personal papers were donated by Callil. Staff at the British Library confirm that the Virago material has been kept as it was when donated: "The majority of the archive was kept in the original order of the creator (in this case Virago as a company/assorted Virago staff) and reflects how it was used and stored by Virago" (email to author from Eleanor Dickens 28/06/2019). The material selected represents Virago's working practices. But the selection will omit areas that the staff or the founder would prefer to remain out of the public eye. It is also the case that many papers have been lost – in the pre-computer years of Virago, keeping track of the vast numbers of letters that are reputed to have come from readers may have been impossible during several changes of office address. Discussing the possibility of future archives, Callil sent a memo to the Virago team saying that "nothing more must be chucked out; not only do archivists and students etc want every small letter but even production costings are kept. [...] I have been the guiltiest offender, as I've constantly chucked out almost everything since we began" (05/04/1982, Add MS 89178/1/71).

Preservation of materials in a pre-computer age can be particularly spasmodic; academic Helen Taylor discusses “the arbitrary nature of memory, keepsakes, and documentation in the world preceding the Web” (in Smith and Stead, 200). Working with archival material involves interpreting the selected papers along with other contemporary information, such as published interviews and newspaper articles. For example, the image of Virago, presented in their publicity materials, as being hugely influenced by their readers when choosing books for the VMC imprint, is not upheld by the British Library files. As Steedman suggests, the researcher “cannot be shocked at its exclusions, its emptiness, at what is *not* catalogued” (68). My project combines interpretation of the archival material with the novels chosen and the ways in which they were presented by Virago in order to evaluate their importance within the context of the second-wave feminist movement.

Based on archival and literary analysis, my work considers Virago’s choice and interpretation of interwar novels in order to illustrate their relevance to the second-wave feminist audience. Archival documents and the Modern Classics merit similar analysis. Both the archives and the VMCs are selective – Virago chose to republish certain novels as VMCs, omitting any that were disliked (often by Callil, who had the final word). Similarly, either through loss or selection, the archival material offers a partial history. Republishing out-of-print novels by women presents some writers’ perspectives on a historical time; the interwar VMCs offer fictional accounts of women’s history during the interwar years. The VMCs can be viewed as an extension of the archives, presenting the historical image and interpretation that suited the Virago team and their feminist

ideals. My work illustrates the significance of analysing the VMCs as a form of historical documentation, chosen to present a white middle-class perspective of women's interwar history through their fictional accounts. The VMCs and the archives together support and demonstrate the non-radical feminist views of the WLM and of the Virago team.

My thesis is divided into four sections. The first chapter situates the establishment of Virago in 1973 within the feminist movement of the 1970s. The WLM took as a main focus the challenge of giving women a voice, through literature and through representation in public life. The phrase the "personal is political" became symbolic and representative of the aims. Women's experiences and lives had been relegated to the periphery of society, where they could be ignored and unheard. Ursula Owen, of the original Virago team, argues that feminists "found art and politics inextricably connected, [...] believing that daring to expose and discuss hidden [...] topics was a vital basis for attacking social and political issues" (in P. Owen *The Future* 86). Making women's hidden lives public, often through literature, was fundamental, and the movement became, to some extent, a campaign about women's literature. Up to that point, the concept of great literature was largely based on the ideas of Leavis, which Callil said she wanted to challenge and change through feminist publishing. Her ideas on Leavis are outlined inside many of the early VMCs, referring to the limitations of his concept of the Great Tradition, as I discuss in Chapter 1. Callil complained, in many VMCs, that the Leavisite concept of literature ignored most women's writing. Mary Chamberlain, who wrote Virago's early publication *Fenwomen*, writes "Not for her [Callil] the grand literary canon

espoused by the likes of F. R. Leavis, a prominent English language critic. Passionate about literature – a love and knowledge that underpinned Virago – she was adamant that great books were also made by women and others who had been erased from the record” (2022). In the *TLS* in 1980, Callil described how, after reading English at Melbourne University, where the course was heavily influenced by Leavis, she “longed to put a bomb under Leavis’s agonisingly narrow selection of ‘great’ novelists.” Leavis’ concept of great literature, from his 1948 work, is discussed in Chapter 1. Prior to the establishment of feminist publishing houses, both Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams had challenged the exclusivity of Leavis’ ideas, arguing that definitions of great literature excluded working-class cultures and cultures from other societies. During the second-wave feminist movement women argued that the literary and cultural perspectives of women were also omitted from Leavis’ ideas of writing. Feminist publishers took on the role of giving women their literary history and this included (re)publishing women’s novels. Chapter 1 contextualises Virago against a background of literature and culture dominated by male values, demonstrating that feminist publishing represents a response to the feminist movement of the 1970s.

The second chapter investigates the ways in which Virago’s feminist views shaped their business model. The VMC range combined Callil’s dual aims of feminism and profit, challenging literary norms and values through a financially successful imprint. Understanding Virago’s feminism enables an insight into the political and ideological context of the VMCs. This section is based on research in the Virago archive at the British Library in order to investigate the values

underpinning Virago's ways of selecting books for the VMC imprint. It appears that Callil often had the final say on choice, but she was influenced by the Virago team and, more frequently, by the advisory team. The media image of Virago, reinforced by comments from staff and the Virago website, is of a publisher largely influenced by its readers and maintaining a close relationship with the readers. The current website draws attention to its VMC readers' book club and encourages readers to "get in touch and let us know what you're reading" (2022). A different picture emerges when consulting archival documents. The influential advisory team comprised women who were academics, critics, and writers, reflecting the class basis of the interwar writers as well as that of readers targeted by the VMCs. This chapter demonstrates how the VMCs exemplified the feminist views of the Virago team, enabling them to promote sisterhood and non-radical feminism through a financially successful imprint.

Chapter 3 is based on analysis of the paratextual elements of the VMCs. Building on Withers' work on Virago's carefully chosen covers for the VMCs (in *Reprints*), I draw on the work of Genette to support my argument that the appearance of the books and the new introductions were of fundamental importance in making the books relevant to a contemporary middle-class audience, and in Virago's creation of a market. Virago promoted the range of books as an upmarket recognisable brand which attracted white middle-class readers from the second-wave feminist movement. Virago's target audience comprised women supporting a feminist ideology based on liberal beliefs: liberal feminism argued for obtaining equality for women through legal changes rather

than through radical actions. I refer to the work of Bourdieu, focusing on his study of the creation of an audience and his distinction between mainstream production and restricted production, in order to demonstrate Virago's creation of a market that had not previously existed. Virago conceptualised a market of readers who reflected the aims and backgrounds of the Virago founders. As I will show, the appearance of the books, with green spines and details from paintings that often feature women, were designed to attract the desired market, offering an upmarket, more expensive format. Withers' argument that the covers reflected the retro-chic of the 1970s suggests that the design of the VMCs is an example of the way in which the books reflected a middle-class bias and a current, contemporary image (*Reprints* 13).

Analysis of the VMC cover notes illustrates ways in which themes of the second-wave feminist movement were signposted to potential readers. These themes were then emphasised and clarified in the newly commissioned introductions. The introductions were mostly written by women writers of the 1970s and 1980s who were able to raise issues in the interwar novels that were pertinent to their own lives and, therefore, to the lives of the readers. The overlaps between the aims of the WLM and the Six Point Group, although not specifically mentioned in the paratextual elements of the VMCs, are manifest in the introductions. The Six Point Group's aims "evolved into six general points of equality for women: political, occupational, moral, social, economic and legal" ("Records of the Six Point Group). In-depth analysis of selected introductions from a range of VMCs demonstrates how the interwar books were made relevant for a new audience – a generation of readers forty or fifty years after

the books were first published. Archival information can indicate the ways in which writers were chosen for providing new introductions. The influence of second-wave theorists on the introductions is apparent and I refer to the work of influential thinkers, including Sheila Rowbotham and Germaine Greer, to illustrate the main concerns of the second-wave feminist movement. The contemporary introductions draw attention to aspects of second-wave feminism without being radical, raising issues related to women's domestic lives and their relationships without suggesting revolutionary social change in order to improve women's lives. Repurposing interwar novels by discussing issues that were important to second-wave feminists encouraged readers to interpret them in ways that were meaningful to their lives. This chapter demonstrates the importance of branding and presentation of the VMCs for establishing a market based on the liberal values of second-wave feminism.

The new introductions and packaging of interwar novels by women need to be considered in conjunction with the content of the novels in order to fully account for the enormous success of the VMC range of books. Chapter 4 offers a detailed discussion of the work of four VMC writers in order to support my contention that the VMCs became relevant to readers during the second-wave feminist period, although they were, mainly, novels that were not overtly feminist, in the sense of promoting feminist arguments or theory. For example, some of Lehmann's novels present women in unhappy marriages, without the happy ending often expected in romance novels, but Lehmann does not propose alternative lifestyles. Novels like those of Lehmann clearly define the problems endured by women, but these problems are not analysed in political

terms, so the solutions put forward are based on individual changes. The few VMC avowed feminists, such as Holtby, tend to promote social and political changes in order to improve women's lives. Like Lehmann, many VMC novelists promote women as the protagonists. By writing about women's lives, the novels bring their private lives into the public world of the published word, making them resonate with second-wave feminist ideas and arguments. As defined above, the VMC novels promote non-radical feminist ideas based on change within the social system, rather than radical ideas of more revolutionary changes.

I discuss a range of books written by Rosamond Lehmann, E. H. Young, E. M. Delafield, and Winifred Holtby. The first three selected writers offer very different styles of writing, and all four held different views on feminism, but close analysis of their work shows that they all contain themes with significance for 1970s and 1980s readers. Rereading was an important factor in second-wave feminism, allowing new interpretations of previously published work; rereading books that were curated and promoted as feminist writing encouraged the readers to see these texts as feminist novels and to interpret them from the perspective of second-wave feminism. There is an implicit assumption in Virago's presentation of the VMCs that all women's perspectives are the same, which was a criticism aimed at the second-wave feminist movement as a whole, particularly by third-wave feminists and post-feminists. In 1991, Watt and Cook put forward criticisms of the feminist movement, arguing that "a cursory glance at the feminist literature available in Britain reveals that it deals overwhelmingly with the experience of white women, often white women of middle-class background" (in Aaron and Walby 132). Criticism eventually led to more

inclusive feminisms and a fracturing of the feminist movement. Although presenting different styles and values, the novels of Lehmann, Young, Delafield, and Holtby overlap in many ways that are relevant to the VMC readers, raising contemporary themes reflecting the position of the white, middle-class women who were Virago's audience. Winifred Holtby differs from the other three in that she publicly campaigned for political, international, and feminist causes, and some of her novels are analysed in order to compare their presentation with the others. I consider whether, or to what extent, Holtby was publicised by Virago as a feminist. Chapter 4 argues that analysis of these four writers, with varied styles and political beliefs, demonstrates that the VMCs were all promoted in similar ways in order to highlight themes of relevance to their modern audience.

Withers' study of the VMCs, including analysis of Virago's 1980 repurposed version of Brittain's *Testament of Youth*, suggests that there were significant overlaps between the late Edwardian era and the late 1970s. They argue that both periods "were riven with economic and social uncertainty" (*Reprints* 39). Withers comments that publishing a successful book necessitates emphasising its relevance to the contemporary readership. Whilst agreeing with Withers' argument on the relevance of the VMCs to a contemporary readership, my thesis argues that the interwar VMCs also resonate with the generation of WLM women, presenting several areas of overlap. The main areas of relevance in Virago's choice of interwar novels are based on sisterhood, and the exploration of women's roles in society. I suggest that the WLM's concerns overlap with women's interwar concerns about financial independence, marriage, and about work roles – both in the home and the workplace – and in the methods of

campaigning. Contextualising Virago as a response to the second-wave feminist movement allows an understanding of the VMCs' role in promoting feminism. Emphasising the commonalities between the two generations of women was a crucial factor in the success of the VMC range, contributing to a tradition of women's writing. The Virago team actively chose and interpreted the books, underlining their relevance to the 1970s and 1980s. Their choice encouraged the same active reading on the part of the WLM readers and exemplifies Virago's VMC project of looking to the past and bringing it into the present through its emphasis on intergenerational commonalities. My thesis argues that the VMCs presented an important response to the WLM, not only by giving women a literary history, but by creating a relationship of commonalities between two generations of women through their curation of the Modern Classics.

Chapter 1: Virago Modern Classics: A Response to the WLM

“1978: The Virago Modern Classics launch with *Frost in May* by Antonia White, leading to a list that becomes a Virago hallmark, dedicated to the rediscovery and celebration of women writers, challenging the narrow definition of Classic” (*About Virago*. Virago Website, May 2021).

This chapter contextualises Virago Press and, in particular, the VMCs, within the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s. I investigate Virago’s aims as a feminist publisher, focusing on the first twelve years of the Virago Modern Classics (VMC) range of reprints, from 1978-1990. The VMCs started as a response to the feminism of the second-wave and, later, responded to different feminisms and their needs. Thus the early years of the VMCs, from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, coincide with the final years of second-wave feminism. By the early 1990s, feminist concerns had become more focused on individuality, emphasising the influence of sexuality, race and disability on women’s oppression and inequality. In her essay “Trailblazer of Feminism” (2000) Melissa Benn explains that “women’s liberation became feminism, a quite different politics that soon splintered into a maelstrom of competing arguments and identities” (in Cochrane 224). As I outline in the Introduction, Benn’s argument reflects the changes brought about by criticisms aimed at the WLM by women who felt that the movement had excluded them and had not recognised the importance of intersectionality. Discussing the profound changes to feminist ideas and ideals, Goodings explains that, moving away from women wanting to know more about their history, by the 1990s “there was a feeling that it’s been done, what is your problem – feelings that feminism’s gone too far” (*Virago: Changing* 00:43:43-00:43:50). Riley further explains the post-WLM

changes, saying that there was a “younger generation of women thinking there were no barriers to their success” (*Virago: Changing* 00:44:29-00:44:36).

Women wanting to understand their history underpinned many of the Virago publications in the first few years, particularly the VMCs, which offered women an insight into the lives of women during the interwar years. More recent Virago publications demonstrate awareness of intersectionality, reflecting issues of race, gender identity and class. But the early VMCs were firmly rooted in the white, middle-class feminism of the WLM. Goodings writes that, during the early years of the VMCs, “other than the Harlem Renaissance writer Zora Neale Hurston, whose fabulously stirring and romantic novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, remains a bestseller, we did not have many classics by women of colour” (*A Bite* 85). The Appendix illustrates Goodings’ contention, showing that the large majority of VMCs published between 1978 and 1990 were written by white, English-speaking women.

Understanding the male values and priorities that dominated publishing at the time Virago was established, in 1973, enables an insight into Virago’s challenge to a literary culture based on patriarchal values through their development and curation of the VMCs. The relationship between second-wave feminism and the VMC reprint range has not been fully explored, and I investigate the curation of the VMCs as a response to the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM). I examine the ways in which Virago’s ethos and practices as a publishing house were a fundamental part of, and response to, 1970s feminism, helping to give women the opportunity to make decisions on publishing and thereby give

women their literary history. The above quotation from the *About Virago* section on the Virago website largely explains the intentions behind Virago's launch of the Classics series. It adds to the views of Carmen Callil, represented by the description inside the back cover of many of the earlier Virago Modern Classics that the "Leavisite notion of the 'Great Tradition', and the narrow, academic definition of a 'classic', has meant the neglect of a large number of interesting secondary works of fiction" (in Enid Bagnold, *The Loved and Envied* 1988 VMC edition. Virago Editorial Team). Virago's comments on Leavis' 1948 book, *The Great Tradition*, imply a criticism of his impact on debates about the English literary canon.

Elaine Showalter, whose discussion of women's writing in *A Literature of Their Own* (1978) influenced Virago's choice of books for their Modern Classics range, complained that ideas of *The Great Tradition* had "reduced and condensed the extraordinary range and diversity of English women novelists to a tiny band of the 'great', and derived all theories from them" (6). One of the aims of the feminist movement was to reclaim women's writing and to change definitions of great literature, making it more inclusive, and enabling women writers to be read. Largely because of Leavis' ideas, literature included in the category of "the great tradition" was limited and ignored the increasingly varied culture in the UK, especially after World War Two. Such views dictated the range of literature studied in university courses, where curricula were (and perhaps still are) biased towards writing by British men, with very little women's writing included.

The almost exclusive focus on the lives of white, middle-class women in the WLM impacted on feminist publishing and on the VMCs, influencing both the choice of books and their presentation, as I will demonstrate. Arguments put forward in *The Spare Rib Reader*, and in Jolly's interviews for *Sisterhood and After*, as well as bell hooks' criticisms of the dominance of white women in the Women's Movement are discussed below, where I consider the relationship between Virago's VMC project and the WLM. Although criticised as exclusive by women of other backgrounds, the frustrations of large numbers of white, middle-class women led to questioning cultural norms and expectations in the 1970s and affected attitudes to publishing and literature. Lennie Goodings, a member of the Virago team from 1978, becoming Publishing Director in 1992, and currently Chair of the Company, sums up Virago's views, explaining that "Virago's entire *raison d'être* was founded on the belief that this old-style exclusion from and protection of what was deemed 'literature' needed re-examining and challenging. Who gets to tell the stories? What voices are admitted? Who decides what is great?" (*A Bite* 164-5). Goodings' comment highlights the need for women to have control of the means of cultural production and to be able to decide whose writing could, or should, be published. In 2020, Goodings explained that although many women, mostly graduates, worked in publishing, before the establishment of feminist publishing houses "they worked and they typed [...] but they didn't take the decisions on what was to be published" (*The Reunion* 00:10.38-51). Echoing the earlier arguments of feminist writer Lynne Spender in 1983, Goodings emphasises the importance of the gatekeepers – those who decide what is to be published. Spender argues that "the 'gatekeepers' are the guardians of culture. They are

the ones who formulate the standards” (5). Prior to the establishment of Virago Press in 1973, women had little power in the publishing industry. Talking about the late 1960s, Callil explains: “there was nothing you could do, really, in my world – book publishing – except publicity and marketing” (*Virago: Changing* 00:02:43-50). In “The Stories of Our Lives”, in *The Guardian* in 2008, Callil described the way in which women in publishing were generally restricted to being treated as “fluttering tinkerbells, good for making tea and providing sex”.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, academic Richard Hoggart and author, critic, and academic Raymond Williams both attempted to broaden definitions of culture to include the post-war influx of popular culture from America as well as non-upper-class cultures within Britain. Using an argument that would later resonate with, and be expanded by, feminist opinions, Hoggart proposed that newer cultures, such as American films and literature, were important to “working-class people in particular, [as] they are substantially without a sense of the past” (167). The ideas of Hoggart and Williams were critical of Leavis’ reliance on a past culture that excluded much of society. The decades following World War Two saw a huge increase in access to higher education, with new universities offering access for the first time to young people from a wider range of backgrounds and to many women.

But academic curricula for English literature remained, until the impact of feminism and postcolonialism, based on a very narrow conception of great literature, excluding different cultural and gendered backgrounds. Neil Roberts, writing about Leavis’ influence on Cambridge in the 1960s, commented that his

reading plan as a Cambridge student in 1965 comprised only traditional male texts, including Dryden, Pope, and Blake (in MacKillop and Storer 272). The writer of a 1980 article for *Gay News Literature Supplement* commented on the novels of Radclyffe Hall, discovered in 1969-70, during the “early years of the Women’s Liberation Movement” (Add MS 88904/1/168). The writer continues, commenting on the forgotten novels of women writers, recommended by other feminists, adding that they discovered “the rich source of fiction by and about women of which I was hardly aware, since it never filtered into my BA(Hons) English Lit course” (author unknown Add MS 88904/1/168). Discussing her familiarity with interwar women writers introduced to her by her mother, compared to her years at Oxford in the late 1960s, Hermione Lee comments that “there was an extraordinary gap between what I had fallen in love with and what I was studying at Oxford” (*The Reunion* 00:15.40-53). Lee had been introduced to the novels she loved by her mother, and the writers included Rosamond Lehmann, Rebecca West, and Elizabeth Bowen. The exclusion of books she knew from academic curricula demonstrates the narrow views of literature deemed suitable for academic study in the late 1960s. Lee graduated from Oxford in 1968, but, as discussed above by Coonan and Scholes, more recent academic curricula still tend to omit writing by women.

The explosion of youth culture, and a more inclusive sense of cultural tradition, coincided with the development of the Women’s Liberation Movement. After the opportunity to take on paid work during the Second World War, women experienced what writer and journalist Mary Stott called, in 1970, “a back to the home” swing of the pendulum during the post-war years, causing many women

to question their roles (in Cochrane 3). The change in expectations of women's roles mirrored the changes and gender questioning that had taken place after First World War, resulting in the Six Point Group, whose demands, aimed at uniting women within the home and in the workplace and improving their lives, are comparable to the WLM's demands. The WLM took as its unofficial manifesto Sheila Rowbotham's 1969 pamphlet *Women's Liberation and the New Politics*. The Women's Liberation Movement in the 1960s and '70s campaigned for equal rights and opportunities. It is part of the second-wave movement: first-wave feminism focused on women's legal rights, especially the right to vote; the second-wave included every area of women's experience — including politics, work, and family. The third wave "saw the growth and expansion of different branches within feminism" (Curtis 346). In a similar way to Lady Rhondda, who founded the Six Point Group and *Time and Tide* magazine in the interwar period, Rowbotham's influence on the WLM was of enormous importance: in addition to her books, she contributed articles to *Spare Rib*, the magazine founded by Marsha Rowe and Rosie Boycott in 1972 to offer news and a discussion forum for women interested, or involved, in the WLM. *Spare Rib* is described by Jolly, in *Sisterhood and After*, as "the WLM's answer to *Cosmopolitan* and *Ms*", both aimed at an educated, middle-class market (98). In 2015, Marsha Rowe explained that "we intended no less than to take on the culture of the whole western world. Finding a new language for both image and word to establish women's changing identity" (www.bl.uk/sparerib). Rowbotham was on the advisory panel of Virago, where her arguments on the importance of reclaiming women's history influenced publishing decisions. Her 1973 book, *Hidden From History*, was particularly relevant for publishing, arguing that

women needed to understand their history in order to influence their future. Rowbotham also promoted the importance of communicating ideas in order for a movement to take place, arguing that “communication for people [...] who have not been recognised, who have not known themselves, is a difficult business” (*Liberation* 5). Publishing books by women was fundamental for enabling women’s communication with each other, leading to understanding and sharing ideas and experiences.

The pioneering generation of women who became graduates in the interwar years, including Vera Brittain who had the opportunity to go to university after her brother was killed in the war, questioned and criticised gender roles and women’s limited expectations. In a similar way, the WLM was, in part, a response to complaints by women who had graduated from university and realised that they were excluded from decision-making in both the public and private worlds. Rowbotham talked of the impact of higher education on the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s in *Woman’s Consciousness, Man’s World* (1973), and she raised the issue of “the specifically female contradictions confronted by women who entered higher education” (ix). The contradictions arose from the development of a feminist consciousness within a society that was still predominantly male-dominated, leading to many women feeling marginalised and let down upon realising that life at university was different from life in the world of employment and home. The limited number of available books enabling women to read about their shared literary background and heritage increased women’s feelings of isolation. Discussing her attempts to “read anything and everything I could find which would help me build an

important little private sphere of ‘culture’”, Rowbotham explained that her reading was dominated by male writers, including Shaw, Ibsen “and inevitably Lawrence and Miller” (*Consciousness* 13).

The establishment of feminist publishers provided women with a literary history as feminist publishing allowed women to make decisions on which books to publish, and, importantly, closed the gap between consumers and producers. Discussing the importance of women as consumers to the publishing industry, Helen Taylor explains that “the female reader is a commercial and critical force to be reckoned with, and a powerful voice in literary culture” (5). Taylor’s study of women and reading (2019) confirms that women are the largest group of fiction readers. She suggests that the history of women’s reading stretches back into history, saying that “the figure of a reading woman in Western culture has a long pedigree” (8). Her study, based on contemporary interviews in the UK, recognises that many women across the globe are unable to read or to access books and she mainly restricts her investigation to Western countries. She concludes that, until the establishment of feminist publishing houses, women had very little involvement in deciding what was published, in spite of being the main consumers of books.

The business of mainstream publishing, pre-Virago, was described as being “like a gentleman’s club” in which “the typical joiner was a highly educated woman, with at least one degree from a top university, but who was also willing to type” (Tim Hely Hutchinson, Group Chief Executive, Hachette UK, *Virago: Changing* 00:01:30-42) Hely Hutchinson’s description of publishing as a

gentleman's club is supported by the long history of male leadership of publishing houses, although the Women in Publishing research discussed below demonstrates changes over time. In his 1982 study of publishing in the twentieth century, in the chapter tellingly entitled "Fathers and Sons", Ian Norrie discusses the nineteenth-century publishing houses in the UK, and the continuing existence in the twentieth century of "many of the publishing dynasties", which had been passed from father to son, or to another male heir (28). Norrie cites the example of the Macmillan dynasty, who "produced sufficient offspring, though not always in direct line, to carry on the tradition. Sir Frederick Macmillan became chairman on the death of his uncle" (33). Norrie's discussion of publishing in the 1970s also discusses Dent's (established in 1888), which in 1977 was still headed by the grandson of the founder (153). Norrie's book devotes a few lines to Virago but mentions no other feminist publishing houses, perpetuating the lack of discussion of women's involvement – or actual lack of involvement – in twentieth century publishing. Similarly, Eliot and Rose have very few references to women's writing or publishing in their 2007 *Companion to the History of the Book*, with Virago being mentioned very briefly in the final section on the future of the book. Throughout the book, the emphasis is on the history of male writing and publishing, leading Eliot and Rose to conclude that publishing was typified by "a distinct gender bias and equally apparent class distinctions" (403).

Recent studies reinforce Norrie's work. A Princeton University study of publishing in the United States by historian Lyndsey Claro found that during the early years of the twentieth century "middle-class women struggled to find

appropriate positions in publishing, with most book publishers hiring women for the lowest paid positions” (2020). The findings indicate that little had changed in publishing during the twentieth century until the feminist campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s: “according to the Association of University Press, in 1979, when WISP [Women in Scholarly Publishing] was formed, 65% of non-clerical university press staff was female, but only 13% of leadership was female” (Claro). Women in Publishing (WiP) carried out a series of interviews in 2018 on women’s roles in publishing; in her interview, Liz Calder discusses joining publisher Jonathan Cape in 1979: “when I joined Cape I was the first woman – ever – to be a director. The hierarchy was unbelievable. The men had grand offices at the front of the Bedford Square building. The women all had tiny offices at the back” (WiP website). Similarly, writer and lecturer Fenella Greenfield’s WiP interview discusses the male dominated nature of publishing: “When I worked at Andre Deutsch I was the publicity assistant and I would often be asked by him to go to Brighton, pick up his mother and bring her back to London. That was one of my jobs, to look after his ailing mother, because I was the publicity girl. It was that sort of thing. You weren’t respected as a professional person in that role. And a lot of girls did that, you know, men didn’t do that role, women did publicity” (WiP website). Callil reinforced this point in 2016, explaining that the only role for young women “who were adequate looking” was being “sent out to flirt with journalists” (*Virago: Changing* 00:02:56-00:03:01). Feminist publishing houses and the feminist movement in the 1980s led to a less gendered environment within publishing, with women becoming boardroom representatives in some of the main publishing houses – Gail Rebeck at Random House, Helen Fraser at Penguin, Annette Thomas at

Macmillan and Ursula Mackenzie at Little, Brown (Kean “Are things getting worse”).

But recent studies undertaken in America and the UK by both Claro and Kean, as well as Jolly, suggest that the progress of the 1980s has failed to continue into the 21st century, with women remaining in low-paid publishing jobs. Earlier work by, for example, Nicola Wilson and Helen Southworth, looks at the input of women in publishing before the WLM and feminist publishing houses. Although, as they explain, no women led “any of the forty-nine publishing houses” in 1895, the development of small presses and little magazines gave women the opportunity to become more involved (*Early Women*). The discussion goes on to investigate the women involved in the Woolfs’ Hogarth Press. But women’s involvement in publishing as a profession was generally limited until the advent of feminist publishing during the WLM, and the improvements are, according to recent studies, not long-lived.

Jolly investigates the current pay differential in publishing and she concludes that “the gender pay gap in the major publishing houses favours men by as much as 29.69 per cent, reflecting that women still disproportionately work in marketing, rights and lower level editorial rather than executive, technology and finance” (*Purpose* 321). Kean suggests that mergers of publishing houses into very few global media companies have led to a changing ethos, and fewer opportunities for women to be promoted. In a way reminiscent of the 1970s’ establishment of small feminist publishing houses, Kean points out that corporate publishing’s refusal to promote women has led to an increase in the

number of “women who have started independent businesses that not only allow them to better juggle professional and home commitments, but also to exercise their creativity in a way the tiers of management in global businesses do not allow” (“Are things getting worse”). Like the founder members of Virago in 1973, some women are still finding that they can only make publishing decisions in smaller publishing houses established and run by women. But today’s small publishing houses are starting from a position of greater acceptance of women’s writing, as a result of the challenges made by Virago and the other feminist publishers established during the active years of the WLM.

Writer Erica Jong argued in 1979 that “the history of world literature is the history of the literature of the male, the white man, the aristocrat, the affluent bourgeois, and the childless woman” (in Cochrane 62). Before the advent of the WLM, literature constantly presented and represented women as inferior to men so that “it is natural for her to define her situation in terms of a kind of sub-manness” (Rowbotham *Liberation* 9). The lack of published books by women meant that women mainly saw, or read about, themselves through the eyes of men, as inferior and silent. The silence experienced by, and expected of, women was strongly criticised by Greer. She argued that “I’m sick of pretending that some fatuous male’s self-important pronouncements are the object of my undivided attention [...] and sick of having no opinions of my own...” (61-62). This was a feeling of frustration that resonated with other women. Callil complained “How often I remember sitting at dinner tables in the 1960s, the men talking to each other about serious matters, the women sitting quietly like

decorated lumps of sugar. I remember one such occasion when I raised my fist, banged the table and shouted: 'I have views on Bangladesh too!'" ("The Stories").

Rowbotham's discussion of women's oppression argued that the oppressed group needs to "project its own image onto history. In order to discover its own identity as distinct from that of the oppressor it has to become visible to itself" (*Consciousness* 27). Publishing books written by women became an important means of women presenting their own image and this was one of Callil's intentions when publishing books by and about women. Discussing sisterhood in her 1986 article, bell hooks' arguments coincide with those of Rowbotham. . She explains that the oppression of women causes the oppressed to be "socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo" (127). Literature during the second-wave feminist movement was a crucial means of emphasising the differences between women's and men's experiences, pointing out that women's lives were largely restricted to the personal sphere. Literature started to enable women to understand the ways in which oppression functions, making the oppressed complicit, and helping women to present their own image, as argued by Rowbotham. The phrase, the "personal is political", became a representation of some of the aims of the WLM. Whilst hoping to avoid essentialist notions of women and men, the second-wave feminist movement highlighted the need for women to read books that reflected their experiences which, for most women, were necessarily different from those of men.

Virago's decision in 1978 to republish neglected writing by women led to the launch of the Virago Modern Classics (VMCs). The VMC range replaced the Reprint Library and focused more on reprinted fiction. The novels republished largely fall within the category of middlebrow novels, as defined by Humble. She explains that "a novel was therefore middlebrow not because of any intrinsic content, but because it was widely read by the middle-class public – and particularly by the lower middle classes" (13). As my focus is largely on the content of the VMCs, categorising them as middlebrow does not add to the discussion, and I will be looking in detail at the content of particular novels, and their presentation, in Chapters 3 and 4. By looking at the novels of Lehmann, Young, Delafield, and Holtby, I am interested in discussing the different genres of the VMCs, rather than grouping them together as middlebrow, so I am avoiding the term, and I refer instead to particular novels within their genres.

The VMC series provided non-radical WLM followers with novels that reflected many of their own experiences of life in their private, hidden worlds. The domestic novels published as VMCs were representative of the style of writing based on "the house and garden", offering "critical scrutiny of the house and household" (Briganti and Mezei *Domestic* 1-2). Writing that presented a critical analysis of the household supported WLM arguments against the institution of marriage. Viewing marriage as a site of power struggles was a focal point of the WLM and *Spare Rib*, as well as being a focus in many interwar novels. By republishing and repurposing interwar novels by women, using new covers and introductions, the VMCs recognised, and developed, overlaps and similarities between women writers of the interwar period and women readers of the WLM

period, both of whom questioned the domestic roles expected of them in the post-war years. The links between two generations of women were constructed and emphasised through Virago's curation and marketing practices, becoming a means of promoting sisterhood. I discuss the links between the two generations of women in detail in Chapter 4.

In doing so, Virago curated a range of books that, in their own way, retained an exclusivity: although they successfully challenged the male dominance of previous literary traditions, I argue that the VMC target audience was, to some extent, based on essentialist notions of all women having the same interests and experiences. Alluding to the exclusivity and limited focus of the WLM, activist bell hooks was critical of the arguments put forward by feminist writers Mary Stott and Betty Friedan; hooks criticised their suggestion that women were isolated and frustrated by their inability to take on paid employment, which ignored the position of many black women, for whom concerns "such as poverty and the necessity of pursuing often difficult work, were more pressing" (Curtis 337). The desired audience mirrored the backgrounds and values of the Virago founders, and also reflected the WLM's followers and members, who were "predominantly middle class, in their twenties and thirties, housewives and white-collar workers" (Rowbotham, in Wandor 1972, 98). As hooks explains, the concepts of sisterhood and solidarity ignore the divisions between women and the role of white women in exploiting women from different ethnicities. "The ideology of Sisterhood as expressed by contemporary feminist activists indicated no acknowledgement that racist discrimination, exploitation, and oppression of multi-ethnic women by white women had made it impossible for

the two groups to feel that they shared common interests or political concerns” (hooks “Political” 130). Virago’s publishing project was part of the white-led feminist movement that did not recognise the needs and oppressions of other groups of women. Women from minority cultures, from other classes, or with different sexualities felt excluded from the values of Virago’s target audience and from the movement, leading to later fragmentations of the feminist movement and to different feminist publishers, each with their own target readership. The intersectionality affecting women’s lives was not, at this time, acknowledged or addressed by the Virago team.

The exclusivity of the canonical tradition

Callil’s criticism of Leavis refers to his narrow conception of canonical literature, a concept which is indefinable and self-perpetuating, based on an unchallenged assumption that only a limited number of books are worth reading. John Sutherland’s discussion of literature illustrates the assumption when, in a brief consideration of books chosen by people to take onto a desert island, he points out that the majority chose “a great work of literature to keep them company” (2). Sutherland does not define what he means by “a great work of literature”, and Leavis’ discussion tends to leave the concept of great or canonical writing unclear. In discussing the difficulty of defining canonical literature, John Guillory suggests that “the canon has retained its self-image as an aristocracy of texts”, arguing that Leavis’ *The Great Tradition* (1948) illustrates the difficulty of definition (339). Leavis focused his ideas in *The Great Tradition* on what he called an English tradition, to which “the great classics of English fiction belong”,

underlining the exclusivity by focusing only on English writing from the UK (*Great* 9). But his explanation of an English tradition seems to be based on an indefinable sense of “being alive in their time” and on a continuum of writers who understand the greatness of writers before them (22). He said of George Eliot, for example, that “she was capable of understanding Austen’s greatness and capable of learning from her” and it was this ability which differentiated Eliot from Gaskell (10). This comparison does not shed any light on what made Leavis see Austen or Eliot as great writers, in contrast to Gaskell.

Leavis offered some explanation of his view of literary tradition in his discussion of Austen. He argued that, although the great novelists were “very much concerned with ‘form’” (7), their greatness depended upon “a marked moral intensity” (9). Referring to Austen, he said, “when we examine the formal perfection of *Emma*, we find that it can be appreciated only in terms of the moral preoccupations that characterize the novelist’s peculiar interest in life” (8). The concept of “moral preoccupations” is not defined, but it is based on the values and preoccupations of higher education institutions during the 1940s, reflecting Leavis’ own life and career in academia. Critic Richard Storer discusses the context of Leavis’ proposals, arguing that his life in upper-class, male-dominated Cambridge University was the main influence on Leavis’ ideas. Storer suggests that Leavis’ proposals for an English curriculum “were framed in terms of a course that could conceivably be fitted into the existing Cambridge English course structure” (*Leavis* 99). Leavis’ work was founded on a notion of tradition, rather than innovation. Literary continuity meant, for Leavis, an author’s ability to recognise the significance of another writer’s moral interest,

and to incorporate it into their own writing. His judgement inevitably led to a small, limited proportion of writers who could be included within his concept of greatness and who could therefore be part of a canonical tradition. Leavis' explanation of the writers he refers to as major novelists rested on his belief that "they are significant in terms of the human awareness they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life" (2). But this explanation leaves unclear any definition of human awareness, or the distinction between the work of major novelists and others in terms of their ability to promote human awareness.

The Great Tradition needs to be considered alongside the ideas Leavis put forward in his earlier writing. During the period when Leavis was heavily involved in *Scrutiny*, the periodical he founded in 1932 with L. C. Knights, his work became largely focused on pre-1900 writing, rather than on modern or contemporary writing. This focus indicated a preoccupation with the past and with the continuity that he suggested was an important aspect of differentiating between major novelists and minor ones. In the opening pages of *Mass Civilization and Minority Cultures* (1930) Leavis' élitism is evident: "In any period it is often upon a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends: it is (apart from cases of the simple and familiar) only a few who are capable of unprompted, first-hand judgement" (12). Developing his theories in the 1930s, at a time when the authors later republished by Virago were writing and attracting readers, Leavis' dependence on nineteenth-century writing exacerbated the exclusion of twentieth-century women's writing from literary culture and criticism. As women were beginning to write more, following social and cultural changes after the First World War, Leavis' work indicates a

regressive attitude to literature. Focusing on work from the previous century, Leavis ignored writing by women, by ethnic minorities and any modernist writing, promoting narrative writing from the 1800s. Riley considers the implications of Leavis' work on canonical literature. Discussing Virago's republication of earlier women's writing, she argues that "the 'rediscovery' of all these rescued texts evidenced the ways in which the parameters of 'great' literature had been drawn to exclude women" (*Virago* 44).

Leavis' views on cultural continuity, taken together with his concentration on an educational élite, led Raymond Williams to associate Leavis' beliefs with the Arnoldian tradition, which defines culture as being accessible only to an educated élite. Williams and Storer both expressed concern over the narrowness and élitism of Leavis' arguments. Storer equated the Arnoldian tradition with a liberal humanist approach, explaining its limitations by suggesting that such an approach not only has an "idea of 'human nature' as something timeless and unchanging", but that it also serves the interests of a limited social group, defined by Storer as "modern, middle-class, patriarchal, Western" (*Leavis* 16). Leavis' focus on élitism and continuity suggests that his work on developing a canonical tradition was limited to a narrow range of both writers and readers, offering a self-perpetuating canon that excluded large sectors of society. Literary critic Stefan Collini, writing in the *TLS*, argued that Leavis' work has become a lasting symbol of an exclusive literary canon. He suggested that the term Leavisite became a "handy piece of polemical or media shorthand" which is used to imply critics who are "rabid persecutors of the mediocre and the popular" (3). Writing during the interwar years, when higher

education was only available to a white, upper-class male minority, Leavis implicitly excluded women and members of other classes or cultures from being part of the educational élite able to appreciate art and literature or to distinguish between major and minor novelists. Women were not awarded degrees at Cambridge until 1948, reinforcing gender inequality in Higher Education.

In the late 1950s and 1960s, the arguments Woolf put forward in *A Room of One's Own* (1928), discussing women's exclusion from history and education, were also applicable to other social groups. Where Woolf concentrated specifically on gender divisions and on discussing the exclusion of women from the canonical tradition, Richard Hoggart, in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), focused on class divisions and cultural exclusion. He drew attention to the exclusion of the working classes from the literary canon, pointing out that canonical literature ignored the culture and interests of many readers. He was particularly influenced by the post-war influx of American popular culture to Britain and the expansion of higher education provisions to include people, like Hoggart himself, who did not come from an upper-class background. Hoggart's work was critical of Leavis' view of working-class audiences, and he raised awareness of the cultural interests of groups that did not belong to Leavis' educational élite. While Hoggart drew attention to working-class cultures, he did not address the dominance of male values in culture. The growth of the second-wave feminist movement presented a critical view of cultural theorists' work and drew attention to the ongoing exclusion of women writers from the canonical tradition. The increasing availability of higher education for women, coinciding with the WLM, gave women the knowledge and confidence to criticise their

exclusion from decision-making in publishing, from the literary canonical tradition and from the public sphere of society. The number of women obtaining degrees rose from fewer than 4000 in 1950 to over 15000 in 1970 – a far greater increase than the equivalent years for men (Bolton 2012).

However, Hoggart's arguments were also valuable for questioning Leavis' focus on continuity. Hoggart focused instead on popular culture, which is largely typified by its immediacy and newness. Taking the focus away from continuity was beneficial for women's literature as well which, as Woolf and Showalter complained, lacked its own history. James McGrath considers that, although Hoggart's work mainly discussed class in relation to education and culture, his work "can also be made relevant to further aspects of the self, including nationality; race; sexual identity; and gender" (3). A similar point was made by Frank Kermode. He suggested that challenges to the theories of Leavis, and to the enduring male canonical tradition, were part of a larger questioning of institutionalised values "that we now hear from feminists and from racial minorities who suspect that the choices of an élite are not made in their interests, and that the existing canons are the production of neither time nor of infallible taste" (5). Interrogating the work of Leavis and the exclusivity of the literary canon led to a questioning of the concept of the canonical tradition, brought about by raising awareness of writing by groups which reflected different cultures and experiences. The growth of feminist movements and awareness of other cultures highlighted the different experiences of people who did not belong to a white, male, educated élite and presented a challenge to the notion of an unchanging canon.

Raymond Williams' work in the late 1950s and early 1960s built upon the critical arguments of Hoggart. In *Culture and Society* (1958) he criticised Leavis' self-perpetuating belief, presented in *The Great Tradition*, that social changes were to be understood only by an educated élite studying a narrow range of literature. Williams argued that the élite is "essentially, a literary minority, which keeps alive the literary tradition" (254). He was critical of Leavis' emphasis on literary experience alone, arguing that society additionally needs other forms of recorded experience, such as "history, building, painting, music, philosophy, theology, political and social theory, the physical and natural sciences, anthropology, and indeed the whole body of learning" (255). Together, the ideas of Hoggart and Williams were influential in bringing about new, more inclusive, approaches to studying culture and literature which helped to pave the way for feminist challenges to existing definitions of literature.

The arguments of Hoggart, in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), and Williams, in both *Culture and Society* (1958) and *The Long Revolution* (1961), were seen by academic Stuart Hall as part of a move to expand the definitions of both politics and culture and their relationship to each other, setting literature into a social and political context. Hall discusses "the move to Cultural Studies as a fully interdisciplinary enterprise and the break with 'the literary' as its governing discourse" (44). A broader conception of culture could benefit women when many women writers struggled to find publishers, allowing for recognition of other forms of culture to include, for example, oral history and diaries as worthy of study and as part of social practices. Hall's work argues for the linking of culture to ways of life – "the study of 'the cultural' and its relation to other

practices in a social formation” (44). Relating cultural forms, including literature, to “ways of life” can offer recognition of the differences between men’s and women’s ways of life, emphasising the importance of a culture that reflects and understands women’s lifestyles (44). Hall proposes that culture is not part of a fixed or absolute value system, but a “constitutive dimension of all social practices”, making it an active force for social change (46). His belief in the importance of culture as a force for social change, “shaping social practice”, underpins the later development of feminist publishing houses (43). Hall’s work recognises the importance of literature and culture for understanding and changing society. Feminist publishing reflected feminists’ recognition of the power of the written word to challenge social norms and to give women a means of representation. Having access to the means of cultural production helped women to end their exclusion from cultural expressions, including art, drama, and journalism, as well as literature.

Hall’s work on the significance of discussing literature as part of culture, rather than in isolation, is related to the concept of the cultural turn. Kate Nash defines it as the recognition that “all social life must be seen as potentially political where politics is the contestation of relations of power” (77). She emphasises the role of culture in the development and existence of social relations and identities, explaining that the concept developed in part from the promotion of agency and self-help groups that developed during the 1960s and 1970s – such as women’s consciousness raising groups that were especially widespread in America and Britain. Roseneil considers the importance of the cultural turn for feminist research, arguing that it “has posed radical challenges and opened up

new ways of thinking” (“Doing Feminist Research” 16). She suggests that there has been an epistemological shift away from explanation to a “focus on practices of interpretation, in which culture is placed centre stage, and social arrangements, events, material artefacts, belief systems, and research data about all of these, are treated as texts” (“Doing Feminist Research”). This shift is exemplified by Hall’s development of cultural studies as an academic discipline.

Although paving the way for feminist challenges to literary tradition, the ideas of Hoggart and Williams had failed to specifically address the exclusion of women from publishing and literary history, ideas raised by Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own*. Woolf’s lecture became an extended essay on the restrictions imposed on women’s educational opportunities and on their opportunities for writing. In discussing women’s lack of access to higher education, Woolf used a fictional university to describe her sense of being a “trespasser”. She wrote of “Fellows and Scholars” determined to “protect their turf” from women, who were only allowed on the gravel path (8). She similarly discussed her exclusion from the university library, where a black-gowned man explained that “ladies are only admitted [...] if accompanied by a Fellow of the College” (9). Considering male power, she argues “England is under the rule of the patriarchy. Nobody in their senses could fail to detect the dominance of the professor. His was the power and the money and the influence” (35). For Woolf, women’s lack of education, power and financial independence meant being dependent on men and lacking the freedom to write or to choose a path in life. She also maintained that women’s poverty and limited education meant that male values dominated in

society. She argued that masculine values dominated literary publications and that women's experiences and writing were marginalised, saying "it is the male values that prevail [...] and these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction. This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing room" (*Room 74*). Increasing numbers of women in Higher Education from the 1960s onwards enabled women to challenge male dominance in many areas of society. But Showalter, writing in 1999, is critical of the limited advances made in attitudes to women's writing. She argues that "a perpetual bias against feminine subject-matter and female subjectivity, as prevalent now as a century ago, tends to belittle stories about women's lives" ("Written Off").

Discussing Vera Brittain's autobiography, *Testament of Youth* (1933), initially published as a standalone print before becoming part of the VMC range, Maroula Joannou suggests that it is referred to as "the best-known account of the 1914 war by a woman" (*Ladies 25*). But she goes on to explain that "the war years actually occupy one-third of the autobiography", although it is for the topic of war that it is most remembered, reinforcing Woolf's argument on the male values implicit in perceptions of important literary topics (25). The focus on male values in literature was highlighted more recently by Hilary Mantel. In July 2018, having won the Booker prize twice, in 2009 and 2012, for the first two books of her Thomas Cromwell trilogy, she suggested that male topics still dominate literary prizes: "It might be observed that it was easier to win a Booker prize writing about men than writing about women's experiences" (*the i newspaper*). Nick Turner backs up Mantel's argument when he points out that Pat Barker

found fame “when she stopped writing social realism focusing on women and wrote about men at war” (7). Confirming Turner’s argument, it is worth noting that Barker had been a published writer since 1982 (*Union Street*, published by Virago) but became famous with her *Regeneration* Trilogy about the First World War, winning the *Guardian* Fiction Prize for *The Eye in the Door* (the second book, in 1993), and the Booker Prize for the final book – *The Ghost Road* (1995) (www.britishcouncil.org). Unlike the majority of VMC writers, it is notable that Barker is from a working-class background, and, in this particular, does not match the background of many middle-class VMC authors. The comments by Joannou, Mantel, Showalter, and Turner indicate that, despite the progress made in the acceptance of women’s writing, male values persist in a way criticised by Woolf, suggesting that success is still connected to male protagonists. Ursula Owen, a founder member of Virago, comments that, during the pre-WLM period, “although women were writing, the opportunity to be published was a matter of what they wrote *about*” (in P. Owen *Future* 86). Mantel’s comment indicates that, in spite of the intervention of feminist publishing, the situation has not greatly, or sufficiently, changed in the twenty-first century.

Showalter suggests that, prior to the WLM, the lack of a female literary tradition was the result of an inability to overcome male influence in publishing.

Increases in the publication of women’s writing have promoted women’s values and perspectives, but, as Showalter argues above, the increase in women’s publication has not totally overcome the separation of literature into male and female writing. She argues that the feminist movement “has begun to provide us

with the information we need to understand the evolution of a female literary tradition” (*A Literature* 7). Discussing differences in publishing in the period before and after the establishment of Virago, Ursula Owen comments that “it is not easy to imagine just how invisible most women’s issues were before this second-wave movement – or how isolated most women felt” (in P. Owen *Future* 86). Presenter Kirsty Wark sums up the situation in publishing before the WLM: “If you were a woman trying to get a book published in the years after the Second World War, the chances are that you first had to convince a male agent that your work was worthy, then a male publisher that it would sell” (*The Reunion* 00:01-12). In the 1970s, Callil believed that women and their writing were still excluded from “the canon of literary culture, which was so absorbed by male writers” (in Simons and Fullbrook 185). Mary Beard argues that “when it comes to silencing women, Western culture has had thousands of years of practice” (xi). Finally ending the long-lasting silence by having the power to publish more women’s writing meant giving women the power to decide which books were published, thereby challenging accepted concepts of canonical literature.

Callil’s aims and intentions were to promote a more inclusive literary tradition, changing from largely male, white, upper-class domination to a literary culture that included and accepted women’s writing. Feminists argued that women’s writing needed to be published and given academic recognition. Woolf wrote of the lack of written information about women prior to the eighteenth century and she imagined herself “looking about the shelves for books that were not there” (*A Room* 47). She complained, “Here am I asking why women did not write

poetry in the Elizabethan age, and I am not sure how they were educated; whether they were taught to write; whether they had sitting-rooms to themselves” (47). Her discussion suggests that the literary world and the canonical tradition were self-limiting, largely excluding women by restricting, or eliminating, their histories and role models. Showalter made a very similar point, saying that “each generation of women writers has found itself, in a sense, without a history, forced to rediscover the past anew, forging again and again the consciousness of their sex” (*Literature* 10). The advent of feminist publishing houses in the 1970s and 1980s became an important way of giving women a literary tradition and history through both contemporary and reprinted books written by women. The Leavisite canon contributed to the loss of much women’s writing, which fell out of print. This led to a situation in which, until the introduction of feminist publishing, women’s writing had largely been restricted to work not intended for publication, often based on diaries, memoirs, or letters, which reflected the restriction of women’s lives to the personal, domestic sphere. Women’s writing tended to be referred to as ‘women’s novels’ or ‘middlebrow’ books, excluding them from the literary canon. The limitations and exclusion perpetuated the notion that women’s lives and words were hidden, personal and unimportant. Virago’s decision to publish a varied range of women’s work directly challenged norms of acceptability in publishing, developing a female tradition in literature, and using cultural production to bring women’s lives and experiences into the public world.

In spite of Callil’s criticisms of Leavis’ work in *The Great Tradition*, and the implications of his work on women’s writing, she did admit to being “a Leavisite,

for Leavis, whatever you may have thought about his choice of books, maintained that English literature is important” (in Simons and Fullbrook 192). Although he believed that only an educated élite was able to recognise and appreciate literary greatness, Leavis’ view led to the promotion of the study of English literature as a means of understanding society. His focus on literature has been fundamental to the development of feminist literary criticism and the establishment of feminist publishing houses, drawing attention to the significance of the written word to women and to the second-wave feminist movement.

Feminist publishing – a response to the Women’s Liberation Movement

Rowbotham argued, at the beginning of the WLM in the 1960s, that women needed to create a collective political movement in order to be heard. She explained that the “oppressed are mysteriously quiet” but change cannot come about unless we “listen very carefully to the people who are not heard and who do not speak” (*Liberation* 4-5). Uniting was essential for Rowbotham, as “a movement is an essential form of group expression. It is the means of finding a voice” (12). Where individuals can be ignored or unheard, a collective movement has more power to be heard. In the WLM, the focus on unity translated into the concept of sisterhood – bringing women together through books, work, or meetings, to share experiences and end their isolation. Sharing experiences of isolation and alienation helped to end what Friedan referred to in 1963 as “the problem with no name” (13). Acknowledging feelings of unhappiness and dissatisfaction empowered and united women. Rowbotham explained the importance of the concept of sisterhood to the WLM: “one of the

great aims of women's liberation has been sisterhood. All women are oppressed so all women must join together" (in Wandor 101). Author and journalist Susan Brownmiller discussed the significance of sisterhood in practice at early all-women meetings when participants were encouraged to share experiences of oppression. She argued that sharing similar stories was a vital aspect of giving women confidence: "The personal-testimony method encouraged all women who came to the meeting to speak their thoughts [and] brought responses from many who had never opened their mouths at male-dominated meetings" (*NY Times* 1970). Building relationships between women went across generations, with younger women learning from, and being inspired by, older women. I investigate the crucial importance of connections and commonalities between two generations of women for the success of the VMCs.

The WLM had an integral focus on writing, as Owen explains: "The women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s was, to a remarkable degree, a writers' movement. Many of the early movers and shapers, starting with Simone de Beauvoir, had begun as writers" (in P. Owen *Future* 86). In 1973 Virago was the first UK feminist publisher, but it was followed by several others. In 1988 Owen commented that "there are now eleven such publishers in Britain and Eire – Virago, the Women's Press, Pandora, Stramullion, Sheba, Onlywomen, Jezebel, Attiz Press, Womanwrite, Black Woman Talks and Arlen House" (in P. Owen *Future* 91). Owen's list of publishers does, however, omit Honno Press, based in Wales and established in 1986 and, as discussed in the Introduction, still in existence. In December 1973, Callil sent a draft statement of Virago's

aims to Marsha Rowe and Rosie Boycott (founders of *Spare Rib*). Discussing the Women's Movement's "new phase" in the 1960s and 1970s, Callil writes that "the WM [Women's Movement] is producing ideas which will change society as fundamentally as the social thinkers and philosophers of the 19th century. Virago will publish books which are the product of this new movement" (1973 statement of aims, Add MS 98178/1/2). Callil also cited the existence of feminist books published in America when discussing the need for feminist publishing in the UK – "Virago feel that it's time an English publishing house took Women's Liberation seriously" (Add MS 89178/1/2). Callil made a speech in 1981 outlining the two aims behind the establishment of Virago – firstly "we are all feminists, and we want to change the world. In that way we hope we are the British antidote to Margaret Thatcher. We had, too, [...] a commitment to the written word" (Add MS 88904/6/1). Feminist publishing enabled women to work together and to publish books by other women. Without men making decisions on the choice of books, women were empowered to offer their own selections, and to put forward their own views on publishing. As I discuss in Chapter 2, there was still a large element of decision-making from the (female) top in Virago's model, unlike the collective models of most feminist publishers. But recommendations for books were made almost entirely by women, although I demonstrate that the women involved were from a narrow sector of society. Feminist publishing was a direct response to the WLM, building on the concept of sisterhood by uniting and working together to promote books that were relevant to their own lives, in both fiction and theory.

Discussing *Spare Rib*, Rowe highlights the value of shared experiences: “so much of our lives had been concealed from each other, it was as if we had been strangers” (16). However, as Wallace points out, the concept of sisterhood can also work to uphold the status quo through its exclusivity (*Sisters 2*). The WLM was, during the 1970s and 1980s, campaigning for the rights of middle-class white women, and largely excluded the experiences of other cultures. Sharing experiences by reading about other women’s lives gave many women a sense of belonging to a movement of shared aims, reducing feelings of alienation and exclusion. Both the WLM and the Six Point Group prioritised uniting women in order to promote their aims, encouraging a sense of belonging to a movement. Sharing and spreading ideas was enabled partly through *Spare Rib*, the magazine started by Rowe and Boycott, which ran from 1972-1993. During the interwar years, ideas were disseminated by means of *Time and Tide*. The founders of *Spare Rib* had worked for magazines such as *INK* and *OZ*, which belonged to the 1960s underground press, but “they were angry to find that women were treated no better by the alternative than by the straight press” (Toynbee, 1982, in Cochrane 86). Toynbee describes *Spare Rib* as “the main notice board and journal” for the women’s movement (in Cochrane, 87). *Spare Rib* presented itself as an alternative to the women’s magazines of the time that encouraged women to focus on the home. It was established to challenge the stereotyping and exploitation of women in all sectors of society, but echoing bell hooks’ criticism of the white, middle-class focus of the WLM, Jolly cites criticisms of *Spare Rib* put forward by Gail Lewis, a founding member of the Brixton Black Women’s Group: “Lewis describes feeling uncomfortable and angry, and challenging the white organizers [of a public meeting], including

Spare Rib editors, for an agenda that did not address the testing of the contraceptive Depo-Provera, the right to have children, and other issues of reproductive control pertinent to poor, black women” (*Sisterhood* 106). Lewis’s comments summarise Wallace’s contention that the concept of sisterhood can be read too simplistically and often excludes “‘transgressive’ women, or women who are ‘different’ in age, sexuality, race or class” (*Sisters* 2).

Like the earlier *Time and Tide* (1920-1979) *Spare Rib*, although open to criticism for its white bias, offered a challenge to magazines such as *Woman and Home* (established 1926). *Time and Tide* “was unique in becoming the only female-produced magazine of its kind, successfully taking up a position alongside its chief competitor the *New Statesman* as a leading review of politics and culture during the interwar years” (timeandtidemagazine.org). Apart from *Time and Tide*, prior to the WLM, women’s magazines promoted the idea that a woman’s role was to marry and spend her life looking after the home, her husband, and her children. In her 1970 study of women’s magazines, Cynthia White describes the appeal of *Woman and Home* and several similar magazines; aimed at older women at home, they had “a bias towards knitting and fiction” (126). Working women were mostly limited to low-paid roles that lacked any power, and Greer suggested that women’s roles in paid work were an extension of their roles in the home: “the pattern of female employment follows the course of the role that she plays outside industry: she is almost always ancillary, a handmaid in the more important work of men” (116). *Cosmopolitan* – first published in the UK in 1972 – in contrast to the many magazines aimed at older women, was designed to appeal to unattached

women in the 18-34 age group (White 254). White describes the magazine's focus on "the single, widowed or divorced and tackling the special problems which arise in their working lives and in their personal relationships" (254). The WLM addressed the issues of women's limited opportunities in life, and *Spare Rib* offered a forum for women to put forward ideas and discussions on ways in which women's lives needed to be improved. To an extent, *Cosmopolitan* and *Spare Rib* appealed to similar groups of women, making it a logical move for Virago to liaise with *Cosmopolitan* for promotions, as I discuss in Chapter 3.

Magazines in pre-*Spare Rib* days reinforced women's restricted expectations, encouraging a focus on the home. White's study of women's magazines published between 1800 and 1968 concluded that the industry was facing a challenge in the late 1960s, because of the "almost total lack of information bearing upon the needs, interests and attitudes of British women in the 'sixties" (20). White points out that *Annabel*, a magazine founded in 1966 and designed to appeal to young women who expected more from magazines and from life than their mothers, still had an "emphasis on knitting for the family" (186). In a reflection of the class basis of the WLM, White's analysis differentiates between weekly and monthly magazines. She explains that most changes to women's magazines were to be found in the glossier monthlies, comprising the more upmarket sector of publications. Change through the WLM was largely led by middle-class women, those more likely to be readers of the more upmarket, less conservative, magazines. Nevertheless, White concludes that the changes were not sufficient to reflect the changes to women's lives and attitudes in the late 1960s, since "the majority of women's periodicals are by tradition trend-

followers rather than trend-setters. The status quo is their frame of reference” (279). The market for a magazine like *Spare Rib* was not addressed until 1972. As part of the inspiration for *Virago*, and as the first point of communication for the WLM, *Spare Rib* offers insight into the development of, and need for, feminist publishing houses.

The *Spare Rib Reader* (1982), introduced by founder Rowe, presents a selection of articles from the magazine, providing a clear indication of the aims and interests. The *Spare Rib* archive was available online at the British Library (www.bl.uk/sparerib). Post-Brexit, much of it has been removed. Lisa O’Carroll explains in *The Guardian* that, whilst the UK was part of the EU, much of “the digital archive does not have specific copyright consent from their authors, but the library is protected from legal action under the EU’s orphan works directive” (25/02/2019). Post-Brexit, this protection ended. The discussions in *Spare Rib* covered topics including work, education, health, the WLM aims, media images of women and violence against women. In protest at national newspapers’ practice of offering a single page addressed to women, after seventeen issues *Spare Rib* decided to increase “its news coverage, created columns on science, health, law and education and expanded the letters page” (British Library). Including news was an important challenge to the male-dominated attitude that, living in the domestic, personal sphere, “women weren’t even supposed to be interested in the news” (Rowe *Virago: Changing* 00:01:02-06). *Spare Rib* questioned societal views of women which assumed that their interests were limited to the home and family. In a similar way, *Time and Tide* magazine “moved into the traditionally male territory of foreign policy and foreign affairs”

(Clay 4). Clay suggests that this move was indicative of the magazine's desire to offer women the chance to gain influence on current issues of importance, which she sees as "entirely consistent with the feminist agenda espoused by the periodical from its earliest years (5). The magazine moved from a traditional, hierarchical working structure in late 1973, becoming a collective. A collective structure challenged the traditional male-dominated hierarchical workplace structure and emphasised the importance of working in non-hierarchical workplaces within the feminist movement: "many alternative and feminist organisations ran on the collective model at this time, with the ideal that all work would be shared equally among the collective members who would also have equal weight in the decision-making process" (author unknown, British Library). As I will establish, Virago, unlike other feminist publishing houses, would later reject the collective business model, maintaining a hierarchical structure, with Callil at the top, as a means of combining ideology and business practice.

The *Spare Rib* collective wrote an afterword for the *Spare Rib Reader* explaining that the magazine was based on the belief that "*Spare Rib* could reach all women [and] reflect women's lives in all their diverse situations" (607). There was, however, a self-perpetuating exclusivity as many of the women involved in reading or contributing to the magazine and to the WLM belonged to the white middle class. This was partly for practical reasons; as a collective, the pay for contributors was low and only better-off women could afford to be part of the team. In an article on consciousness-raising groups for the March 1980 edition, Gill Philpott questions the exclusivity, and points out that "in my group we were roughly the same age, all white, all had higher education and similar

work situations” (587). The lack of inclusivity affected all areas of the women’s movement, including, as I will show, Virago Press, whose members and their target audience shared similar white, middle-class backgrounds. Goodings discusses awareness of the lack of women of colour in publishing, and she outlines one of the many initiatives designed to overcome the imbalance. “GAP – Greater Access to publishing – [...] was set up in the late 1980s by Margaret Busby – the writer and founder of the publishing house Allison and Busby” (*A Bite* 154). Records in the Virago archive detail a £1250 cheque received by Virago in 1987; the cheque was from Greater London Arts towards “the cost of a campaign to encourage black women to enter publishing” (Add MS 88904/3/2). Goodings and Busby worked on several initiatives to increase the presence of women of colour in publishing, including running a day-long conference, funded by the Greater London Authority. Meetings of Greater London Arts took place at the Virago office and the campaign continued with a conference aimed at “those black women who may be looking for jobs and perhaps have not seriously considered a career in publishing” (Add MS 88904/3/2). Delap draws attention to the early difficulties of inclusivity, because of a tendency to “idealise and naturalise ‘Third World’ women [...] A white reviewer noted the ‘enchanted’ testimony of women in Miranda Davies’ collection of writings from the global south [in *Spare Rib*]” (‘Third World’ Feminisms). Although the campaign indicates a growing awareness of the predominance of white women in publishing, the VMC list continued to be based largely on books written by white women, reflecting the people who made up the Virago team and the WLM.

Writing for oneself and for other women liberated women by removing the need for writing to be accepted by, or acceptable to, men. Feminist publishing provided the public outlet for women's writing. Wandor's 1975 *Spare Rib* article, "Positive Discrimination", focuses on cultural production, and the need for women to "produce where we have not produced, and to produce with confidence where we have produced with timidity" (In Rowe 286). She emphasises the need for women to end male domination in the cultural industries in which women "have for so long been objects and concepts in a male-dominated view of the world" (287). One of the aims of *Spare Rib* was to help women to change their own lives and challenge the patriarchal values that dictated women's images and choices. Publishing articles by women on subjects of their own choice enabled them "to find forms by which women communicate perceptions to oppose the ideology of oppression, of race, class or sex" (Rowe 21). The ethos behind the VMCs reflected that of *Spare Rib*, publishing and promoting books written by women on subjects that reflected their lives in a male-dominated society.

Callil was determined to take on the male domination of cultural production, "to do for books what *Spare Rib* did for magazines", and she originally called the publishing house Spare Rib Books (*Virago: Changing* 00:04:43-46). Starting a feminist publishing house was an important intervention; as Taylor shows, women have been, and still are, the largest group of consumers of fiction. Her study of women and reading draws attention to the power of women as consumers of books: "publishers, writers and reviewers alike know that, for most fiction to succeed, it must attract female readers" (*Why Women Read* 5).

She suggests that women tend to gravitate to books written by women in order to counter the dominance of male perspectives in society. Taylor argues that, although women read fiction written by both women and men, “there is a special bond, a mutual loyalty, between women writers and readers”, a bond of sisterhood linking women through shared experiences and oppression (46).

Joannou argues that the bond between women writers and readers highlights the small numbers of men who choose to read books by women. She suggests that, where women can read about their own shared experiences and female presentations of women, a man reading woman-centred texts risks “seeing his reflection in a distorting mirror, to find himself the ‘other’ and to submit to the kind of experience that in a patriarchal society has too often been the woman reader’s” (*Ladies* 9). Writer Siri Hustvedt explains that “when men repeatedly tell me that they do not read fiction but their wives do, and they’d like me to sign my book for their spouses”, she questions whether they read no fiction at all, including work by Dante and Shakespeare, or “do they mean that they don’t read female writers like me?” (in Appignanesi et al 124). Writer and journalist Mary A. Sieghart raises the issue of men failing to read books by women when discussing her 2021 book *The Authority Gap*; Sieghart’s book draws attention to “the way women are belittled, undermined, questioned, mocked, talked over and generally not taken seriously in public and professional life” (Merritt).

Sieghart argues that men assume that women’s writing is not aimed at them, and this assumption means “they will continue to see the world through an almost entirely male lens, with the male experiences as the default” (Sieghart).

Callil's non-radical feminism (as defined in the introduction to mean following feminist views based on liberal, rather than radical, ideas on patriarchy) and her desire to sell to a large readership made her want to aim Virago's books, including the VMCs, at a market that included both women and men. Goodings contends that some men kept a VMC by the bed in order to demonstrate their feminist credentials to women (*A Bite* 62) but she also argues that gendered reading plays an important role in limiting readership of the VMCs to a mainly female audience (ibid 241). The study by Sieghart suggests that Callil's hope for a market of women and men has not happened and that novels by women are seen to be for a predominantly female readership. Virago has been very successful in attracting their target audience of women but has apparently failed to attract a male audience. Any failure to encourage men to read books by women is perhaps exacerbated by the design and marketing of the VMCs, which emphasised the bond between women readers and women writers. Virago's emphasis on sisterhood has been a major factor in the success of the VMCs, both financially and in challenging the lack of women's published writing. The focus on commonalities between women succeeded in challenging male dominated literary culture but, according to Sieghart, there has been a general failure to encourage male readers, perhaps limiting the scope of change through feminist publishing. It is, however, worth recognising the podcasts available through *Backlisted*, started by Andy Miller and John Mitchison. *Backlisted* has become a popular book podcast promoting older books – "it's about how and why some books stand the test of time" , and their titles include some VMC authors, such as Rosamond Lehmann, Stevie Smith and Sylvia Townsend Warner (<https://www.backlisted.fm/about>). The success of the

podcasts might suggest that the appeal of older books has now reached a wider audience.

Rowbotham's argument that we need to listen to oppressed groups includes listening to women's untold histories. One of Virago's earliest, innovative publications was Mary Chamberlain's *Fenwomen: A Portrait of Women in an English Village* (1975), based on the oral histories of a group of women in the Fens – women whose lives were untouched by feminism. Chamberlain described it as “a book about survival” (*Virago: Changing* 00:13:14-16). Its focus on unheard poor women brought into the public sphere the lives of women who marry young, in a village where divorce is “unheard of”, and who have total responsibility for childrearing – “the great unacknowledged profession” – with virtually no money (*Virago: Changing* 00:12:21-30). The *News of the World* condemned the book as “disgraceful”, complaining that “a dirty trick has been played on the women [...] some of their most private feelings and opinions are held up to public ridicule and amusement” (*Virago: Changing* 00:12:49-59). The criticism implies that powerless working-class women had been exploited by the middle-class writer and the publisher. The complaint reinforced the view of mainstream, male-dominated mass media that listening to women's complaints about men was unwelcome as it might threaten the patriarchal status quo. The views of women in Chamberlain's book drew attention to existing inequalities and such views were unwelcome in institutions that belonged firmly within a patriarchal society. Attention was also drawn to the lives of working-class women who were generally not written about in the VMCs.

Chamberlain's book, and the reaction to it, emphasised the importance of bringing women's voices and lives into the public sphere. *Fenwomen* helped to make people realise that women's lives were dictated by men's prioritisation of work outside the home, and that their lives were often extremely difficult and restricted, particularly for poorer, working-class women. Sharing women's collective memories also serves to unite women in sisterhood. Although women's lives and experiences differ, the oppression by male-dominated values was common to many women during the pre-WLM years; and remains so today – to perhaps a lesser degree.

Printing oral histories subverts the idea that oral memories are for private consumption only, in the same way that women's archives subvert accepted male views of history and historical records. Making women's views publicly available through reprints and through archival material fundamentally challenges the historical silencing of women and their experiences. Archival material, including oral history and the Virago papers, are vital components in challenging male perspectives of history, but access to archival material tends to be limited – needing, in the above examples, a British Library Reader card. Whilst obtaining a reader card is free, it tends to denote a certain level of education and confidence as well as access to London.. Wilson suggests that “archival research has traditionally been a laborious, expensive and privileged form of scholarship, necessitating sometimes lengthy research trips” (in Parrinder et al 2014, 78). The limited access to archival research, referring specifically to the Virago archives, is perhaps another reflection of the original middle-class bias of the Women's Movement.

Referring to the distinctions between different types of feminist groups and aims, Goodings, in her book discussing her time at Virago, comments that “the one thing all these groups had in common was a desire to be heard. The female voice had something to say” (*A Bite* 10). The concept of a singular female voice becomes problematic, relying on essentialist notions of women, as I will discuss. But recognising the need for women to be heard underpins the arguments of both Goodings and Taylor, and their emphasis on the importance of books for women’s empowerment. Taylor states that her experiences of teaching and interviewing have led to her being “struck by the way fiction – with all the imaginative demands it makes of readers – can empower and liberate women” (*Why Women Read* 231). Goodings suggests that, having recently worked as the publicist for Greer’s *The Female Eunuch*, Callil “knew that books could be an agent of change” (*A Bite* 12). *Spare Rib*’s inclusion of challenging articles on topics normally thought to be the private concerns of women, including childcare, relationships, housework, and family, indicates the collective’s belief in the importance of making known, and sharing, women’s hidden lives, reflecting the WLM’s demands. Reprinting novels based on domestic concerns provided another method of sharing women’s views on their private lives. In discussing VMC writer Grace Paley’s views on politics, Goodings sums up the importance of reprinting much interwar women’s writing based on domestic issues. She describes how Paley demonstrated through her writing that “the female world of childcare, husbands, food, and care was just as important politically as the big gestures of the more male socialist and anti-war politics of the time” (*A Bite* 57). The VMCs’ focus on women’s lives epitomises

Goodings' reflection on the role of Virago – it “had the drive to bring to prominence voices from the margins, to right the imbalance” (*A Bite* 47).

Challenging literary tradition through Virago Modern Classics

During their first five years, Virago's books followed the tone set by Chamberlain's *Fenwomen*, described by Withers as “foreground[ing] the historical importance of ‘ordinary’ women's lives” (*Reprints* 21). Similarly, Goodings commented that the book “signalled a crucial aim of Virago: to publish the stories of women's everyday lives, stories not previously thought worth telling and recording” (*A Bite* 23). *Fenwomen* was followed by *My Secret Garden: Women's Sexual Fantasies* (Nancy Friday) in 1973. In 1976 Virago ended the support they had from Quartet and “relaunched as a fully independent company” (Goodings *A Bite* 24). Riley explains that “Virago's first eleven books were published in association with Quartet, who paid Virago £75 for each title in an arrangement which saw them take responsibility for distribution and marketing” (*Virago* 18). Withers sees the time at Quartet as a period of “frantic learning and development, especially in terms of understanding how the publishing business functioned” (*Reprints* 23). Using her contacts at Quartet gave Callil a link with mainstream publishing, helping to avoid Virago's marginalisation as a niche, minority publishing house. Callil describes the practical benefit of working with Quartet to begin the new publishing house, explaining, “Using the facilities of Quartet, Virago will be an imprint organised by women for women, to use established publishing facilities to reach a mass audience” (undated 1973 memo from Callil Add MS

89178/1/2). Independence enabled them to exercise full control over publishing decisions, as the founders, Callil, Owen, and Spicer, “quickly realised the need to be in charge of *all* aspects of their business” (Riley *Virago* 20). In a way that reflected the advantages to Virago of the Quartet facilities, the later addition of Virago to the publishing house of Chatto, Bodley Head & Jonathan Cape gave Virago the use of large sales and distribution services. There was a further benefit through gaining “the potential open to a company that had scrimped and saved all its life [of] being given access to enlarged financial resources” (de Bellaigue 144). Catherine Riley discusses the timeline of Virago’s independence in *The Virago Story* (2018) and in her article “The Message is in the Book” (2014). Virago’s sale to other publishers is also addressed by Murray (2004)

The launch of the VMC range in 1978 represented a departure from Virago’s earlier books. Withers suggests that it “marked a significant change in the trajectory of Virago’s reprint publishing which, up to that point, had focused more on non-fiction books” (*Reprints* 32-3). Virago’s new focus on republished fiction represented Callil’s views on feminism and publishing. She explains: “Feminist publishing houses tend to be more concerned that work should be politically correct than about their authors and the quality of the writing they publish. This is why so many feminist publishers have failed. One cannot publish for an idea only” (in Simons and Fullbrook 185). Sheba Press, for example, focused on publishing books about sexuality, presenting a lesbian-feminist viewpoint. Virago did publish for an idea, but their idea was to publish books that “present feminism to a mass market” (185). In her statement to Rowe in December 1973, outlining the aims of Virago, Callil wrote that “Virago

wants to publish books for the mass market, for men and women” (Statement of Aims Add MS 89178/1/2). In practice, their mass market comprised a white, middle-class female readership and the limitations of Virago’s model are discussed in later chapters. Through the VMCs, Virago curated a range of books that set them apart from the other feminist publishers. The books, often domestic writing, ensured a focus on women’s lives that were still, in the 1970s, largely restricted to issues around the home and family. 1970s readers’ familiarity with the topics and attitudes of the interwar VMCs underpinned the most innovative aspect of the range: the ability to build and shape a relationship between two generations of women. Both generations of women experienced resentment at the restriction of their lives to the home and unpaid work; the feminist movements in the interwar years and in the 1970s and 1980s campaigned for women’s financial independence and for opportunities to make choices about their lives. The VMCs enabled Virago, through their marketing and design, to illustrate and construct commonalities between the interwar women writers and the women readers of the WLM years.

The idea of reprinting forgotten and neglected novels by women came to Callil when she read Antonia White’s *Frost In May*, first published in 1933. It became the first VMC, a book she described as a novel that “could tell the story of my life”, concluding that there must be “hundreds more” that could tell the stories of other readers’ lives (“The Stories”). The book, published by Virago in June 1978, became a bestseller for the publishing house, “selling 11,401 copies by May 1980” (Withers *Green Spines*). In a similar way, The Women’s Press launched a series of reprints in 1978, mainly focusing on nineteenth century

fiction. Murray discusses the similarities between Virago and The Women's Press, seeing them as competitors for the feminist market, but The Women's Press became better known for publishing new fiction and for its more radical content (4 and 19). Callil's decision to publish, and republish, books by women, about their lives, challenges literary history that was based almost exclusively on male presentations and explanations of society. Telling the stories of women's lives had always been at the forefront of Callil's aims and the VMC fiction range presented books that predominantly narrated the experiences of white, middle-class women. Virago's decisions were also influenced by "new writing in social and cultural history which was among the most important work being done in the 1960s and 1970s" (Goodings, *A Bite* 26). Callil cites E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) as an influence on Virago's publishing decisions, mentioning the focus on the hidden stories of people's lives: "we knew that women had recorded their lives in memoirs and autobiographies and histories – by 1976 most of them unavailable for decades" ("Redressing" 1001). Thompson's book is described as portraying "the ordinary people of England not as statistical fodder, nor merely as passive victims of political repression" (cover notes). Virago's publication of *Fenwomen* clearly follows the lead of Thompson in its portrayal of ordinary women, as described above.

Montefiore discusses the ways in which interwar writing illustrates "the different ways in which male and female writers of the 1930s construct a self through memory in their writings" (5). The First World War influenced interwar writing, but women and men experienced war in different ways and have different

memories. Montefiore suggests that “the differences in experiences [...] are visible when one compares the interwar writings of Jameson, Brittain, Holtby, Warner and West with the canonical male writers” (in Joannou *Women* 27). A review of Bagnold’s work in 1987 suggests that her work also offers a female perspective of war. The reviewer writes that Bagnold’s work presents novels portraying independence, which “roll up Bagnold’s personal life into a detached object of study and open out new vistas of uniquely female experience to balance male-dominated views on war” (author unknown, Add MS 88904/1/14). Women’s interwar writing offers insights into the impacts of war and social change on women and families and on women’s shifting roles, rather than on the men involved in fighting. Callil sums up women’s literature in relation to war, arguing that women’s writing had historical value because they “wrote about life around them, rather like keeping a diary. War is not only about putting on a uniform and going off to fight” (in Cooke 2008). But, as Withers points out, although many women’s accounts of the war existed, “these stories failed to achieve parity with masculine ideas of heroism, suffering and sacrifice” (*Reprints* 41). The interwar VMCs signify an attempt to redress the balance, promoting alternative perspectives of war and its impacts on society.

The interwar novels by women republished as VMCs are notable for having female protagonists, presenting their lives within the home and family. In Woolf’s terms these are novels that question the notion that books should be about war, promoting instead writing that focuses on women’s lives and feelings (*Room* 74). The focus of many VMCs was marriage and family life, and Wallace suggests that popular VMC writers such as Lehmann and Holtby “reveal the

very real risks of marriage for women: boredom, frustration, self-delusion, loss of self [...]” (in Joannou *Women* 67). Many of the women writing in the interwar years presented a view of relationships that subverted the women’s magazine image portraying the ideal of marriage as the aim of all women – the fairy tale happy ending was, in reality, not very happy for many women, as illustrated in *Fenwomen*. The WLM drew attention to the patriarchal bias of marriage as an institution. Articles in *Spare Rib* discuss the loss of identity women experienced upon marriage, which was associated with their legal and economic dependence “on the husband as breadwinner and head of the household” (in Rowe 75). The aims of the WLM, like the Six Point Group, included a focus on women’s need for financial independence, presenting a direct criticism of the institution of marriage. An interview with a woman called Lucy in the January 1975 issue of *Spare Rib* discusses her lack of confidence during her violent marriage: “he [her husband] had a very low opinion of women, and of course, it rubs off on you in the end. [...] Even now I’ve got no confidence in myself. Never will have now” (in Rowe 81). When she came across the WLM, she said that Women’s Liberation “was such a revelation to me. Let’s be free, be somebody in your own right, not just an adjunct to a man” (81).

In domestic writing marriage becomes the subject matter, rather than the ultimate solution of the plot. Briganti and Mezei (*Domestic*) suggest that domestic writing shows the home and marriage as sites of conflict. Domestic novels are thus a means of subverting literature based on male values in which conflict frequently implies a battlefield or a power struggle in the workplace. Agency and power are generally seen as male traits exhibited in the public

domain, reflected in male dominated literary culture. In domestic writing, women are often shown to exert agency over their domestic space of the house and garden, “which operates as a site of agency and mode of communication for female novelists and protagonists, with the domain of the private, the interior and the everyday replacing the public sphere” (*Domestic* 1).

Domestic literature challenges the male-dominated literary tradition by subverting the values and subject matter of novels, presenting female characters who change their environments through agency and imagination. For Mezei and Briganti, the focus and abilities of the protagonists have an appeal to readers “bombarded by the cult of domesticity in magazines” (*She Must* 319). Republishing interwar domestic writing was directly relevant to women who were beginning to be influenced by the women’s movement’s protests and by campaigns relating to their lack of power and agency within marriage and in the workplace. The VMCs reflect the focus of the WLM and the Six Point Group, both of whom were concerned to improve the lives of women in the home and the workplace by ensuring more financial stability and agency. Both interwar writing and the WLM raised questions about the institution of marriage and its frequently negative impact on women’s lives. The VMCs became a conduit for disseminating interwar writing to women of the WLM generation, highlighting the commonalities as a selling point, drawing women together within, and across, generations. Virago employed the values of sisterhood in developing links between writers and readers across generations, recognising the role of sisterhood in empowering women and in giving them choices.

Domestic writing also emphasises the importance of female relationships, between friends, between mothers and daughters or between sisters. E. H Young's *Jenny Wren* and *The Curate's Wife*, discussed in Chapter 4, present examples of the importance of relationships between sisters in literature. These relationships offer a sense of togetherness and support, related to the WLM concept of sisterhood. Many domestic novels subvert writing based on the aim of marriage as an all-consuming and all-important relationship that makes a woman complete, instead emphasising the value of other relationships in women's lives. An interview in *Spare Rib* illustrates the importance attached to marriage by the interviewee, Lucy, and her work colleagues. Looking back, she explains the attitude to her still being single at twenty-six, when "everybody did their damndest to get a bloke", explaining, "people used to say to my mum, 'Isn't it terrible Lucy's not married'" (Rowe 79-80). Lucy's interview was conducted by her daughter, exemplifying the value of women sharing experiences.

Women's friendships gained importance and value to women involved in the WLM, offering a sense of security and belonging, as well as empowerment. The emphasis on sharing experiences made women aware of the importance of female friendships and relationships, and in many of the VMCs they were able to read examples of forms of female support that held relevance to their own lives. In the Prologue to *Testament of Friendship* Vera Brittain draws attention to the historical focus on, and veneration of, friendships between men in literature, and the neglect of literary friendships between women. "From the days of Homer the friendships of men have enjoyed glory and acclamation, but

the friendships of women [...] have been not merely unsung, but mocked, belittled and falsely interpreted" (2). Brittain's book, recording her close friendship with Winifred Holtby, is partly an attempt to redress the balance, "to show its readers that loyalty and affection between women is a noble relationship" (2). The WLM promoted the importance of female friendships, and the VMCs offer many literary examples of women's platonic affection for each other.. But Wallace argues that female friendships can work in support of the patriarchal social values that they are supposed to challenge: "Female friendships [...] may provide solace and guidance which help to assimilate women into heterosexual relationships" ("Sisters and Rivals" 2). She further suggests that friendships can also work to exclude women who are "different' in age, sexuality, race or class" (2). This point agrees with hooks' contention that women can replicate male hierarchical values based on white supremacy, causing some women to feel superior and contemptuous to women with different backgrounds and values (129). The sisterhood promoted in the VMCs can be contextualised as part of the white, middle-class feminist movement that fails to recognise the complexities of female relationships and identities.

The WLM arguments on marriage, agency and friendships made many of the VMCs relevant to 1970s' WLM readers, helping Virago to develop commonalities between the women writing the interwar VMCs and the women reading them as republications. The books, although very successful and read by many women, appealed to a predominantly white, middle-class, non-radical audience. During the early days of the WLM the concept of sisterhood implied a sense of unity between all women, a notion criticised by Lucy Bland as

“romantic” (*Virago: Changing* 00:27:51-55). With the fracturing of second-wave feminism during the 1990s, other feminist publishers produced books that held more direct relevance to women of different cultures, classes, and sexualities. Feminist writer and activist Scarlett Curtis explains, “during the third wave, feminism expanded, transformed and, following on from the limitations of the second wave, became many movements” (342). But authors and academics Morris and Withers, in their study of feminist revolution, point out that even though different feminist publishers had different target audiences and priorities, “they were united in a concern to make print media written by women, for women” (160).

Virago’s middle-class appeal, particularly through the VMC range, partly resulted from its determination to avoid being associated with any specific theoretical stance or to recognise the potential limitations of its market. Goodings explains that Virago has always avoided giving a definition of feminism, and “has refused to be hard-line” about its feminist beliefs (*A Bite* 29). She adds that Virago’s feminism was based on putting “women centre stage and highlight[ing] women’s achievements and history” (29). But only some women were put centre stage, and these were predominantly white, English-speaking middle-class women, as indicated by the information in the Appendix. Although, as I argue, the majority of VMCs were written by white, middle-class authors, some of Virago’s other publications focus on a wider range of backgrounds and classes; these publications included work by Pat Barker, although she does not fall within my research period of interwar writing, Chamberlain’s *Fenwomen* (1975), and Margaret Llewelyn Davies’ *Life as We*

Have Known It (1931, republished by Virago 2012). Avoiding any close association with particular branches of feminism was perhaps understandable when the movement was finding its way, but it eventually led to criticisms of Virago for ignoring the needs of women who did not feel that they were included in the concept of Virago's appeal to all women.

Callil's aim of giving women a voice by publishing books by and for women has been criticised, as it risked marginalising writing by women as a separate genre: "I'm afraid that [...] women writers usually means 'lesser writers'" (Gee and Appignanesi in Simons and Fullbrook, 173). Hanson's discussion of the term "woman writer" implies that it is a problematic concept. She indicates that "the qualifier 'woman' suggests a concentration on the feminine sphere, which is generally construed as the private, the domestic, and, perhaps, the everyday" (Hanson in Simons and Fullbrook, 66). Hanson's comment presents a traditional, male-centred view, which marginalises women's private, domestic lives. But, for the WLM and Virago, and for interwar feminists, promotion of the home as a site of agency and power subverts the idea that women's lives are powerless within their restriction to the private, hidden world. Changing conceptions of the domestic world presented in novels by ending the public/private dichotomy was an important aim of the WLM. Owen largely sums up the achievements of the women's movement and feminist publishing when she says, "We came out of a place where people were silenced and that isn't quite true anymore" (*Virago: Changing* 00:57:48-54). It is significant that all bookshops now include very large numbers of books by women, and Virago's early insistence that their books should be included in the main bookshelves,

rather than separated as books for women, had an impact on the acceptance of writing by women as part of mainstream literature.

This chapter has demonstrated that Virago, and specifically the VMCs, were part of the WLM and a response to the WLM's campaigns for women to be heard and for their private lives to be made public. The VMCs developed from these campaigns and from the criticisms of Leavis made by Hoggart and Williams. The concept of canonical literature was shown to be dominated by white male writing. Republishing work by interwar women writers challenged the canon by making women's writing more enduring, worthy of reading and rereading. Calling the range of reprints "Classics" represented a clear questioning of canonical literature, and I next examine the ways in which books were chosen and presented by Virago, in order to further understand the values of Virago. Analysis of the choice, presentation, and content of the VMCs will demonstrate their significance for the WLM and for the generation of women influenced by the campaigns of second-wave feminism.

Chapter 2: “If founding Virago was my first light bulb, dreaming up the Classics was the second.”: Selecting books for the VMC range.

Virago’s decision to curate the Modern Classics range of books distinguished them from other feminist publishing houses, although, as noted above, The Women’s Press also had a range of reprints before deciding to concentrate more on contemporary writing. Choosing to republish women’s fiction that was no longer in print, in addition to Virago’s emphasis on combining profit and feminism, were innovative aims within feminist publishing. In this chapter I analyse Virago archival material to establish that the business model and the criteria for selecting VMCs, and the books themselves, were compatible with second wave feminism’s aims and values, in spite of differing from other feminist publishing models. The profitable range of republished novels represents an important intervention into mainstream publishing. As Withers points out, “the idea of a women’s literary tradition came into focus first for a specific group – women’s liberationists – and then broadened out to resonate with wider, popular audiences” (*Reprints* 4). They suggest that the VMCs were an important aspect of Virago’s move into the mainstream market, attracting a wider market. I will, however, suggest that, although they moved into the mainstream market, Virago did not appeal to a mass market. I demonstrate the lack of inclusivity of Virago’s model, discussing the ways in which both the WLM and the VMCs largely excluded women who did not belong to the white, educated middle class sector of society in the 1970s and 1980. Although the VMCs followed the theme of Virago’s early publication, *Fenwomen*, in telling the stories of women’s lives, republishing older novels from the interwar years

represented a new direction for feminist publishing houses, based on publishing a range of fiction rather than feminist theory or historical work like *Fenwomen*. Telling the fictional stories of women's lives situated the VMCs firmly within the WLM by providing an archival record of women's literature and literary history. The importance of providing women with their history, through archival documents and through literature, is emphasised by author and academic Janet Dewart Bell during a recent discussion of American feminist magazine *Ms*: "People who don't understand their history don't understand they have a future" (in Yvonne Roberts *The Observer* 03/07/2022). The VMCs combined the main aims of the WLM, emphasising the importance of the political nature of personal lives, and demonstrating the need for women's history to be known.

The slogan "the personal is political" was fundamental to the actions and values of the WLM, arguing for the importance of making women's private, hidden lives known, and ending the dichotomy between male and female lives. Vera Brittain had raised the issue of the limitations and narrowness imposed on women restricted to the personal, hidden sphere of life. In her 1936 novel *Honourable Estate*, one of the male characters, married to a feminist, asks "Why are women expected to be content with personal interests when men need impersonal achievement for fulfilment and satisfaction?" (500). Politicising women's unpaid work and lives was a major aim of the movement; in 'the personal is political', the word political is used to denote "power relationships, not the narrow sense of electoral politics" (Hanisch). The argument that "individual experiences are inextricably connected with the greater social and historical context" was originally put forward in 1959 by sociologist C. Wright Mills (Kelly). The idea was

later adopted by the WLM to argue that “women’s personal problems were political problems inasmuch as they were caused by women’s inequality” (Kelly). Curating a list of republished out of print domestic and romance novels by women was an important response to the WLM as it focused on putting women’s everyday lives into the public world of published literature. Many VMCs focused on women’s lives during marriage, illustrating the limitations on women’s choices imposed by a society based on patriarchal values. The VMCs supported the sisterhood and collectivism of the WLM by enabling women to recognise the experiences they shared, not only with many contemporary women, but also historically, with women from the interwar years. As I argue in this thesis, the presentation of the VMCs helped second-wave feminists to understand the similarities between their campaigns and those of interwar women. Curation of the VMCs challenged the absence of women’s known history and cultural history, providing an archival record of women’s fictional lives.

Callil’s combined aims of running a successful business whilst promoting feminism involved a unique blend of ideology and profit within the feminist publishing world. Virago’s adoption of a business model based on a top-down hierarchy allowed them to subvert male-dominated business practices and models within a female-run publishing house. Virago’s way of working contributed to setting them apart in feminist publishing: other feminist publishing houses promoted working as a collective in order to challenge male-dominated hierarchical business models. Virago used existing male-dominated business models in order to subvert them through their own working practices. Despite

Callil's more capitalist business model, the VMCs were an important response to the WLM, actively challenging accepted views of canonical and classic texts. Republishing older novels by largely forgotten writers was a significant intervention in publishing norms and it is through the VMCs that Callil was able to reconcile her financial and ideological aims. The VMC range became the most popular and successful range of books published by Virago, ensuring financial security by promoting feminist ideals. Murray describes the achievement of the VMCs, discussing Virago's commercial success during the first ten years of the VMCs, commenting on "the substantial backlist sales generated by its fiction reprint series, the Virago Modern Classics, and its unmatched reader loyalty" (31).

Although leading to business success and longevity, Callil's decision to combine ideological and financial aims was problematic and contradictory for many feminists. Murray maintains that profit-making entails acceptance of capitalist values and that feminism and profit are incompatible, a view shared by other feminists and feminist publishers. The difficulty of combining profit and ideology was an issue for *Spare Rib* – the inspiration for Virago. Delap, in her work on the magazine, states that "the challenge of reconciling politics and profit was constantly debated" (267). Like many other feminist publishers and unlike Virago, *Spare Rib* was run as a not-for-profit collective, but the debate around ideology and profit was a major criticism of Virago by Greer and Rowbotham. Greer argues that a capitalist economy relies upon women being exploited in unpaid or low-paid support roles. Rowbotham's socialist feminist views were also critical of the capitalist system's reliance on women in unpaid roles and

their necessary support of wage-earning men. Although Rowbotham was a socialist feminist, she was on Virago's advisory panel, in spite of Virago's more mainstream view of feminism. Both views promoted women's voices, but from different theoretical stances, indicating the common aims amongst the varying factions within second-wave feminism. Murray encapsulates the criticisms of Virago's aim of combining profit and feminist ideology, arguing that the publishing industry is "in its structure and operating practices [...] intrinsically capitalist", and thus based on social stability and the exploitation of women as low-paid workers or mothers (2). She continues, arguing that "the twin goals of political commitment and profit generation might be expected to pull any such feminist publishing operation in mutually incompatible directions" (2). The study by Cadman et al on feminist publishing emphasises the importance of feminist publishers producing work that allows for "improvement in what goes between the covers of a book, and indeed *on the cover*" (27). To make these challenges possible, "women must become aware of the importance of the groups who have the power – those who hold the purse-strings" (27). Their argument explains the importance of combining ideology and profit – of controlling the purse-strings, and the means of cultural production, to enable women to publish books reflecting women's lives and views. Callil shared this belief, arguing, as Murray explains, that "capitalist survival in itself is a political statement" (39). Most feminist publishers attempted to work outside this model, setting up alternative ways of working based on non-profit making collectives that offered a range of theoretical feminist books. Murray argues that Virago's decision to combine incompatible aims resulted in a watered-down form of feminism. She is critical of what she refers to as Virago's depoliticization and "the commercial

necessity of minimising a book's political content in its cover design" (64).

Virago's success in promoting its VMCs necessitated a concentration on marketing and packaging. Chapter 3 contains an analysis of Virago's marketing methods and the ways in which Virago used capitalist, male-dominated practices to promote and sell their brand of feminism.

In contrast to Murray's criticism, Riley argues that Virago's example of a financially successful organisation staffed entirely by women was feminism in action and that it was both possible and important to promote feminist beliefs within a capitalist society. Riley argues that Virago's publishing model was "a moment of feminist praxis – an enactment of feminist politics through the incursion into 'male' areas of economic and cultural authority" (*Virago* 1). Her argument suggests that, in order to become part of mainstream publishing, Virago needed to be competitive, prioritising profit and ensuring business success. Intervening in the male-dominated capitalist world of mainstream book publishing required a successful challenge to existing practices. Delap discussed the concept of praxis in connection with *Spare Rib* feminist magazine. She emphasises the importance of its practical challenge: "the idea of *praxis* captures activity that is oriented to concrete change rather than simply abstract interventions or reproduction of the status quo" (250). Virago's establishment of a profitable publishing house staffed by women, who made all the publishing decisions about books written by women, exemplified an alternative way of running a business within a capitalist society, and demonstrates the liberal feminist approach followed by Virago. Callil's dual aims were summed up by Goodings in 2013, emphasising the importance of financial

success and survival: “There’s no point in being the greatest thing in the world if you can’t survive. I guess it’s fair to call it pragmatic but we’re not a charity, we’re not a political movement, we reflect what’s going on but we’re not a library, we’re a business” (in Rustin “Lennie Goodings”). Callil prioritised Virago as a business as she believed that it was Virago’s “duty not to go bust. Virago must be here for future generations, ensuring that women writers are not forgotten again” (in Toynebee 1982). Republishing forgotten women writers as a popular range of books characterised – and achieved – Callil’s aims.

Callil’s focus on running Virago as a profitable business impacted on both the day-to-day practice and the selection of books to be republished. The Virago author archives, although limited and partial, offer some insight into the values underpinning the selection of VMC novels². Although Goodings referred to the “bag loads” of letters from readers, fewer than expected were found in the archives (*Virago: Changing* 00:26:20-25). In pre-email days, many letters were simply lost or discarded, as illustrated by Callil’s memos (cited in the introduction), in which she admits to having thrown out much correspondence. Throughout this chapter, I draw on examples of letters from readers requesting particular titles, but it is also possible that Virago’s actual relationship with readers was emphasised as part of its image, highlighting sisterhood and democracy as aspects of the WLM that influenced the running of Virago. Writing in the *TLS*, Nigel Cross suggests that “there is a pleasing fiction that readers send in nominations, votes are counted and participatory democracy triumphs

² In the Introduction, I explain my use of the archives and my choice of archival material.

[...] but some nominations are more influential than others” (*TLS*). In Virago’s case, Cross’s comment implies that, even when readers contacted Virago with book suggestions and requests, other suggestions may have carried more weight. Although Virago’s working practices promoted sisterhood, it was a limited form of sisterhood; the influences of readers on their choice of VMCs was perhaps more limited than Callil’s comments suggest, but the incomplete archives make it challenging to assess the importance of readers’ suggestions. The backgrounds of the women known to be recommending books for the VMC range reflected the composition of the WLM, promoting the interests of a limited sector of society.

Although Callil claimed that the VMCs represented a response to the movement, the relationship between the VMCs and the WLM has not been explored within the context of generational feminist debates. By looking at Virago’s business model and decision-making practices, as well as at the VMCs themselves, I will demonstrate the place of the Modern Classics within second-wave feminism. Drawing attention to the importance of commonalities between two generations, Callil’s decision to produce the Virago Modern Classics range “sprang in part from the women’s movement, but also from my past: [...] from my mother’s love of reading [...]. A number of the novels we were to publish as Classics came from my mother” (“The Stories”). Reflecting the shared nature of women’s reading and experiences, the books were also ones that “we all read and passed around” (“Callil On Virago” 5 x 15 00:11:32-36). Callil’s contribution to the 5x15 talks is relevant: founded by Rosie Boycott, Daisy Leitch, and

Eleanor O’Keeffe, “5x15 brings world leading figures to speak to audiences to spark ideas and inspiration.” (www.5x15.com/about).

The VMC range emphasised links between women, and a sense of continuity, with women recommending books to each other – through reading groups; mothers to daughters, as in Callil’s case; through reader requests for titles to be republished as VMCs; and through contemporary writers’ recommendations. Analysis of the Virago author archives demonstrates the ways in which the selection of books was influenced by the political priorities of the WLM, emphasising the relevance of the range to non-radical second-wave feminists. The archives also allow an understanding of why and how books were chosen for republication, choices that upheld Virago’s feminist approach and their mainstream market.

Virago’s non-radical feminism

Virago was driven by the desire to be part of mainstream publishing, to offer reading and inspiration to all women. The VMCs would, for Callil, tell the stories of women’s lives. But Callil’s feminist beliefs meant that the Classics list curated by Virago did not have the same relevance for all women or all feminists. As explained by Goodings, Virago avoided being labelled as belonging to a particular type of feminism: “our books look at the world through women’s eyes but we’ve never taken a stand on what is the ‘right’ kind of feminism” (*A Bite* 29). In 1998 Callil explained that “feminism seemed absolutely natural to me, though it would be true to say that I never was a feminist of the brutalist, radical,

politically correct kind” (in Simons and Fullbrook 184). The intended reading audience for the VMCs comprised women who were concerned with equality without being militant or interested in fundamentally changing their lifestyles, in contrast to the sort Callil referred to as radical and politically correct. Her views reflect the antipathy to radical feminist aims and methods; liberal feminism, as outlined in the introduction, was thought by many women, and by many patriarchal institutions, to be a less threatening and more acceptable approach to improving the lives of women. Both the WLM and the Six Point Group employed non-violent, liberal feminist approaches to improving the lives of women, working by means of legal change and change through existing systems. Virago’s approach appealed to one of their employees in the 1980s: Lorna Stevens, in an echo of Murray’s view, although in a positive way, comments on what she refers to as its “somewhat diluted feminism” (“Telling Tales” 162). She explains that, in common with many feminists, “I wasn’t comfortable with too much militancy, and nor did I possess dungarees, big boots or have short hair, which at the time was how the feminist stereotype was perceived” (162). Harriet Harman comments on the different approaches of feminists, all of whom were scathingly branded as “bra-burning man-haters” by the media, and although “some of the women’s movement certainly were, we weren’t. While many radical feminists rejected make-up and wore dungarees, I, for one, was wearing black eyeliner and a miniskirt” (32).

Decisions about the books Virago would publish for the VMC range were made in accordance with Callil’s feminist views and with a non-radical readership in mind. Her broad-based, mainstream feminist approach was a major influence

on the type of books selected, which focused on presenting women's experiences and lives. As I will show, the books represented the experiences of only some women, reflecting the lack of inclusivity within the WLM and Virago. In a 2008 interview with the journalist Rachel Cooke for *The Observer* Callil discussed her wish to reprint Antonia White's 1933 *Frost in May*, which became the first VMC in 1978. "I was utterly bowled over [...]. I thought: I have got to find a way of publishing this book. But I had the sisters to contend with. Some of the early feminists were socialists. There were jolly socialists, and there were wretched socialists who didn't have any joy in life. I had to think of a way of not offending them" (in Cooke "Taking"). Callil was clearly aware of the different factions within the second-wave feminist movement and had chosen a mainstream, liberal feminist audience for the VMC range and the establishment of a successful feminist publisher.

Callil's determination for Virago to be part of mainstream publishing in order to be successful as a feminist publishing house involved adopting and using some capitalist business practices for feminist purposes. Running as a collective, like most feminist businesses, entailed working outside the dominant, capitalist, male-dominated system. Callil rejected the collective model, instead following a tradition discussed by journalist and broadcaster Jenni Murray with reference to the suffragette movement. Murray explains that change brought about by suffragettes was driven by "the ones who knew how to operate within the patriarchal system. [...] and it seemed to me in the early 70s that *that* was the way you got things changed" (British Library sisterhood interviews). Jenni Murray's argument implies that the choice of books for the VMCs can be

understood as being aimed at the women with more power in society, those able to exercise authority by means of more education and resources than other women. In her discussion of women during the interwar years, Sarah Lonsdale explains that after the First World War more women were graduating “and some were beginning to occupy positions of power in the public world of newspapers, politics and trades unions, and were able to help their more struggling friends” (*Rebel Women* 23). Murray, Lonsdale and Callil all recognised the middle-class dominance and power in feminist movements, and for Callil, this recognition impacted on the type of publishing house she established. Discussing collectives, Callil explained in a letter to Goodings (prior to her employment by Virago) in the 1970s, “I think you are under a misapprehension about our company. We are not a co-operative but a limited company and we operate in a normal business way” (in Goodings *A Bite* 6). Callil later explained that “apart from the fact that [Virago] was smaller and couldn’t pay authors so much, it was trying to be the same as mainstream publishers” (in Simons and Fullbrook 186).

Establishing an all-women publishing house to produce writing by women subverted what Callil referred to as “a normal business way” (above in her letter to Goodings). Callil’s business model was clearly part of the WLM in its practice of only employing women, who were responsible for all publishing decisions and had complete financial control after the early years of being under the auspices of Quartet. The long-term effects of Virago’s mainstream methods and audience shifted women’s writing “into their own world and their own perspective”, rather than writing “in a man’s world” (Jon Snow *Virago: Changing* 00:01:58-02:03). But working within a capitalist workplace and promoting feminism contained

clear ambiguities. Sisterhood was promoted through the books, through the all-female workforce, and through the practice of women recommending books to each other. But at the same time, Virago's hierarchical structure entailed being "run on Thatcherite lines of hard work, low pay and long hours" (unnamed Virago employee in Bennett).

There was a fundamental contradiction in the desire to establish feminist businesses that challenged the male-dominated capitalist organisations in existence, whilst working in a capitalist society. Delap suggests that the WLM encouraged an ethos of "anti-careerism", in which "professionalism was often understood as creating unfair hierarchies" (263). Hierarchical systems had historically benefitted men and exploited women. The Thatcherite ethos impacted on the organisational models of several feminist presses during the early 1980s. Delap discusses the *Spare Rib* and the *Trouble and Strife* collective organisations. These collectives were both run as non-for-profit concerns. Delap considers their decisions not to pay members, and their pride in maintaining their "independence from any grant funding. Zoe Fairbairns, a contributor to both *Trouble and Strife* and *Spare Rib*, contested the former's non-payment of writers, citing a lack of budgeting and 'monetarist' approach to supply. This last observation was clearly provocative in linking non-payment to Thatcherite economics" (262-3). The Thatcher era highlights the contradictions involved in running all-female magazines and publishing houses. Whether running as a not-for-profit collective or a profit-making business, all of the organisations involved some exploitation, in many ways continuing the long-term exploitation of women in the home and in the workplace. The long hours

and Callil's tyrannical style, combined with the ideological feminist beliefs, demanded total commitment from the staff to the point of exploitation, particularly from the original team members. When Owen first considered joining Virago, she started doing "freelance, unpaid work" (*Virago: Changing* 00:09:43-48). Callil admitted to the amount of free help and support given by the members of the advisory team, who provided meals along with advice. Authors supported Virago by taking "very little or no pay" ("Callil on Virago" 5 x 15 00:09:53-57). These contradictions cast doubt on the possibility of the WLM's aims of promoting gender equality, in both not-for-profit collectives and in the mainstream, profit-making model of Virago Press.

The WLM's early manifesto included fighting for childcare and nurseries, but this was not a practice promoted by Virago. Alexandra Pringle, of the original Virago team, admitted that "in a different circumstance I would have had another child", but found it impossible in the face of long hours and the financial commitment (*Virago: Changing* 00:42:55-59). An unnamed former employee complained that Callil "could not bear any reference to family or private life. Pregnancy was intolerable" ("Profile: Virago" *The Independent* 1993). Running a feminist publishing house as a capitalist, hierarchical business encompassed clear, often unreconcilable, contradictions. Although Virago had the same values as the WLM, its working practices contradicted the important WLM aim of improving conditions for working mothers. Some of the VMCs I discuss in Chapter 4 illustrate the need for improving the lives of women in the workplace, an important demand for both interwar feminists and second-wave feminists.

Virago's mainstream feminist views clearly impacted on their business model. These views also influenced both the types of books selected for the Modern Classics range curated by the Virago team and the ways in which the books were chosen. The selection was partly inspired by the ideas of the WLM, and Rowbotham's work was of particular significance. Gilbert et al explain: "Rowbotham's book *Hidden From History*, aimed at a younger audience interested in learning more about women's history, helped to inspire the beginning of the Virago Reprint Library in 1977" (82). The Reprint Library started during the 1970s and, as Withers writes, was a decision based on financial need. Withers explains that, needing to build up a backlist was important for Virago's independence and its economic situation. It became evident that developing a profitable backlist was easier with reprints: "if a title has been languishing on a publisher's backlist for decades [...] most likely it would be cheap to acquire publication rights" (*Green Spines*). After publishing eight titles, the Reprint Library was replaced by the VMCs with Callil's decision to concentrate on fiction reprints. Rowbotham's emphasis on the importance of republishing writing by women from an earlier generation was a factor in books becoming a fundamental means of women reclaiming their cultural heritage.

Writer and academic Lynne Spender emphasises the link between publishing and politics, explaining that feminist publishers recognised that "their selection of material and writers [...] has a political dimension" (102-3). The prominence of sisterhood in the WLM influenced the decisions made on what was published and republished. Republishing books written by the previous generation of women gave women in the 1970s and 1980s insight into the lives and histories

of other women and developed links between the two generations. Being able to read about shared experiences and interests developed a sense of sisterhood between readers, and between readers and writers. Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (published by Virago in 1978) inspired some of the choices for the VMCs, exemplifying the importance of women recommending books to each other. Recommendations were frequently made by the women who made up Virago's advisory panel.

Callil had a strong belief that the quality of women's writing for inclusion in the VMCs was important, and she was critical of "feminist publishing houses that concentrated on work that was politically correct at the expense of what she called the quality of writing. "The market that I wanted to reach with Virago was not primarily feminist. Rather I wanted Virago to present feminism to a mass market" (in Simons and Fullbrook 185). Her feminist focus was predominantly on making women's writing an acceptable part of literary culture, challenging accepted notions of canonical writing. Callil's attempt to change literary culture by making women's writing part of the mass market was heavily influenced by mainstream middle-class values regarding literary quality, a concept that Callil does not clearly define. In "The Stories of Our Lives" Callil discusses the criteria involved in choosing books for republication. She explains "We had a limit known as the Whipple line, below which we would not sink. Dorothy Whipple was a popular novelist of the 1930s and 1940s whose prose and content absolutely defeated us." Why Dorothy Whipple's prose was so unacceptable to Virago is unclear, and her books are now reproduced in Nicola Beauman's range of reprints for Persephone Books. Humble's study of middlebrow writing

describes the disparaging way in which it is discussed. She suggests that middlebrow's predominance of female writers and readers is largely to blame for its poor image. Callil's desire to offer books that conform to her undefined focus on the quality of writing is possibly why the VMCs are not referred to by the Virago team as middlebrow, since doing so would imply books of low quality writing, perhaps writing aimed at readers with less education than the intended VMC readers. There is an implicit suggestion that the VMCs were better than middlebrow books.

The desire to appeal to a middle-class mass market of women readers is evidenced in correspondence between Virago and *Woman* magazine in 1987, one of the magazines created between the wars "for the affluent middle classes" (White 96). A letter from the editorial department at *Woman* thanked the Virago team for "your help over our Summer Reading Special. I think Enid Bagnold would be best, in the end, and it is also a good chance to introduce our readers to VMCs – if anyone hasn't come across them by now!" (Add MS 88904/1/14). The new middle-class mass circulation journals, including *Woman*, promoted an ideology based on traditional, conservative gender roles. White suggests that *Woman*, like other weekly journals aimed at the middle-class market, was very conservative: "The range of topics covered in the newer mass weeklies did not depart significantly from the traditional scope of women's magazines" (129). They produced articles and short stories representing marriage as the aim for all women. The content promoted the lives of married women as homemakers who were, and should be, subordinate to their husbands.

The views on marriage promoted by *Woman* and other similar journals were based on pre-second-wave notions of women's roles, "cautioning all those capable and efficient women coming to marriage from full lives in the outside world to guard against becoming dictatorial wives or competing with their husbands" (White 110). The suggestion from *Woman's* correspondence that their readers were already familiar with the Virago Modern Classics makes it clear that the Virago reprints were aimed at a wide, non-radical, middle-class readership – like the readership of *Woman* magazine itself. The correspondence with *Woman* suggests a departure from the feminist views of *Spare Rib* magazine, even though it had been the inspiration for Virago books.

The novels by Bagnold that became part of the VMC range are examples of Virago's predominant choice of non-modernist, non-experimental writing, and three Enid Bagnold novels were reprinted as VMCs: *The Happy Foreigner* (1920, VMC 1987), *The Squire* (1938, VMC 1987), *The Loved and Envied* (1951, VMC 1988). Bagnold is an example of Virago's practice of resurrecting neglected and forgotten women writers; a 1988 review in the *Johannesburg Review of Books* offers a pertinent comment on the reissuing of forgotten novels: "Enid Bagnold has languished in obscurity too long. With its introduction by Anne Sebba, this new edition of *The Squire* is therefore a welcome addition to the Virago list, which has already exhumed an enviable number of little-known women writers" (in Add MS 88904/1/14). The novels chosen for republication generally presented strong female characters in a narrative style which adhered to Callil's literary taste. Owen suggests that "realist fiction,

describing women's lives, work, and relationships, was a mainstay of feminist literature produced during the 1960s, '70s and '80s. Describing the everyday world of women was a crucial task for the WLM" (British Library interviews). In her 1998 interview with Simons, Callil states that "the Virago Classics list is by no means exhausted, but quality and entertainment must remain paramount" (Simons and Fullbrook, 192). She further explains her belief, commenting, "If you forget about standards and concentrate on political correctness then all is lost" (in Simons and Fullbrook 185). Virago's values were later reinforced by Jill Foulston (commissioning editor for the VMCs) in response to a reader's letter in May 2000: "We feel that in order to merit inclusion in the VMC list, a book should first and foremost be a cracking good read. It should also have strong female characters" (Add MS 88904/2/13).

Like Callil's views on whether a book is good enough to merit republishing, Foulston's description of "a cracking good read" is not clarified but suggests unchallenged acceptance of previous traditions of non-modernist literature in relation to plot and characterisation, further enhancing the concept of a non-radical feminism, upheld by conservative literary styles. Although the majority of VMCs are based on narrative, non-modernist styles of writing, there are some exceptions, including Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* novels, and the work of HD, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Rebecca West. The cover notes describe Richardson's style as "the first expression in English of what was to be called 'stream of consciousness' technique". Emphasising the unusual style at the time of the first book, written in 1915, Gill Hanscombe's 1979 introduction explains that Richardson predates both Joyce and Woolf. She also comments that "of

the early twentieth-century modernists, there is no one who has been more neglected” (1). The neglect, in addition to the books’ focus on the writer’s own life and experiences, which reflects a main focus of the second-wave feminist movement, explains their relevance to the VMC range and the decision to include them.

The WLM originally represented an attempt to unite women in a joint cause, fighting for childcare, equal pay and equal opportunities in jobs and education, trying to offer a feminism that was “focused and united” (Joan Bakewell in Appignanesi et al 31). Virago, the first of many feminist publishing houses, endeavoured to promote the unity and collectivism attempted by the WLM and by the Six Point Group, although in practice “the women’s movement [was] never a single organization” (Harman 19). The second-wave phase of the women’s movement failed to recognise differences between women’s lives and experiences, while the Six Point Group attempted to bring women together after the partially successful suffrage campaign, giving them aims intended to unite them Owen discussed the feminist beliefs underlying Virago by explaining: “We concluded early that to alter the culture we had to occupy the middle ground” (in P. Owen *The Future* 96). Occupying the middle ground, which ignores or excludes the existence of any radical or minority feminist views, suggests a recognition that attracting the mainstream market of women readers was the key to success – both culturally and economically. But the middle ground was not inclusive, failing to offer sisterhood to many groups of women.

Callil further explains her feminist views in an article for *The Guardian* in 2008, saying, "I was sorely out of place in the sombre waters of socialist feminism. I had a libertarian dread of preaching to people" ("The Stories"). Her comment demonstrates her desire to promote feminism within a more liberal ideology based on changing society by demonstrating women's ability to participate in cultural production on an equal basis to men, rather than through 'preaching'. But the feminist movement became increasingly diverse and splintered in the 1980s, leading to the existence of a plurality of feminist movements and casting doubt on the feasibility of Virago's middle ground being non-separatist. The pluralisation developed from the realisation that the same ideas and beliefs did not apply to all women, and from a recognition of the limitations of a feminism based on the false concept that all women had the same needs and suffered equal discrimination.

There was agreement amongst all feminist groups and factions that women were treated as subordinate to men, but the type and amount of discrimination was not the same for all. In 1984 the writer Audre Lorde emphasised fundamental differences in the position of women based on their race and colour, saying, "Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you, we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs upon the reasons they are dying" (17). bell hooks addressed this issue in 1986; in her discussion of the feminist movement of the time she argues that, within the movement, "racial conflict between white women and women of colour continues to be one area of struggle" (125).. Later feminist

movements reflected the diversity of women's places in society and the intersectionality that influenced their lives. Jolly sums up the importance of intersectionality to feminism's aims of addressing inequality through business activities, saying "a feminist business strategy must be true to values of gender inequality which are transformative and intersectional too" (*Mamatoto* 337).

Owen clearly came to recognise that Virago's feminism did not apply equally to all women and she explained in 1988, ten years after the publication of the first VMC, that "young women often associate the word [feminism] with separatism; black women often feel the word applies only to white, middle-class feminists" (in P. Owen *The Future* 95). Murray's discussion of publishing houses argues that there were complaints "from women of colour who felt alienated from the predominantly middle-class, first-world agenda of the feminist presses" (67).

Looking back, Goodings explains her distressing realisation that the First International Feminist Book Fair in 1984 had no disabled access and was dubbed "a monstrosity of racism" by Audre Lorde (*A Bite* 140). Speaking to writer Lucy Scholes in July 2020, Goodings admits to the early lack of awareness of intersectionality – the understanding that women with disabilities and women of colour are affected by sexism in different ways to the white, middle-class women who represented the WLM and Virago (*OurShelves with Lennie Goodings* 00:06:50-07:20)

Awareness that the early aims of the women's liberation movement did not have the same relevance to all women led, by 1988, to the existence of several feminist publishers in Britain. Additionally, there were several feminist

magazines, including *Spare Rib*, *Everywoman*, *Shrew* and *Feminist Review*, as well as feminist bookshops such as *Silver Moon* (1984-2001) and Virago's own shop, which traded from 1984 to 1987, with Rosamond Lehmann as guest of honour at the opening (who was also at the forefront of the 21st anniversary re-launch of the VMCs in 1998). The establishment of so many diverse feminist publishing houses, imprints and magazines emphasised the difficulty of avoiding separatism and of maintaining a position based on occupying the middle ground. A study of the Virago archives illustrates that the middle ground for Virago was effectively a white middle-class mainstream readership which ignored or excluded women from different class or ethnic backgrounds.

The interwar domestic writing that made up a large proportion of the VMC range, particularly during the first ten years of the VMCs, demonstrated a preoccupation with offering conservative continuity to readers. Following the work on domestic writing by Wallace and by Briganti and Mezei, it is evident that most of the VMCs listed in the Appendix focused on domestic issues and women's everyday lives; issues surrounding the home and garden, as defined by Briganti and Mezei. But there are some clear exceptions in style to conservative continuity. For example, Dorothy Richardson's work is more modernist and experimental, as are the novels of Sylvia Townsend Warner, May Sinclair, Elizabeth Bowen, and Christina Stead. But, as the Appendix illustrates, writers such as F. M. Mayor, E. M. Delafield, Enid Bagnold and many others, present commentaries on women's lives in non-experimental styles. The relationship of commonality developed by Virago was between non-radical middle-class writers and non-radical middle-class readers of different

generations, representing white, mainstream culture. Both the writers and the readers questioned the social norms that limited women's opportunities, but they did so through non-radical methods. Recommendations for books generally came from women with similar backgrounds, reinforcing the limitations of Callil's mainstream feminism. In Virago's 1988 survey of readers, carried out in a select number of bookshops, data analysis shows that many VMC readers (68% of those interviewed) relied on recommendations from friends suggesting books to read (Add MS 88804/2/11). Like-minded women discussed books and shared ideas, supporting the idea of sisterhood that was such a fundamental aspect of second-wave feminism.

The influence of writers and the editorial team on the choice of VMCs

Callil's awareness of different feminist views encouraged her to attempt to publish without offending "the wretched socialists" (above in Cooke). Trying not to offend other feminists and their values influenced Virago's methods of choosing books for inclusion as VMCs, and the editorial team took advice and recommendations from many people. But the available archival material demonstrates that the recommendations came from a limited sector of society, mainly from writers and academics. Virago's advisory team was valuable for advising on reprint recommendations, but the team was comprised of a narrow sector of society and was mostly made up of academics and writers. The advisory team included the writers and feminists Angela Carter, Carol Adams, Zoe Fairbairns, Suzanne Lowry and Beatrix Campbell, literary agent Jane Gregory and academics Sheila Rowbotham, Elaine Showalter, Anna Coote, Germaine Greer, and Rosalind Delmar. Correspondence in the archives further

reflects the lack of diversity amongst the people who put forward suggestions and requests.

A letter dated 11/07/84 from an Associate Professor at the University of Delaware typifies the background and interests of the letter writers. The letter asks how the decision to republish [Rebecca West] was reached? Alexandra Pringle, of the Virago team, replied, "We began publishing Rebecca West for a number of reasons, one being that we do try to represent all important women writers within our Classics list. Elaine Showalter's book *A Literature of Their Own* has been an important factor in our decision making" (undated letter from Pringle Add MS 88904/1/441). Correspondence in 1983 between writer Victoria Glendinning and Alexandra Pringle offers Virago's views on West's *Harriet Hume* (1929) and *The Thinking Reed* (1936), indicating the reasons for including books in the VMC range. The books "can be seen as two variations on one theme: the incompatibility of the values and perceptions of men, by whom the world is run, with the values and perceptions of women" (Add MS 88904/1/439).

Their views illustrate the ways in which West's books had direct relevance to the WLM's challenge to a patriarchal society. Showalter's discussion of West includes the description of her work as summarising "the failure of feminist reform to change the fundamental ways in which women viewed themselves" (*A Literature* 247). West's argument was later echoed by the WLM, and the ways in which women viewed themselves was a significant aspect of their discussions. The idea was developed by Rowbotham's argument proposing that

women, as a group, need to “discover [their] own identity as distinct from that of the oppressor [and] become visible to [themselves]” (*Consciousness* 27).

Callil stressed the direct impact of Showalter’s work on the VMC list: “An important influence on choices for the list has been Professor Elaine Showalter’s critical study *A Literature of Their Own*, which brilliantly traces connections between novelists who are women: her judgements led directly to the reprinting by us of May Sinclair, Sarah Grand and Dorothy Richardson” (Callil “Redressing”). In the introduction to the new edition of *A Literature of Their Own*, twenty years after its original publication, Showalter summarises her aims in writing the book. She explains that it was largely a reaction to having studied English at university where the required reading included virtually no women. The aims of Virago Press coincide with Showalter’s views, bringing women’s writing into the public sphere.

Both Showalter and Callil wanted to challenge the concentration on male writers in academic curricula and on publishing lists. Callil hoped to develop public awareness of the literary tradition of women’s writing and to continue building on the connections between women that were highlighted by Showalter.

Through reprinting novels that had fallen into obscurity, by writers whose names were no longer well-known, the VMCs were, as Riley suggests, “Callil’s personal attempt to broaden the scope of literature” (*Virago* 42). The VMCs gave Virago the opportunity to make known “the hundreds of existing novels, books by extraordinary female writers of a previous generation, that were

languishing out of print and out of sight” (Kirsty Wark in *The Reunion* 0:00:19-22).

Archival documents illustrate the frequency of contemporary writers recommending books by out-of-print women writers. In an undated letter, writer Penelope Mortimer asks why the books of Elizabeth Von Arnim “drifted into oblivion after 50 years of acclaim” (Add MS 88904/1/422). Callil discussed the influence of writers on Virago’s choice of books for the VMC range, commenting that “the Classics became a sort of cultural game, one writer connected to another as in snakes and ladders” (“The Stories”). She drew attention to the links between writers, saying that Rosamond Lehmann “knew or recommended every writer of her time: May Sinclair, F. M. Mayor, Sybil Bedford, Rose Macaulay, Elizabeth Jenkins” (“The Stories”). The associations between women writers are also referred to by academic Janet Montefiore in her discussion of interwar novelists and she explains that “there are many unnoticed links between well-known liberal women writers, namely Rebecca West, Storm Jameson, Vera Brittain [and] Winifred Holtby” (in Joannou *Women* 27). These writers were all republished as VMCs. Continuing to emphasise the links between writers, Callil draws attention to the relationship between women writers of different generations, explaining that “the biggest contribution [to the VMC list] came from writers whose names read like a roll call of the best of our time. Each of them seemed to choose a writer they loved best [...]” (“The Stories”). Writers also played a significant role in the presentation of the VMCs, with many contemporary writers producing new introductions for the reprinted novels. The significance of the new perspectives put forward in the introductions

is discussed in Chapter 3, in which I analyse the branding and presentation of the VMCs.

Many of the contemporary writers who wrote introductions for the Modern Classics continued to correspond with Virago, recommending other books they felt should be included. Journalist and writer Sally Beauman, who wrote the introductions to Virago's 1985 reissues of E. H. Young's *Jenny Wren* (1932) and *The Curate's Wife* (1934), wrote to Callil suggesting two other books by Young: *William* (1925) and *The Misses Mallett* (1922), both of which became VMCs in 1986. Commenting on the above two novels and *Miss Mole*, writer Susan Hill wrote to Callil on 24/02/1982: "They are enormously pleasing, and beneath the quiet surface, really rather unusually perceptive and pleasing about women" (Add MS 88904/1/469).

A. S. Byatt, who wrote introductions for several VMCs by Willa Cather, explained, "I discovered Willa Cather through writing the Virago prefaces from 1979 onwards. She was not part of my childhood or student reading" (Add MS 88904/1/70). She went on to recommend that Virago included Cather's *The Professor's House* in their 21st anniversary promotion, "as it is my favourite and Hermione [Lee]'s". Callil took Byatt's advice, and Byatt wrote an afterword for the Virago reprint of *The Professor's House*. Callil's frequent reliance on the recommendations of contemporary writers is clearly evidenced in a series of letters about the work of Cather. In 1979 Callil asked the advice of Byatt in order to decide on the novels to republish: "I loved *My Mortal Enemy* and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. On the other hand, if you [A. S. Byatt] think *Shadows on the*

Rock and *The Professor's House* are the ones we should pursue, then I'll take your advice" (undated letter from Callil Add MS 88904/1/70). A letter dated 08/05/1979 to a New York publisher from Callil asked for information on which titles they control, as "Antonia Byatt is brooding on what future Cather's we should publish". A later letter from Callil (21/03/1980) confirmed the decision on publication, saying, "Antonia Byatt has had long discussions and decided on the next two books to publish" (Add MS 88904/1/70). The correspondence between Byatt and Callil demonstrates Callil's willingness to accept contemporary women writers' recommendations for VMC titles. Largely based on Byatt's recommendations, Virago reprinted several novels by Cather: *My Antonia*, *A Lost Lady*, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, *The Professor's House*, *The Song of the Lark*, *My Mortal Enemy*, *O Pioneers!* and *Shadows on the Rock*. The books were originally published between 1913 and 1931.

By accepting many recommendations from writers, Callil was developing a sense of continuity and community, as well as indicating her values in her reliance on white, educated women. Callil stressed the relationships between two generations of writers, emphasising the commonalities between them. There were ongoing conversations with academics and writers and many authors became personal friends of Callil; she was particularly close to Antonia White and to Rosamond Lehmann who said, "I owe my 'resurrection' as a novelist" to Carmen Callil (Add MS 88904/1/248). Callil explains that "our advisers directed us back to women's writing of the past, suggested writers, wrote introductions, spread the word and for each of us, in different ways, became a community of friends retained today" ("The Stories").

Pringle comments that, when publishing, “you’re not taking on a book, you’re taking on a writer, a person, a career, and that intimate and powerful connection, if you’re lucky, can go on over many decades” (*The Reunion* 00:37:20-30). The sense of community and sisterhood achieved by Virago reflected the ethos of the WLM, and Simone Murray comments on this feature of feminist presses that distinguished them from non-feminist publishing houses. She draws attention to “efforts to reconceptualise positively the author-publisher relationship by infusing it with greater supportiveness, mutuality and consultation” (17). Her argument illustrates the context of Virago and other feminist presses as an important response to the feminist movement. Women working together and recommending ideas and books to each other was an important characteristic of the second-wave movement, encouraging Callil to develop an all-female network of writers and advisers which prioritised the relationships between women.

Recommendations for books often drew attention to their relevance for a new generation of readers, raising issues that were part of the WLM debates. Discussing the work of Vera Brittain in August 1980, the writer Claire Hardisty wrote to Callil, saying that Brittain’s *Born 1925* (written in 1948) “expounds her perpetual mission: the importance of women’s work” (Add MS 88904/1/194). As part of an ongoing communication between Callil and Hardisty (who wrote the introductions to the VMC publication of Brittain’s 1936 *Honourable Estate* and Winifred Holtby’s 1924 *The Crowded Street*), Callil wrote, “Some of the remarks you make made me realise why we publish some of the books we do, most

particularly your thought that Vera Brittain reflected most accurately not only the historical incidents of a very eventful period, but the preoccupations of large numbers of people [...]. Of all the novels the one I much prefer is *Honourable Estate* [...] it discusses so many issues which modern feminists are discussing again" (Add MS 88904/1/194). Two Brittain novels, and two autobiographical works were republished as VMCs: *The Dark Tide* (1923), *Honourable Estate* (1936), *Testament of Youth* (1933) and *Testament of Friendship* (1940). The cover comments on the VMC publication of Brittain's 1936 *Honourable Estate* describe the book as "a [...] story of three generations struggling with the realities of twentieth-century marriage" (2000). Wallace discusses the 1930s frequency of multi-generational novels by women. She suggests that writers "use the story of three or four generations of women to conduct a kind of historical stocktaking, a measurement of progress made and that still to be attained" (*Historical Novel* 55). In her Foreword (April 1934 – August 1936) to *Honourable Estate*, Brittain writes that she "tried to leave a truthful impression of certain changes and movements – and especially of the social revolution that has so deeply affected the position of women and their status in marriage and other human relationships" (1). Brittain's aim clearly indicates her book's relevance to the WLM and Callil's recognition of its significance. Callil's comment to Hardisty shows her awareness of the importance of many republished books to contemporary feminists who would recognise, and share, many of the concerns raised by writers of the interwar years. At the same time, readers would gain an understanding of their own cultural history through the VMCs' representation of women's lives a generation earlier.

Archival documents – within the author files in the British Library – indicate that there were many conversations by letter between Callil and both writers and journalists, emphasising the influence of writers on the VMC range of books. Mary Stott, feminist author and *Guardian* columnist, “the first – and longest-serving – editor of *The Guardian* women’s page” (Lena Jeger), exchanged several letters with Callil on the novels of Winifred Holtby, a writer who was requested by several readers. In reply to a request by Stott to republish *Women and a Changing Civilisation* (1934) Callil replied (24/11/1978): “I’ve just finished all Winifred Holtby’s novels and except for *South Riding* they’re *not* good” (Add MS 88904/1/194). Callil did not explain why she disliked Holtby’s other work, but she evidently came to see some points of relevance and value in the novels, and wrote to Claire Hardisty two years later, at the end of 1980, saying, “I do think that Winifred Holtby was writing within a tradition of novels which tried to expose the position of the single unmarried woman confined within the home” (Add MS 88904/1/194). By drawing attention to “a tradition of novels”, Callil emphasises a sense of continuity in writing by women as well as the continuing relevance of the subject matters they discussed. Six of Holtby’s novels were republished as VMCs: *Anderby Wold* (1923), *The Crowded Street* (1924), *The Land of Green Ginger* (1927), *Poor Caroline* (1931), *Mandoa, Mandoa!* (1933), and *South Riding* (1936), as well as *Remember! The Selected Stories of Winifred Holtby* (1999). I discuss some of these novels in Chapter 4. In contrast to many VMCs, *Mandoa, Mandoa!* presents Holtby’s interest in international politics and social affairs. Marion Shaw’s 1982 introduction to the novel discusses Holtby’s “political sympathies for black people [which] found their practical issue in her commitment to the growth and organisation of trade

unionism" (xi). Republished by Virago in 1982, *Mandoa, Mandoa!* is described by Lisa Regan as "the culmination of seven years' passionate dedication to the study and reform of international and race relations. It perfects the satirical form of *Poor Caroline*" (*Winifred Holtby's Social Vision* 103). Although the novel looks to Africa and colonialism, Shaw also suggests that Holtby saw parallels between the situation in Africa and "the paternalistic farming community of her youth" (xi). Holtby's political views and work, like Brittain's, were more internationally and globally based than many other VMC writers, representing some variation in the VMC list.

The correspondence between Callil and Stott continued (Stott was included in the Virago Advisory group), particularly with reference to the novels of Rose Macaulay. Stott wrote to Callil on 28/01/81 asking "Can we have some Rose Macaulay sometime? Marvellously funny as well as an elegant writer". The book she particularly recommended was *They Were Defeated* (1932), which "shook me to the core all those years ago. [...] one of the most convincing 'period' novels that I have ever read". In reply, Callil replied: "Women like Sally Alexander [Professor at the University of London] and Anna Pavord [journalist] have always been very strong in social history and I think they recommended *Life As We Have Known It* and *Modernity*" (Add MS 88904/1/256). Macaulay was also requested by Jane Novak from the University of Queensland in 1979 but Callil's response was to reject *Told By An Idiot*, saying "I don't think it's the one I'd like to buy for our list" (Add MS 88904/1/256). Macaulay's book was, however, included in the VMC range in 1983, suggesting that Callil could be influenced by the recommendations of writers and academics, and by her

awareness of commercial and financial considerations, sometimes leading to the republishing of books she personally disliked. Three Macaulay novels were republished as VMCs: *Told by an Idiot* (1923), *Crewe Train* (1926), and *The World My Wilderness* (1950).

Similarly, Pringle of the Virago team recommended to Callil that two of E. M. Delafield's novels should be included in the VMC range: *The Way Things Are* (1927) and *Thank Heaven Fasting* (1932). Pringle described them as being about "surplus women and sexual mores" (Add MS 88904/197). Both were republished as VMCs after the success of the reprinted *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* (1930). But Callil's memo to Pringle explained that she was very reluctant to publish them as she felt that they "will lose readers who love her humorous books", adding that *Thank Heaven Fasting* "is quite bad and not as funny and nothing like as good as *All Passion Spent* [by Vita Sackville-West]" (Add MS 88904/1/97). Callil's decision to republish the Delafield novels was influenced by financial implications and advice from her team. Pringle explained that "we've sold over 1000 copies [of *Diary of a Provincial Lady*] so I really think we'd be crazy not to do some more" (undated memo Add MS 88904/1/97). Callil's focus on combining her second-wave feminist beliefs with the need to be profitable influenced her decisions, sometimes leading her to publish books that she personally disliked.

The reliance on the views of writers and academics for recommendations and for making up the members of the Virago advisory team reinforces the extent to which Callil promoted the importance of women as professionals whilst her

recognition of financial opportunities indicated her determination to combine her challenge to literary culture with business success. Virago's intervention in mainstream publishing emphasised the professionalism of women in roles previously denied them in the world of publishing. It reinforced women's ability to take on decision-making roles. Riley stresses the importance of Virago as an instance of putting theory into practice, challenging male dominance in workplaces, and providing an example of women's ability to be taken seriously as professionals (2008 and 2018). Virago helped to shape the world of women in publishing.

Callil's willingness to take advice from the Virago editorial team demonstrates her respect for the professionalism and opinions of her team. She particularly respected the views of Owen, referring to her "as the most intellectual of them [the original team]" (Toynbee 2016). In "Virago reprints: redressing the balance", Callil discussed the early days of Virago, writing about "a group of women, many of them on our advisory board, including most importantly Ursula Owen, Virago's editorial director [...]" ("Redressing"). Owen's background and contacts were different from those of Callil, who explained that "Ursula belonged to the socialist, academic, philosophical world of British feminism, and had contacts and insights quite different from mine" ("The Stories"). Owen's contacts included historians with knowledge of women's lives through memoirs, autobiographies and women's writing which was no longer in print, making her invaluable to the members of the Virago team and their priorities. In 2016 Callil said that Owen "gave [Virago] feminist credentials" (*Virago: Changing* 00:09:28-42) perhaps in contrast to Callil's own undefined, broad-based feminism.

Toynbee cites Callil's comments on having been interviewed by the BBC for a radio programme and being compared to French and German feminist publishers: "They said the difference between us and the French was that the French women were far more theoretical in their approach [...]. I know what they mean. We run this place like a kitchen. We have a general view that women's contribution to history, literature and society has always been crushed, but we're only now beginning to formulate a view of our work [...]. We tend to publish what feels right and see what it all adds up to afterwards"

("Redressing"). Her recognition that members of the Virago team, especially Owen, could give Virago the theoretical feminist basis that it might otherwise have lacked indicates Callil's awareness that Virago needed to be recognisably situated within the 1980s feminist movement, both theoretically and in practice. Callil needed to develop a team of professional women for advice on publications in order to subvert the pre-WLM values of publishing houses, and the limited roles available to women in publishing prior to the advent of second-wave feminism. Feminist publishing presented a practical challenge to male-dominated literary culture and to models of publishing run by men.

In 2008 Callil had commented that the writers who recommended books for inclusion as VMCs were "the best of our time" ("The Stories"), demonstrating her implicit value judgements on the standard and importance of the writers' views. The involvement of so many women writers with Virago reflects the changing literary culture during the 1960s and 1970s. Contemporary writing by women was beginning to be more widely published prior to the VMC range,

including writers such as Margaret Drabble, Muriel Spark and Lynne Reid Banks. The VMCs enhanced the acceptance of women writers by resurrecting forgotten writers and, importantly, challenging notions of canonical writing by giving women their cultural history through a range of books entitled Classics. The educated middle-class values underpinning writers' recommendations are significant for understanding Virago's project of uniting women through books, and their choice of books to be published as VMCs. Callil was clear that she wanted feminist publishing to challenge and change "the Leavisite notion of the 'Great Tradition', and the narrow, academic definition of a 'classic'", as stated by the Virago Editorial Team inside the cover of many of the VMCs. She was critical of the amount of literature omitted by the exclusivity of Leavis' criteria and wanted to ensure that his definition of great writing was enlarged to include a wider range of books.

As discussed in Chapter 1, part of Leavis' criteria for inclusion in his definition of great literature was based on literary continuity and on writers being able to recognise the significance of the moral interest of other writers, incorporating it into their own writing. Leavis stressed the value of writers learning from each other's ideas and values. In her reliance on the recommendations and suggestions of writers for books to republish as VMCs, Callil exhibits some overlaps with the criteria used by Leavis, with a strong focus on the importance of authors' views and on literary continuity. The writer Claire Hardisty, in her 1981 introduction to Winifred Holtby's 1924 novel *The Crowded Street*, acknowledges the importance of writers influencing other writers, describing the novel as being written "in the tradition of English fiction whereby the action turns

on a moral decision” (xi). She continues by recognising Winifred Holtby’s protagonist as “a direct successor to some of the heroines of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot” (xi). In emphasising the importance of this sense of continuity between writers, and an English tradition, Callil and Leavis coincide.

But the main difference between them is that Callil built up a team of authors, journalists and academics who were able to make judgements from female perspectives. Leavis’ work on literature was founded in a traditional, male, educational environment. Working during the peak years of the WLM, Callil was able to develop an all-female publishing house, advised by a team of professional women. Doing so represented an important intervention into the world of publishing and into literary culture. As Goodings explains, Virago’s books “are fuelled by a feminist perspective – quite simply, they unabashedly explore the world from a woman’s point of view” (in P. Owen *Publishing Now* 66). Until women began to exert influence in the world of publishing, writing was dominated by books written from male perspectives. Feminist publishing was the means of starting to redress the balance.

Changing the criteria for choosing books symbolizes a challenge to the cultural status quo. For Lynne Spender, this meant questioning and replacing the gatekeepers – the “few who make the choices” (1). Her analysis of women’s exclusion from literary culture questions the ways in which men have limited “women’s access to the world and eclipse[d] women’s contributions from our culture” (12-13). The Leavisite concept of great literature exemplifies the

situation in which the criteria are decided and upheld by male gatekeepers. Spender suggests that gatekeeping is a term used to explain why women are excluded from positions of authority and decision-making; gatekeeping “provides us with a linguistic tool to name the techniques used to arrange our exclusion” (6). Feminist publishing is the key method by which the cultural gatekeepers can be challenged, changing the criteria and standards associated with literary merit. Women-run publishing houses are in a position to disseminate writing by women, and to promote their own interests. They can challenge the view that, in Woolf’s terms, the events within a drawing room are of less significance than the events of a war (*A Room*).

The judgements of the Virago team and their advisers changed the Leavisite criteria of literary merit and led to a broad inclusion of books promoted as worthy of republishing, and to a reassessment of the genre of women’s writing. Clare Hanson discusses arguments over the definition of women’s writing, using the examples of Rosamond Lehmann, Elizabeth Bowen, and Antonia White, all of whom were included as VMC writers. Hanson suggests that much writing by women, “while it does not have canonical status, does not fit into the category of popular literature either” (in Simons and Fullbrook 70). She goes on to discuss the “separate tradition” of women’s fiction, suggesting that it was valuable for “conveying information and dealing with experience which is not represented elsewhere” (79). In saying this, Hanson is building on the ideas of Virginia Woolf when she talks of women’s experiences and their representation in writing by women.

Very few of the interwar VMC writers were acknowledged to be feminists, with the exception of some, such as Holtby, who actively campaigned for feminist causes. My contention is that Virago presented the writers' female perspectives as feminist, through their publication methods. In doing so, they created commonalities between interwar writers and second-wave readers, presenting writers' interests in furthering the interests and aims of feminist movements such as the Six Point Group, whilst demonstrating the similarities between interwar and second-wave feminisms.

Virago's reliance on the opinions of women authors for choosing books for republishing meant that the focus was largely on the acceptability of what had been known, and marginalised, as domestic writing – writing that was, in Hanson's term, neither canonical nor popular, and had defied categorisation. As explained by Woolf, domestic lives and issues were marginalised and ignored, as they did not belong to the male-dominated world of literature and publishing. Republishing domestic writing and the romance novel within the category of Modern Classics directly challenged the marginalisation of women's writing and lives.

In her development of a network of women in the advisory team and as employees, Callil made women's writing more prominent and acceptable, allowing women's experiences and culture to be accessible for another generation of women to share. Since her focus was only on mainstream middle-class writing, her values overlapped with those of Leavis perhaps more than she would care to admit, with a shared emphasis on continuity. Through their

curation of the VMCs, Virago positioned itself as a feminist publishing house promoting the importance of the written word and women's cultural history to the second-wave feminist movement. Whilst introducing a range of reprinted books by women as Classics was innovative, the reliance on previously published books, rather than on new or experimental writing, suggests a sense of continuity and conservatism in the choice of books. Virago's challenge to male-dominated publishing and literary culture was based on non-radical conceptions of feminist theory.

Readers' suggestions and requests for books to republish.

The Virago team underlined the importance of their relationship with readers. Doing so drew attention to their place within the WLM, with its emphasis on sisterhood. Owen explains that "people would come up to me and say, 'Oh my God, [Virago's] changed my life'. I mean, our readers made us really" (British Library interviews). She added that the Modern Classics were particularly popular with readers, and she situated the VMCs within the genres of autobiography and storytelling, which were "fundamentally important to the broadening awareness and increasing volume of women's voices beyond simply literary spheres" (British Library). Owen's situating of the VMCs supports their specific importance in both bringing women's personal lives into the public, published world, and in giving women their cultural history.

Even with Callil's somewhat dictatorial leadership, the mainstream, yet subversive, publishing model developed by Virago enabled them to work in a more informal way than large publishing organisations, allowing the Virago team

members to build and maintain relationships with their authors, as discussed above by Pringle and Simone Murray. Murray, Riley, and Withers have all investigated and written at length about Virago's different incarnations and their buyouts. Murray comments on Virago's "protean house identity [which] proved the key to its success. Because the press maintained a double outsider status [...], it was able to weather the enormous changes in industry organisation" (33-4). Goodings, in *A Bite of the Apple*, details some of the benefits and drawbacks of the Virago takeovers. Discussing the period, 1982 until 1987, when Virago was part of CVBC (Chatto, Virago, Bodley Head, and Cape), she explains that constant growth is essential for any company in order to avoid decline. But by the end of 1986 Virago was suffering as part of CVBC as it was "tied to a percentage of the overall costs of CVBC, over which we had no control" (*A Bite*, 126). It became evident that Virago needed to keep control and editorial autonomy, leading to more buyouts and three more owners after CVBC. The changes brought about by Virago's different ownerships are well documented but the developments emphasised the importance of editorial power and autonomy in order to continue the project started by Callil in 1973.

The Virago model also facilitated relationships between the publisher and its readers. This was further encouraged by Virago's specific product, aimed at a particular, identifiable audience, enabling an awareness of their readers in a way not possible for large publishing houses with a wider, more diverse product range. Both Owen and Goodings comment on Virago's awareness of their audience, and the importance of the target readership. Owen notes, "I think we [Callil and Owen] always thought, when we took on a book, who's going to read

it, what is the audience?" (*The Reunion* 00:11:56-00:12:04). Goodings' description of Virago as a "club" underlines the publisher-reader relationship: "Virago's list began with [...] a deep awareness of its audience – and a view that there were many others out there who wanted to understand and be part of this world-changing 'club'" (*A Bite* 9). Knowing the audience entailed producing books specifically for the readers, listening to their interests and responding to requests where possible, developing a relationship in which readers felt they were able to correspond with the publisher about their ideas. But the issue to note is that the readers' suggestions for VMCs overlapped with those made by writers and the Virago advisory team – all groups were comprised of the same narrow sector of society as the WLM and Virago itself.

Virago tried to encourage booksellers to carry the range of VMCs, and Withers discusses some of the difficulties they encountered. They cite the example of a bookseller who did not display any of the publicity posters Virago had sent. The bookseller explained that he would only display posters if "the author [had] recognisable literary excellence [or] a very distinctive face" (*Reprints* 63-4). Withers further details examples of difficulties Virago experienced with booksellers, particularly with provincial booksellers "who perceived Virago as a specialist feminist press and, therefore, not suitable for their shops" (*Reprints* 65). Virago attempted to build relationships with booksellers, drawing on the knowledge of booksellers' familiarity with readers' requests for particular books and writers. To mark the publisher's fifth birthday, in 1978, Virago held a competition involving bookshops, asking about readers' opinions and requests. The flyer for the VMC competition asked "Is your favourite novelist out of print?"

Do you remember a great work of fiction that the rest of the world has forgotten?" (Add MS 88904/1/256). The competition offered booksellers "the chance to contribute a little to our VMCs list". Very few responses were found in the archive material, so it is not possible to assess the impact of the competition on additional titles, but it suggests Virago's use of promotional campaigns as well as its interest in involving others in their choice of books to republish.

The importance of readers' requests and opinions for Virago's choice of books is emphasised by Pringle in a letter from late 1986, discussing some of the main factors that helped the editorial team make decisions on the choice of reprints: "All editors, in the end, stand or fall by their own taste, but in the case of the Classics Carmen has consistently listened to other people's views. Some novels have been reprinted simply because so many people have written in requesting a particular title" (Add MS 88904/1/422). As I have illustrated, listening to other people's views largely meant, for Callil, the views of contemporary writers and academics. But, even with the limited archival material in existence, there are several instances of readers writing to Virago asking for specific writers or books, often requesting books from authors with whom they were already familiar. I refer to particular examples throughout my discussion, with reference to certain authors, such as Delafield, Young, and Macaulay; these examples are found in the author files in the British Library archival material. Recommending books that women had read in the past is a further example of the WLM's emphasis on sisterhood between generations of women. Highlighting the intergenerational importance of the VMCs, books were often suggested to younger women by their mothers, as with Callil. Hermione

Lee was also familiar with many novels that were to be republished as VMCs. She remembers, “I had a literary mother who gave me writers to read in the 1950s and 60s that I fell in love with – like Rosamond Lehmann and Elizabeth Bowen and Rebecca West” (*The Reunion* 00:15:34-44). It is possible that the generation of mothers who recommended titles were aware of the interwar women’s campaigns for women’s rights and saw the relevance to their WLM daughters, understanding the overlaps between feminism across generations, and perhaps recognising the lack of progress on women’s rights.

The mothers of many second-wave feminists were the women Stott referred to as those suffering from a loss of freedom after the Second World War, with the expectation that women were supposed to return to the home to look after their husbands, homes, and children. Books these women recommended to their daughters could illustrate their frustrations and explain their feelings to the next generation of readers, perhaps acting as a warning. Bruley’s interviews highlight the frustration of their mothers as an important factor in women’s decisions to become feminists in the WLM years (discussed in the Introduction). Speaking about its original publication in 1927, Rosamond Lehmann referred to the torrent of letters from readers saying that, in *Dusty Answer*, “she had written their own story” (Add MS 88904/1/248). Due to copyright issues, *Dusty Answer* was not republished as a VMC until 2000. When republished as a VMC, the book became popular with a new generation. Echoing Callil’s feeling that White’s *Frost in May* had told the story of Callil’s life, Lehmann’s new popularity indicates the ongoing relevance of her writing to another generation of women who were influenced by their mothers’ experiences.

Fifty years after the first WLM conference in 1970, Rowbotham reflects on the importance of generations of women working together, recognising that the WLM was “part of a much longer history of women’s protest and resistance” (“In 1970”). Discussing the festival organised to mark fifty years since the original conference, Rowbotham concludes that it “aims to bring older and younger women together and handing on memories is the purpose – in the hope that remembering can strengthen creativity for present times” (2020). Handing on memories was a focus of the WLM. Memories that the WLM focused on disseminating to another generation included archival documentation as well as fiction from a previous generation. By listening to advice from readers and the advisory team, Virago helped to shape the nature of the intergenerational relationship, using books that had gone out of print to speak to a new generation of readers, giving them a fictional archive of women’s lives a generation earlier.

Many of the available letters from readers asked for books they already knew. In 1982 a reader wrote asking for more Rose Macaulay books, saying “there are some of her novels which I remember reading in my youth – somewhere between 1925-1935 – and I have always recollected them as penetrating, witty and well-written” (Add MS 88904/1/256). Her letter underlines the importance of rereading and reinterpreting books at different times. Macauley’s *Crewe Train* was also requested, with a reader in 1988 describing it as a book about “a girl, trying to escape the accepted role of being a woman”, particularly relevant to women in the 1970s and 1980s, when WLM campaigns led to questioning and

re-evaluating women's roles (Add MS 88904/1/256). Responses from Virago to readers' requests are only occasionally found in the archive folders.

A reader's letter dated June 1978 is a similar example: "It was with great interest that I read that you were going to issue past time favourite books in paperback editions [...]. Are you by any chance going to re-publish E. H. Young's books? I've worn my wartime paperback copy of *Miss Mole* to shreds". Callil's response from 04/07/1978 states, "we're always happy to have suggestions of books to consider republishing, and I have put E. H. Young's *Miss Mole* on my reading list" (correspondence in Add MS 88904/1/469). In 1984 *Miss Mole* was included in the VMC list, which later included another seven books by E. H. Young; in a memo to Pringle in 1982 Callil wrote, "I'm madly in love with this author, particularly *Miss Mole*" (Add MS 88904/1/469). The VMCs clearly attracted readers who wanted to re-read books they had previously enjoyed, sometimes specifically mentioning their feminist content. The ongoing interest in re-reading republished novels suggests that the books continued to be relevant to women readers.

Returning to books previously read can offer new interpretations and new understanding of the text. Writer Ali Smith suggests that books, like music, take time to understand and to recognise that they are "a result of all the books that went before them [...] books are adaptable; they alter themselves as we alter in life, they renew themselves as we change and re-read them at different times in our lives" (31). Adrienne Rich suggests that rereading is an important feminist intervention, offering women new understanding of their social and cultural

history. She refers to the act of “re-vision” as a way of “seeing with fresh eyes”, which “for women [is] more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival” (35). Virago encouraged rereading through the lens of women’s perspectives and experiences. Doing so challenges male interpretations of written work, as well as offering reinterpretations for a new generation whose experiences are different from those of the original readers. The above examples of reader requests for books previously known suggests that the books merited rereading for contemporary insights.

Once they became more widely available and recognised, the VMCs began to appeal to younger women influenced by second-wave feminist ideas, who discovered writers they had not previously read. A new generation of readers contributed to the popularity and sales of the VMCs, creating a new market. A separate study would be valuable in tracking changes in the presentation of the VMCs, assessing differences in, for example, the introductions over time, asking whether they were more relevant for newer readers. Writer and journalist Rachel Cooke explains how she had discovered Stevie Smith as a VMC when she was 17 and then went on to read many other writers for the first time. An obituary for Rosamond Lehmann commented that “towards the end of her life most of her novels were republished by Virago Press and brought her a whole generation of new readers” (Add MS 88904/1/248).

The familiarity of the style and the shared experiences of the interwar VMCs helped to attract a new and expanding readership. Several newer readers wrote to Virago asking for more novels by particular writers. There are letters

asking for more work by Radclyffe Hall, such as a letter dated June 1985: “Having read two of your VMCs by Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* and *The Unlit Lamp*, I am at a loss to find that the rest of her books are nowhere to be found” (Add MS 88904/1/168). Similarly, a letter dated 24/07/1978 requested the republication of more Vera Brittain books after the 1978 VMC publication of *Testament of Youth* (Add MS 88904/1/194). The success of the VMCs in attracting both new and old readers made possible Callil’s dual aims of offering feminism through the running of a successful publishing house.

Recognition of the relevance of the feminist content of a number of the VMCs was conveyed in many letters. The archives contain several examples of the appeal of the VMCs to readers with feminist beliefs. In 1999 a reader asked about the novels of Margaret Kennedy, specifically mentioning *Not in the Calendar*, in which there is “a lot of interesting information about daughters of the landed gentry and their fates if not married, a lot to appeal to a feminist press” (Add MS 88904/1/234). Four novels by Kennedy were republished as VMCs: *The Ladies of Lyndon*, *Together and Apart*, *The Constant Nymph*, and *Troy Chimneys*. The feminism of the readers was, in accordance with Callil’s views, non-radical, with one undated letter requesting Margaret Kennedy’s novels stating, “I do not enjoy ‘female’ novels which seem to dwell almost pruriently on childbirth and menstruation etc” (Add MS 88904/1/234). Her views referred to more radical writing published by other feminist presses and highlighted the wider appeal of mainstream writing by women.

Readers' letters requested non-experimental, non-radical novels that presented views critical of the social expectations of women's lives. The type of books requested, and found in the VMC list, mainly conform to narrative styles such as romance – books that told a story, generally in a chronological narrative. With some exceptions, noted above, the VMC list contains predominantly non-experimental novels – a non-radical list that conforms to Virago's non-radical feminism. A 1983 request by a reader for more work by E. M. Delafield, in addition to the *Provincial Lady* series, refers to her as “a prolific, and undeservedly forgotten authoress with a most untypical approach to the accepted role of women in her day” (Add MS 8804/1/97). Perhaps typical is the following letter to Ursula Owen, dated 12/9/1980: “As a feminist reader and writer I am naturally very interested in your publication list [...] I am writing to ask if you might reprint the works of E. H. Young. [...] I am struck by the insights she presents into women's issues, problems and situations” (Add MS 88904/1/469). The non-confrontational, liberal feminist content and the relevant focus on women's lives became an important factor in the popularity of some of the books as a new generation of readers read and identified with the writing of interwar women.

Many letters to Virago came from readers who were both feminists and writers, as in the above example. Readers, old and new, suggested many titles for inclusion as VMCs, but there were also many ideas put forward by women who were writers, and the archives demonstrate that writers were the main influence on the choice of books and authors for republishing. But, as previously discussed, many readers' letters were lost so it is impossible to assess their

influence. The VMCs, as a response to the WLM, were aimed at a wide readership of women, of all ages. Pringle comments that not all the VMCs were popular or best sellers, “and it did tend to be the rather middle class – the Antonia White’s and Rosamond Lehmann’s – that really got the popular imagination” (*The Reunion* 00:17:17-24). The white, middle-class appeal of the VMCs is illustrated by links Virago developed with academic institutions, as well as the inclusion of several academics on the advisory team.

In 1985 Pringle was asked by Somerville College, Oxford, to speak about Winifred Holtby, focusing on the publishing side and on why Virago chose to include Holtby in the VMC series. The link between Somerville and Holtby was based on her attendance there and enhanced by her decision to leave the royalties of *South Riding* to the college for scholarships, as she was “acutely aware of the poverty of women’s colleges” (Beddoe 47). The letter from Somerville suggested it as an opportunity for Virago to “display and sell books by Winifred Holtby, Vera Brittain and other Somerville authors” (Add MS 88904/1/195). The academic appeal of Virago was promoted and emphasised by the invitation from Somerville, indicating the intellectual and middle-class readership attracted by the publishing house. The Somerville invitation is also indicative of the promotion of commonalities between generations; Pringle’s talk, aimed at contemporary students at the college, would encourage them to read work by a previous generation of Somerville women, women like Holtby and Brittain who were influenced by interwar feminist campaigns.

Owen's understanding of the second-wave feminist movement as a writer's movement agrees with the arguments put forward by Murray. . Murray contextualises the place of feminist publishing in the second-wave feminist movement, when she talks of the renewed fight for women's rights from the late 1960s onwards, "which took as [its] project the production and republication of women's writing" (4). Analysis of the British Library author files in the archives illustrates the extent to which Virago followed the advice of writers when choosing books for republication as Virago Modern Classics. Virago's business model and decision-making process, with its reliance on writers and academics from white, middle-class English-speaking backgrounds, separated them from the more radical branches of feminism. Decisions about books to be published reflected the tastes and interests of the writers who frequently advised Callil, most of whom were women, reflecting a sense of continuity between women writers of two generations. Virago shaped the relationship between generations of women through their curation of the VMCs and through their own project of building relationships between the publisher, authors, and readers.. The different groups of women shared interests and experiences through the VMCs, and Virago emphasised the commonalities between the experiences of interwar women and WLM women, and their feminist campaigns. Without directly referencing the Six Point Group or the WLM, the presentation of the VMCs drew attention to the overlaps in the groups' aims.

The choice of books clearly reflected Callil's desire to avoid being labelled as a radical feminist, as defined by her antipathy to radical methods based on ending patriarchy (discussed in the Introduction).Virago's non-radical liberal feminist

approach was intended to reform, rather than destroy, patriarchal institutions. Her beliefs and priorities set the tone for the whole of Virago and heavily influenced the books to be included in the VMC range. An article in *The London Evening Standard* in 1998 by the journalist Joan Smith reflects on Callil's mainstream, non-radical values when she comments on the wide appeal of Virago, saying that it "played a key role for women readers. Its stylish dark green jackets became a badge of identity for feminists, activists and others who did not go on marches" (Add MS 88904/2/13). The target readership for the books produced during the 1980s comprised women who shunned radical tactics in their fight for equality but who wanted books which promoted women's writing and contained strong female characters; books which "made a real and lasting difference to the development of women's literature" (Foulston, Virago team Add MS 88904/2/13). The VMC range targeted the readers who were the main component of second-wave feminism.

The second-wave feminist movement in the 1970s was partly led by older women whose largely non-radical beliefs in equality influenced many younger women, but the movement encompassed different age groups. Both Jolly and Mackay point out that the movement was predominantly motivated by young women. Mackay situates the beginnings of the WLM in the 1960s, a time of unrest and uprisings "often led by students" (35). Jolly's interviewees in *Sisterhood and After* were "students, young workers, and/or mothers in their twenties when the WLM was itself youthful" (89). As Bruley's research found, many young women were influenced by their mothers' unhappiness. Virago's decision to republish novels already familiar to, and valued by, the previous

generation of women encouraged the lead by older women; and the discovery of books by a new generation of younger women further enhanced the sense of a shared history and a common culture. The younger generation of readers ensured the continuing popularity of the VMCs, contributing to Virago's financial success and longevity, fulfilling Callil's joint aims. Virago Press was undoubtedly influenced by readers, and the team developed an understanding of the readership. But their closest links were with writers and they developed a group of influential professional advisers.

The publishing house was also influenced by the WLM's focus on sisterhood for recommendations and for working practices. Developing an intergenerational link between women epitomised Virago's emphasis on sisterhood, and the VMC range was an important intervention in linking women of similar backgrounds but different ages, mirroring the women's movement of the 1970s and 1980s, whilst highlighting the similarities between interwar feminists and second-wave feminists. The VMCs were clearly a response to, and a part of, the second-wave feminist movement. Virago's development of intergenerational links based on commonalities greatly influenced the ways in which the VMCs were produced and targeted at their readership. The next chapter investigates the design and publication of the books, assessing its importance in attracting the target audience and in establishing the relevance of the VMCS to WLM readers.

Chapter 3: “I love my shelf of green Viragos”: Creating a market for the Modern Classics

The previous chapter demonstrates that Virago’s decision to curate a list of republished work by women was a direct response to the WLM. In this chapter I analyse the paratextual elements of the VMCs in order to demonstrate how these interwar novels were made relevant to Virago’s target readers. I examine the presentation of the VMCs through the work of Genette on the paratext and Bourdieu on cultural production. The paratextual elements of the VMCs are fundamental in understanding how Virago repurposed novels in order to make the VMCs relevant for a new readership. Genette’s work distinguishes between the text and the paratext, suggesting that the text “rarely appears in its naked state” but is accompanied by several paratextual elements, including the name of the author, the title, an introduction (261). These paratextual elements “surround it [the text] and prolong it, to *present* it [...] to make it *present*” (261). In order to understand why Virago presented the VMCs as they did, with carefully chosen covers, cover comments, and new introductions, it is necessary to investigate how they visualised their market, which I do by considering Bourdieu’s work on cultural production, and the role production can play in challenging social structures and power relations. My concern is to analyse the way in which Virago perceived their desired market in order to understand how this perception influenced, or dictated, their branding and presentation of the VMCs – their choice of paratextual elements. I thus focus on Virago’s ideological viewpoint rather than on sales or the growth of the market for the VMCs, whilst Withers’ book on the VMCs offers some analysis of sales and growth of the readership (*Reprints*). Promotions, presentation, and

introductions were used to reinterpret republished novels and to offer feminist analyses for contemporary WLM audiences. Virago's Donna Coonan (recent Editorial Director of the VMC list) suggests that "introductions act as personal recommendations to readers" (introduction to *Writers As Readers*, ix). Her argument highlights the importance of the relationship between the publisher and the audience for Virago's project. Connecting the readers with each other and with interwar writers enabled the development of a sense of community which could empower and support women. Shared experiences, found in the VMCs, prevented feelings of isolation and powerlessness by, using Rowbotham's arguments, uniting as a movement and finding a voice (*Women's Liberation* 12).

Literary theorist Gérard Genette's emphasis on considering all aspects of a book for cultural analysis, rather than the text alone, provides a theoretical basis for Coonan's comment on the importance of introductions. Genette's work on paratextual analysis proposes that the presentation of a text is designed to "assure its presence in the world, its 'reception' and its consumption" (261). He underlines the importance of reviews, personal recommendations, and author interviews for reaching future readers, arguing that paratextual elements such as promotions and introductions help to situate a book for its readers. Recognition, by means of covers and recommendations, that the VMCs were books by women that told women's stories was, as Owen explains, an important aspect of their appeal, encouraging readers to request and buy these books *because* they were VMCs. She comments that the VMC brand became so popular that "people would go into bookshops and ask for the next Virago

book”, rather than asking for a particular title (*Virago: Changing* 00:26:48-50). Similarly, a reader request for more republished work by Rebecca West comments that, although “they have been produced in hardback, [...] I like paperbacks, particularly yours with their green and white covers. I have quite a collection of them now” (Add MS 88904/1/440). The popularity of the VMCs indicates that the design and marketing succeeded in developing reader recognition. Contemporary readers actively read the VMCs for the sense of shared experiences, recognising the brand for its relevance to their own lives.

Concentrating on the VMCs originally published in the interwar years and republished during the most active years of second-wave feminism, I analyse Virago’s branding and marketing materials, and their new introductions, using archival information where available. Advertising materials indicate the type of readers Virago wanted to attract for the VMCs, and analysis of the introductions demonstrates that specific themes in the reprinted books were emphasised. These themes drew attention to many political aims and concerns of both the WLM and the interwar writers, establishing links between two generations of women. Comments on the back covers, designed to attract buyers, further emphasised themes of importance to the second-wave feminist movement. Awareness of Virago’s readership is emphasised by Goodings’ comment that “Carmen Callil, Ursula Owen and Harriet Spicer [the original members of the Virago team] knew who they were publishing for; they shared their readers’ concerns, quests, and passions” (*A Bite* 9). In other words, the VMCs were produced for women resembling the Virago founders, conceptualising the market as a reflection of their own concerns – the concerns of educated, white,

middle-class women. Virago's view of their readership dictated the way the books were to be presented, so that introductions, for example, drew attention to areas of interest to the targeted readership, emphasising the similarities between the ideas of the interwar writers and the WLM readers.

Virago's conception of the market can be understood through sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's work on cultural production, which enables an understanding of the presentation of the books and the ways they were designed for a specific readership. John Thompson suggests that Bourdieu's concept of the field of cultural production aids understanding of the publishing business by showing that there are multiple publishing worlds, each with its own characteristics (3-4). The concept of the field enables Bourdieu to consider culture in a system "of distinctive properties by which it can be situated relative to other positions" (Bourdieu *The Field* 30). He analyses the field of cultural production within broader social structures of power and dominant values. This analysis leads Bourdieu to situate artistic work, and its production, within the social conditions influencing production. He argues that the different fields are hierarchical, competing against the dominant field. Bourdieu contends that "the literary or artistic field [...] is a field of struggles" (*The Field* 30). The dominant field operates to maintain its position of power, and this contention emphasises the need to see cultural production in relation to other social structures. Bourdieu's cultural contextualisation situates Virago in relation to the mainstream publishing houses in existence when Virago was established.

Bourdieu's work argues that cultural activity either reproduces or challenges social structures and power relations. He suggests that new challengers within the fields of cultural production "must get themselves known and recognized ('make a name for themselves'), by endeavouring to impose new modes of thought and expression, out of key with the prevailing modes of thought" (*The Field* 58). Challenges to existing social structures serve to question dominant ways of describing social and cultural practices, as illustrated by Callil's aim in establishing a feminist publishing house. Bourdieu's theory enables an understanding of Virago's intention of competing with mainstream, profit-making publishing, which they did by using capitalist methods of promotion and presentation, using them to promote feminism. .

Bourdieu's discussion of the field of restricted production enables him to distinguish between "large-scale cultural production, destined for [...] 'the public at large'" and work that has a particular value "accorded by the peer group whose members are both privileged clients and competitors" (*The Field* 115). Work produced within the field of restricted production largely defines its own criteria for publication, enjoying a degree of autonomy in publishing choices, "measured by its power to define its own criteria for the production and evaluation of its products" (*The Field* 115). Virago's autonomy is evidenced by their decision to republish books by women that had become unavailable, focusing on books that promoted women's history and lives..

Virago's initial position in the publishing world can be analysed in terms of its function within a field of restricted production: the team of publishers challenged

the gatekeepers by adopting new criteria for selecting books for publication, and the books were published for like-minded readers – “a public of equals” (*The Field* 116). Virago’s Modern Classics range exemplifies their approach: reproducing books that had largely been forgotten, and calling them Classics, represented a clear political challenge to existing publishing norms and to male dominated definitions of classic literature. Referring to the women writers whose names were new to him, Jonathan Coe suggested that “declaring their works to be ‘classics’ with such conviction was a courageous act on the part of Virago Press” (*The Observer* 2007).

Callil’s conception of the market, although incorporating “thousands of readers” (“The Stories” 2008) was, nevertheless, based on attracting a large, but specific, readership comprising white, middle-class women. The market for the VMCs, reflecting the founders’ tastes, spoke to the nascent interest and demand from women to read experiences similar to their own. Virago’s view of the market can be seen to satisfy a taste which has been “raised from the vague semi-existence of half-formulated or unformulated experience” (Bourdieu *Distinction* 228)., Responding to the WLM, Virago produced books that catered to the demands and interests of this particular group of women in a changing society. Even though Virago became very successful, largely through the VMC range, analysing their work through Bourdieu’s theory questions whether they moved away from the field of restricted production and whether Bourdieu’s categorisation of the fields of production can sufficiently explain Virago’s project of a financially successful feminist publishing house.

Callil's business acumen, and Virago's positioning as a response to the WLM, ensured the financial success of the VMCs. Such success, based on demand for the VMCs, would appear to remove Virago from Bourdieu's field of restricted production. But Virago's product was always based on their own criteria – telling women's stories and giving women their literary history – and was not aimed at reaching a mass market because it was drawing on a feminised aesthetic.

Bourdieu's conception of the opposite to the field of restricted production is a field of large-scale production, aimed at a mass market. Although Callil had suggested, in designing the Classics range, that she envisaged a brand like Penguin, the VMCs attracted a much more limited market. Sieghart's recent work, discussed in Chapter 1, shows that writing by women is mainly read by other women. The popularity of the VMCs for a female readership highlights a contradiction in Virago's stated aims – to compete in the mass market alongside Penguin whilst choosing books based on the values of middle-class feminists for a specific audience. Their success situates them between Bourdieu's field of restricted production and the field of large-scale production, occupying what can be called a popular restricted field, or a mainstream restricted field – using mainstream in the previously defined sense of non-radical.

Developing the popularity of the VMC brand by concentrating on paratextual elements enabled Virago to compete with mainstream publishers whilst aiming the books at their targeted audience. Brand development distinguished Virago from most other feminist enterprises, which “prioritized trust, sisterhood or shared ideology” above brand loyalty (Delap 268). Virago managed to maintain an ideological aim whilst also focusing on brand recognition to sell their ideology

in a mainstream, competitive market. Thompson explains the importance of a brand, suggesting that it is “a marker of distinction in a highly competitive field” (8). Virago’s brand development for the VMCs gave women a recognisable product that catered to their tastes, treating women as active consumers. Branding requires advertising and marketing methods to ensure financial success: “Marketing and sales staff devote a great deal of time and effort trying to ensure that their titles stand out from others and are not simply lost in the flood of new books appearing every season” (Thompson 11).

Advertising in the 1970s and 1980s was male dominated, thriving on the exploitation and objectification of women. It supported the socio-political status quo by promoting the strongly gendered roles criticised by the feminist movement, whereby women were powerless, financially dependent on men and restricted to the domestic sphere while men were in the public sphere of work and decision-making. Morris and Withers suggest that before the second wave feminism movement, “toy manufacturers, school guidance counsellors, youth and church groups, and television commercials were all complicit in steering young women to goals of [...] marriage. [...] Ambition itself might be presented as a freakish quality in a girl” (128). By creating consumer demand for the books produced, Virago challenged the “focus on issues of production rather than consumption” (Costa, in Catterall et al 255). Virago’s use of marketing for feminist books recognised that, until the establishment of feminist publishing houses, production was “primarily a male activity”, while women were seen as the main consumers of books, as Taylor recognises (Costa 254).

Analysis of Virago's brand development and advertising practices demonstrates how the editorial team used mainstream publishing methods to their own advantage to publicize their range of Modern Classics. By moving the focus away from the so-called radical bra-burning feminists demonised by the tabloid press, Virago offered a moderate form of feminism to women who exercised their choices through consumption and debate rather than through active protests. Some protests attracted women from various feminist backgrounds. Campaigns for childcare and workplace nurseries, for example, drew many different women to their marches and campaigns. Harriet Harman, as a non-radical feminist, was heavily involved in campaigns for childcare and their importance to "women wanting to go out to work" (198). Harman discusses the aims that were common to all feminists, although the methods of achieving them differed: "While we didn't always agree among ourselves on certain points, as women we all agreed that it was for us to discuss and decide [...] and that we would not be told by men what we should do and what we should think" (28). In this respect the WLM is comparable to the Six Point Group – both groups attempted to unite women to bring about change through legal challenges, and they both attempted to give women increased choices.

Harman, like many other women, eschewed the more radical approach to feminism and did not align herself to the feminists stigmatised as "man haters" (32). Perhaps following on from the suffragette's use of identifiable clothing and colours to make their campaigns visible, Jolly discusses the various types of feminism represented by women's choice of clothing – "the increasing diversity and malleability of women's identities and self-presentations" (*Sisterhood* 147).

Like Harman, not all feminists wore dungarees and cropped hair, preferring a more moderate approach to change perceptions of women and to challenge the power structure of society in the 1970s and 1980s. The VMCs situated feminism in the mainstream, and Virago represented the “acceptable, and very successful, face of feminist book publishing” (Stevens 161). The Modern Classics secured Virago’s success, partly because they represented, and attracted, a potentially powerful group of women – those with more money, leisure and education from white backgrounds who were most likely to spend money on books and to spread the word about the VMCs through discussion.

The success of the VMCs was also due, in part, to their role in the creation of a community of women. By developing a relationship of commonalities between the interwar writers and the second-wave readers, Virago engendered a sense of belonging based on shared experiences. This sense of belonging encompassed the VMC readers influenced by the WLM, who felt empowered and less isolated in the knowledge of experiences shared with many other women. Goodings’ reference to Virago as a “club” (*A Bite* 9) indicates a recognition that women felt a strong need to belong and to share their experiences of life. The ongoing existence of the online Virago book club reinforces the importance of belonging and sharing, and of belonging to a community. “Every month we select a Virago Modern Classics title to read, sharing quotes, further reading and reading recommendations with the Virago community” (Virago website). In Anderson’s terms, the community developed by Virago and the VMCs is imagined. His discussion is based on the concept of nationalism but is also applicable to the community of VMC readers and writers

developed by Virago's promotion of commonalities. He refers to "an imagined political community" (6). He further explains that, in imagined communities, the members "will never know most of their fellow-members" (6). The sense of a nationalist community is perhaps also applicable to the interwar VMC writers. Writing between two world wars – when support for one's country and for the soldiers fighting were widespread emotions – enhances the sense of belonging to a nation and strengthens links between the community of writers discussed by Callil in Chapter 2. The four writers I analyse in Chapter 4 were all influenced by the war that had recently finished and, in the case of Holtby in particular, by the likelihood of another war to come. They perhaps presented, in their writing, a sense of Englishness, shared by many of the VMC writers republished during the WLM. As illustrated in the Appendix, the vast majority of VMCs at this time were written by white, English-speaking women, many of whom were English and shared the values of women of their class and nationality. The concept of an imagined community is applicable to Virago's community of readers during the WLM, as well as to the interwar writers..

This chapter focuses on the various paratextual elements of the VMCs. Firstly, I consider Virago's use of advertising as a means of attracting an audience of women; secondly, I examine their development of a brand in order to establish their position within publishing; thirdly, I analyse their use of new introductions as a way of connecting the lives portrayed in the reprints with the lives of the WLM readers.

Developing a brand and marketing feminism

Ursula Owen explained Virago's decision to prioritise marketing and branding of the VMCs: "the question was not just what to publish but *how* to publish, because Virago had marketing as well as literary and political aims" (in P. Owen *The Future* 89). Elizabeth Young's 1989 research on feminist publishing and business practices is based on the year she spent working at feminist presses in London (although not at Virago). She argues that a strong audience for feminist books was crucial for the survival of the publishers, partly to compensate for the lack of review space given to books produced by feminist publishers during the 1980s. The lack of reviews for books by women, especially those produced by feminist presses, is the focus of Women in Publishing's 1987 study *Reviewing the Reviews*. Considering the audience attracted by Virago, Young adds that "it's very difficult to pin down this readership exactly" (3). The various feminist publishers aimed to attract different types of women readers, as they came to recognise that not all women experienced the same forms of discrimination, making it particularly difficult to define a readership that encompasses all targeted audiences. Specific publishers aimed at different groups of women, with, for example, Sheba publishing books by black and Asian writers; Onlywomen was known for its focus on radical, feminist lesbians. Young suggested to an editor at Virago that their "stereotypical reader [was] a middle-class, university-educated white woman purchasing a 'tasteful' Virago Modern Classic" (3). The editor refuted the idea, insisting that their audience was far broader than that, but the content and branding of the VMCs clearly indicate the nature of the market created for the reprint range by Virago. Whilst it comprised a much broader sector of

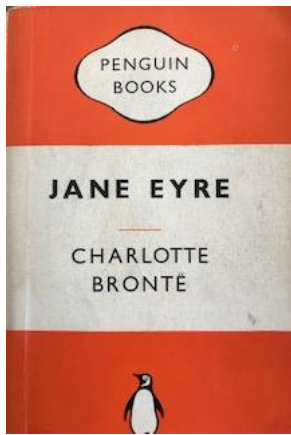
society than the more specific readership of the radical feminist publishers, the VMC market was necessarily limited. Stevens, who worked for Virago, described herself as “a wishy, watery, liberal, heterosexual feminist” (162). She realized that Virago was designed to appeal to women like her who held non-radical views.

Virago focused on attracting their non-radical (as previously defined to mean women attempting to reform society rather than to destroy patriarchal institutions) readership through design and advertising. Peter Owen’s 1993 work on publishing discusses the recognition by publishing houses that “cover design is important [...] it also helps if an individual house style can be developed to make the publisher’s imprint easily recognizable” (P. Owen *Publishing Now* 46). Thompson emphasises the role of branding in defining a publisher’s image and product: “their imprint is a ‘brand’, a marker of distinction in a highly competitive field” (8). Callil’s previous experience of publicity enabled her to appreciate the importance of design and brand identification. The VMCs became familiar in the 1970s and 1980s, easily recognisable by their dark green spines, apple logo and cover design, resulting in a brand that came to epitomise Virago and non-radical feminist publications. The books were branded by Virago as fictional texts which presented female, but not specifically or overtly feminist, perspectives on social issues. Brand recognition became a means of women relating to each other and to the second-wave feminist movement. Eleanor Caldwell, in her 1988 article “Bites From the Apple”, draws attention to the place of the VMCs as a marker of feminist beliefs at a time of changing views of feminism. “If admitting to being a feminist in the climate of Thatcherite

Britain in the late 80s is no longer fashionable, having a respectable collection of glossy green paperbacks on the bookshelf is imperative [...] the appeal of the modern classics series is its startling variety of authors and styles which are bonded in the common cause of the celebration of women's lives" (*TES*).

The Virago name and the apple logo had been in use since the Press started in 1973 and both were recognised by readers for their feminist implications. The name had been chosen by Callil in discussion with Rosie Boycott and Marsha Rowe, the founders of *Spare Rib*. Callil explained that "we chose it for this heroic meaning: a strong, courageous, outspoken woman, a battler. Irreverence and heroism, that's what we wanted" ("The Stories"). Or, as Boycott commented, it meant "a stroppy, heroic woman" that reminded her of Callil (*Virago: Changing* 00:8:40-44). The connotations of the apple logo, with its reference to Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden, have been discussed by several critics, and Murray comments on its allusion to "the dangerously subversive knowledge to be sampled within" (57). Research carried out by Virago in the late 1980s, involving visiting bookshops, illustrated the importance of the visual impact of Virago's green spines. Ruthie Petrie, of Virago, reported one bookshop owner suggesting that the green spines should be used for all Virago books. This view was supported by another bookseller who "feels we still have brand loyalty and should exploit it more" (Add MS 88904/3/3).

Callil saw the potential for Virago to compete with mainstream publishing



houses. When considering her initial idea for the Modern Classics, Callil visualised them “as a brand, just like Penguin” (“The Stories”). She envisaged Virago, and in particular the VMCs, as feminist and mainstream, using a mainstream publisher such as Penguin as a template for the range they curated. Like the early Penguins, Virago concentrated on a range of

reprints, but differed in their choice of books, catering to a more specific readership than Penguin. Callil described the process of designing the VMCs, insisting that she wanted to develop “a library of women’s fiction with Boadicea [...] waving the flag. I chose green because it was neither blue for a boy nor pink for a girl. I saw in my mind rows of green paperbacks with luscious covers on all the bookshelves of the world” (“The Stories”). (It seems that Callil actually meant Britannia, rather than Boadicea, and it is an image of Britannia that is used on promotional material, discussed below.) Discussing the development of the Penguin brand, writer Tom Dyckhoff comments that the eye-catching covers “created an audience from the increasingly literate mass market [producing] an intellectually respectable product to which readers were loyal” (*The Guardian*). He concludes that “the trick was [...] deftly to straddle the divide between art and commerce”. Powers further highlights the importance and ambiguity of book covers, arguing that the cover is “a selling device, close to advertising in its form and purpose, but also specific to a product that plays a teasing game of hide and seek with commerce” (6). Both Dyckhoff and Powers sum up the contradictions and difficulty involved in Virago’s attitude to combining commerce

and feminism – the difficulty of combining “art and commerce” (Dyckhoff – above). Many feminists were critical of Virago’s combined aims and Murray’s criticism typifies the opinions of many. She refers to Virago’s depoliticization and the need to make the books saleable by not drawing attention to their political content in order to attract a wide audience (64).

Whilst continuing to publish books presenting feminist theory, Virago became known as a publisher of well-presented fiction by women. Callil argued: “I wanted the [VMCs] to look good and be of high quality” (in Simons and Fullbrook 185). Virago’s VMC range, although originally based on Lane’s Penguin paperback range, differed in several ways, particularly in size and price. Murray explains that “Virago departed from Lane’s principles [...] in its pioneering use of the larger trade B-format paperback – now the staple of highbrow literary imprints” (57). The size of paperback chosen for the VMCs was a factor in creating the upmarket image and identity of the range. Kate Chisholm suggests that Virago’s use of the “‘Midway’ book, hardback size but with a paperback binding”, implied affordable quality, but the price necessarily excluded poorer readers (*TLS*). The choice was, as Ursula Owen explains, partly a matter of necessity; being unable to print large quantities of a book, as required for a mass market paperback, it was more practical to use what she referred to as the trade paperback, with “its larger format, elegant cover and slightly higher price” (in P. Owen *The Future* 89). For example, in the VMC range, Winifred Holtby’s *Anderby Wold*, with 308 pages, sold for £3.50 in 1981 and Rebecca West’s *The Harsh Voice*, with 250 pages, sold for £2.95 in 1982. In contrast, Penguin’s 1980 edition of Evelyn Waugh’s *The Ordeal of Gilbert*

Pinfold, with 220 pages, was priced at £1.25; the New Penguin Shakespeare 1984 edition of *Othello* was also priced at £1.25. The choice of size, and price, worked in Virago's favour, adding to their identity as a publisher of attractive, good quality books by women, books that were worth a higher price, and they perhaps bridged the gap between hardback and paperback books. Murray suggests that "Virago discerned that inferior production values and utilitarian packaging actually militated against the proselytising of feminist ideas" (64). Whilst the price reinforced the appeal to better-off middle-class readers, the look and price of the VMCs were also essential to Virago's aim of competing with mainstream publishing houses.

Reader recognition and loyalty developed in response to Virago's marketing and branding. Journalist Rachel Cooke describes how, having discovered her first VMC when she was 17, she continued buying them for both their content and quality, explaining that "the green cover, and the Virago logo [...] were enough" (*The Observer* "Taking"). The books became known for presenting female viewpoints, focusing on women's lives and experiences: "a Virago book means one thing: a book about being a woman by a woman" (Bennett). Women began to collect VMCs, making Callil's dream of filling bookshelves everywhere with green covers a reality; readers requested new titles because they "particularly [like] their distinctive green covers" (Add MS 88904/1/440). Hilary Mantel noted that, returning from abroad in the 1980s, "the green spines were everywhere. I remember thinking that the world had changed while my back was turned" (in Cooke "Taking"). But the branding of the VMCs meant that,

while the books were recognised as mainstream, they were not “everywhere”, and the audience was very specific, rather than a mass market.

Scanlon and Swindells comment on Virago’s branding and appeal to a wider group of feminist readers, which enabled them to “broaden the perspective on women’s writing” (in Eagleton 132). But they also raise the issue of the negative ideological process involved in Virago’s approach, questioning Callil’s focus on branding and market success. Their arguments overlap with those of Murray, and her questioning of the combination of feminism and capitalism. She asks how “an oppositional politics [can] hope to achieve commercial success within the ruthlessly competitive global publishing marketplace?” (25-6). But, as Goodings explained, Virago questioned “the idea that there is only one way to be a feminist” (*A Bite* 51). Goodings’ view, although sound in a business sense, does not acknowledge other, non-mainstream feminist views, as I will demonstrate. The success of the VMCs suggest that the books found a ready market that represented the large numbers of non-radical feminists within the WLM. Through the VMCs Virago became what the journalist Rustin, in discussion with Goodings, referred to as “the business wing of the women’s movement in literature” (*The Guardian*).

Virago hoped to situate themselves within mainstream publishing, which was enhanced by their insistence on promotion within mainstream bookshops: “display in mainstream outlets was from the company’s inception a priority” (Murray 56). Additionally, they refused to have the VMCs displayed within the feminist books’ section and were, instead, determined to see their books on the

general fiction shelves. A similar decision was taken by the *Spare Rib* collective, who found it “symbolically and practically important [...] to sell in ‘mainstream’ newsagents such as John Menzies and W. H. Smiths” (Delap 259). These decisions were taken to ensure a wider appeal and to avoid the marginalisation of feminism. Goodings explains “we might publish from the margins, but we are not marginal” (*Virago: Changing* 00:27:09-12). Being mainstream meant that the VMCs were produced to be, and recognised as, appealing to a wider readership than more radical, niche feminist publishing. But, as I argue above, they did not become part of Bourdieu’s “field of large-scale production” which may “eventually reach a socially heterogeneous public” (125). Readership of the VMCs was large but restricted to a specific sector of society. Although more recent VMCs recognise intersectionality, the early publications were aimed at the white, middle-class women influenced by the WLM. The audience for Virago’s republished books clearly reflected the socio-economic background of the women active in the WLM.

Virago’s conceptualisation of the market and their participation in mainstream publishing indicate their recognition that consumerism and culture were aspects of women’s lives that could be employed to empower them, rather than exploit them. Women’s involvement in making Virago a success impacted on literary tradition, showing women that their choices as consumers could change social norms.. Virago’s brand of feminist publishing follows Thompson’s suggestion that Bourdieu’s “notion of field [...] forces us to look beyond specific firms and organisations, and makes us think, instead, in *relational* terms” (4). Considering Virago as a feminist publisher in relation to other cultural producers and social

organizations aids understanding of its innovative role in adapting existing socio-political structures in order to challenge literary tradition.

Marketing was a necessary aspect of Virago's feminist publishing project of becoming a recognisable brand that challenged male literary values. Marketing was also part of Callil's background experience, and whilst she learnt the other skills necessary for running a business, at the time of establishing Virago Press "I only knew publicity and marketing" (*Virago: Changing* 00:10:08-13). Ursula Owen explains the necessity of marketing for feminist books: "one forgets how disturbing and unmarketable feminism was in the early 1970s" (in P. Owen *The Future* 86). But marketing was criticised by many feminists because of its exploitative treatment of women. Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) contains her views on the nature of advertising and its use of images of women to sell products. She argues that the images treated women as objects and promoted unachievable ideals of perfection. The ideal of perfection is satirised by Virago's choice of *Vogue* images for the covers of Delafield's books. Greer further discusses the commodification and objectification of women, criticising the presentation of women in television and advertising posters as young and physically perfect. Greer complains that "I'm sick of the masquerade. I'm sick of pretending eternal youth. I'm sick of belying my own intelligence, my own will" (61).

Her argument underpins criticisms of Virago's use of advertising but also highlights the importance of their use of marketing to promote women's writing and to empower women. Virago adopted many of the promotional techniques

used by mainstream publishers. Virago's promotional campaigns and marketing for the VMC range indicate their intention of undermining and challenging male-dominated business practices. Catterall et al discuss the evolving relationship between marketing and feminism, shedding light on the significance of Virago's decision to embrace this traditionally male-led aspect of the business world. They argue that "a feminist presence in marketing is important to raise awareness of [women's] issues" (9). Scott suggests that women in advertising and marketing can offer "a fresh perspective" that can promote women's lives (in Catterall et al 37). Women working within marketing, or using marketing skills to promote feminist products, serve to subvert advertising materials that depict women as objects used to sell to so that "ads will speak to us rather than at us" (O'Donohoe, in Catterall et al 90). Ursula Owen quickly realised the impossibility of separating "the economic and creative sides of a publishing house" (in P. Owen *The Future* 98).

Some aspects of Virago's marketing of the VMCs made them particularly attractive to the target audience of white, middle-class women. The available promotional material and campaigns illustrate how Virago attracted their desired readership of white middle-class readers. Archival material also serves to demonstrate the ways in which Virago's advertising campaigns, in O'Donohoe's words above, spoke *to* the readers rather than *at* them (my emphasis). Virago's campaigns spoke to women's interests and lives, without objectifying them or giving them unattainable goals, which is Greer's criticism of male-dominated marketing campaigns. The *Spare Rib* collective criticised the extensive media images of women in existence, complaining that, in "films, television, radio,

newspapers, magazines, books – women are depicted as inferior to men. Produced within a male-dominated culture, these images confine women to stereotyped roles, such as the mother who nurtures, the wife who nags, the object of male desire” (Rowe 1).



The above images exemplify the WLM's criticisms of media images designed to perpetuate gendered stereotypes. The images were presented in an online article discussing the development of promotional images in America since the *Mad Men* era. (www.businessinsider.com) The article does not state where the adverts were originally placed. The first image is typical of 1950s advertising, offering ways to make women's lives in the kitchen easier. Little had changed by 1968 and the advert claiming that air hostesses are there to look after men, like their mothers; the third image, still portraying women in the kitchen, is from 1973 – the year Virago was established. Whilst the women's movement was gathering supporters, advertising campaigns continued to present limited, stereotypical roles for women. Promotional material in the Virago archive presents a contrast and a challenge to the above images.

At the time of writing, limited marketing materials were available in the British Library archive and images could not be included as photography is prohibited. The promotions I discuss are typical of the glossy, middle-class materials available, emphasising the appeal of the VMCs to the better-off, educated market of women in the early 1980s, mirroring the lives of many of the interwar writers. Virago's promotional material from 1984 includes a glossy flyer advertising their publications, illustrated with a picture of Britannia reading a book (Add MS 88904/5/3). The image promotes the enjoyment women experience from reading, but while clearly showing women as strong with leadership qualities, the image is also related to Britishness and imperialism, implicitly excluding women from ethnic minorities. The flyer included a complete list of VMCs in 1984, with photos of the covers of each one, promoting brand recognition. In 1985 Virago produced a glossy leaflet entitled *Virago – All You Need*, aimed at the holiday market. It is illustrated by a picture of three women, looking confident, heading towards a small island, and taking piles of books. Unlike the majority of adverts of the time, the image does not present women in the home or as wives and mothers. It implies that they can be free to enjoy time reading without being hampered by the duties of home and family. The flyer also included a list of new books for 1985 and an order form. The VMCs are described as "beautiful reprints of 19th and 20th century fiction" (Add MS.88904/5/3). The list of VMCs for that year included Elizabeth von Arnim's *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, E. H. Young's *The Curate's Wife* and *Jenny Wren*, and Winifred Holtby's *Poor Caroline*. A promotional comment from *Good Housekeeping* magazine is included, saying that Virago "deserves a medal for its contribution to literature" (Add MS.88904/5/3). *Good Housekeeping* focused

on “the professionalisation of housewifery”, attempting to upgrade the role of women who ran homes whilst accepting without question the role of women in the house (White, 103). The magazine appealed to middle-class women and did not challenge the gendered status quo. The flyer, with its holiday image, its glossiness, and the comment by the non-radical *Good Housekeeping*, is clearly aimed at a middle-class market – it assumes that holidays and expensive new books can be afforded by the viewer. Like the image of Britannia, the promotion implies exclusivity and is likely to alienate poorer women, often those from working-class backgrounds and ethnic minorities. Virago is promoted as a brand offering a product for a specific market.

As indicated by the above comments from *Good Housekeeping*, Virago liaised with several non-radical, middle-class magazines for some of their publicity campaigns. In 1988, to celebrate their 15th anniversary, Virago ran competitions in selected magazines. These included one in upmarket *Country Living* in which the prize was a copy of the second *Omnibus*, a hardback edition containing three VMCs (Add MS 88904/6/2). There was also an anniversary competition in *Cosmopolitan* magazine which featured the cover paintings from six VMCs, asking readers to identify the books. The prize was VMCs to the value of £90 (Add MS 88904/6/2). The *Cosmopolitan* competition skilfully increased VMC brand recognition by asking readers to identify books from the cover paintings alone. The magazines chosen for these publicity campaigns further situate Virago’s readership among non-radical middle-class women of varied ages. *Cosmopolitan* attracted a younger market than *Good Housekeeping* or *Country*

Living, emphasising Virago's project of promoting mainstream feminist ideals for a range of age groups; but all three magazines had a limited class appeal.

Celebrations for Virago's 15th anniversary year involved promoting their brand on BBC Radio 4 programmes. In May 1988 Radio 4's *Kaleidoscope* arts programme contained an item on Virago, in which they described the aim of the publishing house as "ensuring that writers are not ignored or forgotten or passed over because they are women" (transcript in Add MS 88904/6/2). The programme introduction continued by drawing attention to the mainstream nature of Virago's publications, which "are not about 'women's issues'. Many of their authors are not 'feminist'" (Add MS 88904/6/2). The comment implies a disparaging view of radical feminists, distinct from VMC readers. Virago was also discussed on *Woman's Hour*, in which Jenni Murray talked about the publishing house with Mary Chamberlain. In response to Murray's question about Virago's impact on publishing Chamberlain put forward the view that Virago had "upgraded the quality of the paperback, and people now recognise that paperbacks are good quality books and, of course, Virago's design, very distinctive livery, have become very much a hallmark of that quality publishing" (transcript of interview, Add MS 88904/6/2). Virago's success in "upgrad[ing] the paperback" indicates that they had moved away from niche, marginal publishing and developed their field of restricted publication into a financially viable and mainstream, but still restricted, field.

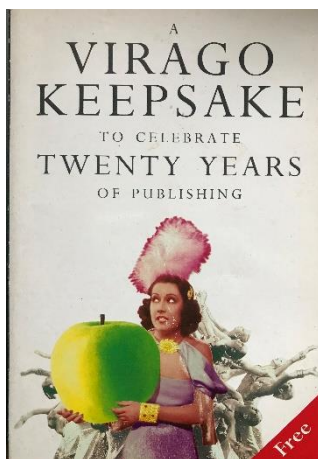
As with the promotional campaigns in magazines, the radio programmes that discussed Virago had a particular audience, appealing to middle-class women,

perhaps with a higher level of education and the time to listen to radio programmes. Neither programme could be defined as radical. Both programme discussions imply that the VMCs represented Virago. Kaleidoscope's mention of women not being forgotten refers to the range of republished novels. Similarly, Chamberlain's focus on high quality paperbacks ignores the more theoretical and academic books also published by Virago. Virago's other publications during the 1970s and 1980s include works by Elaine Showalter, Sheila Rowbotham, Kate Millett, Adrienne Rich, Lynne Segal, and Beatrix Campbell. The publishing house was promoted and recognised predominantly as a producer of republished fiction by women. Virago Press came to be synonymous with Virago Modern Classics, indicating the financial success of the VMCs, as well as the success of the brand development. As Simone Murray points out, the VMC range "achieved such success that its titles came to define the public image of the firm" (36). Virago's involvement with mainstream magazines and radio programmes suggest that Virago itself had, by this time, been accepted as part of the mainstream culture.

Virago's co-ordinated and well-designed marketing and publicity campaigns increased sales of the VMCs and ensured the financial security of the Press, highlighting their unique combination of feminism, creativity, and finance. Thompson distinguishes between marketing and publicity, explaining that, while they have the same aim, "the only real difference is that the publisher pays for marketing, whereas publicity, if you can get it, is free" (21). Virago's awareness of the usefulness of free publicity is also commented upon by Withers: "the company understood and leveraged the value of 'free publicity'. Reviews,

features, radio and TV interviews were all used to great effect to raise the profile of Virago's books and authors" (*Reprints* 3). Virago showed itself to be an astute user of publicity, benefiting from Callil's previous experience: they made good use of the opportunities to obtain publicity through newspaper interviews, liaisons with magazines, and radio programmes. Goodings explains that the mainstream press treated Virago as "a news story, so they wanted to know about us and some wrote genuinely good pieces" (*A Bite* 48). Virago's involvement in middle-class radio programmes and magazines is also indicative of mainstream acceptance of feminism by the late 1980s.

In addition to the campaigns involving flyers, magazines and radio, Virago celebrated some of its anniversaries and birthdays by giving away specially produced books. Journalist Catherine Bennett discusses the *Virago Keepsake* –



to celebrate 20 years in publishing (1993). She draws attention to Virago's emphasis on self-promotion and comments that "Virago has always been as shrewdly commercial as it is intently feminist and this little collection of eulogies by Virago writers will no doubt pay for itself, being little more than a sales tool designed as a treat" (*The Guardian*). The *Keepsake*

contains essays by twenty women and is described in Harriet Spicer's introduction as "something which would mark the twenty years of our existence and share the pride we take in the achievements of our publishing house" (v). The writers in the *Keepsake* include noted feminists such as Elaine Showalter, Lynn Segal, and Kate Millett. The book promotes women's writing, women's

publishing, and Virago. In support of Bennett's argument that the free book is simply a sales tool, the book includes a list of the contributors' books published by Virago, encouraging readers to purchase them (117-120).

Attracting the target readership

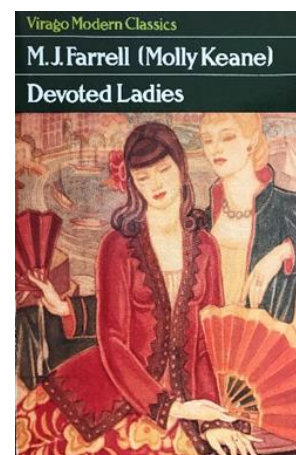
Goodings, in an interview with Rustin at the time of Virago's fortieth birthday in 2013, discusses the importance of their brand image: "one of the reasons Virago survived is that people recognise it as a brand with a genuine philosophy" (Rustin *The Guardian*). The VMCs needed to attract their desired audience by making both their image and their philosophy, to use Goodings' word, appeal to the right sector of society – the white, non-radical, educated, middle-class feminist reader. The brand was carefully designed for this group. Publishing within a field of restricted production, Virago spoke to readers who mirrored the values and tastes of the Virago founders. Virago continued to appeal to this group of readers, developing their field of production into what I refer to as a popular field of restricted production. Their limited readership appeal prevented the VMCs from moving into the mass market, in spite of their popularity, but they did become accepted as part of mainstream publishing. For Bourdieu, a cultural product is "a constituted taste" which develops from experiences or desires to become a finished product through the work of professionals – in this case through the publishers (*Distinction* 228). By addressing the concerns and interests of like-minded women, Virago brought into existence a cultural product that could satisfy their tastes and present a challenge to existing cultural standards.

Analysis of the covers and cover comments demonstrates how the VMCs were designed to attract the target audience. Virago's development of a brand included making the covers both recognisable and upmarket. Murray draws attention to the apparently contradictory design of the VMCs, suggesting that "the name and logo were self-consciously feminist [but] its cover design was classically up-market literary" (57). The up-market literary appeal can be seen as an aspect of Virago's appeal to its intended readership. Riley comments that "Virago's clever use of marketing and branding played a big part in its success as the books' green spines and apple logo helped readers identify them quickly on the shelves" (*Virago* 28). The importance of cover design lies partly in its ability to "demand a relationship, something that when given, defines the values of the giver and recipient" (Powers 11). The VMC covers visibly signposted the values of the readers and of the books. Examination of the covers illustrates Virago's promotion of the VMCs, presenting the VMCs as books that represented the values common to the Virago team and their readers.

The colour and logo were enhanced by the use of carefully chosen paintings for the covers. Coe comments that "everything about those early Virago editions was well judged, and nothing more so than their cover illustrations" (*The Observer*). Toynebee describes the VMCs as "beautifully produced, with a distinctive masthead and perfectly matched paintings on the covers" (*The Guardian* 2016). Choosing the cover paintings to match the books was Callil's task, as Alexandra Pringle explains: "Finding the jacket was enthralling. Carmen and I used to go round the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition", where Callil

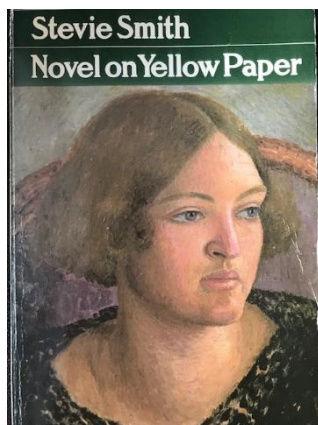
only looked at paintings that may be of interest for a VMC cover, not stopping to look at anything else (*Virago: Changing* 00:22:30-35). Some of the paintings were by women artists who were not necessarily well-known, although famous male and female artists were often chosen. For example, Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* has a painting by Vanessa Bell, Gwen John paintings are on Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* series and many other books had cover paintings by well-known artists. The choice of little-known women artists reflected the emphasis on forgotten writers and artists; both the books and the covers frequently promoted the work of women who were generally unknown and, in this, the covers were part of Virago's project to make known women who had been forgotten. Murray suggests that "the traditional exclusion of female artists from the art history canon made the selection of their works not only a political, but also a marketing, boon" (57). Her comment emphasises the feminist thinking behind the design of the VMC covers – they had an upmarket, artistic appeal but also a clear feminist appeal.

The significant similarity between most of the cover paintings, whether by men or women, famous or unknown, is the repeated focus on women as the subject, sometimes painted in the interwar period, when the books had been written. The cover of *Devoted Ladies* shows a detail from *The Bay* – a 1927 painting by Australian artist Thea Proctor,



typical of VMC covers in its representation of women. The predominance of paintings of women on VMC covers indicated to potential readers that women

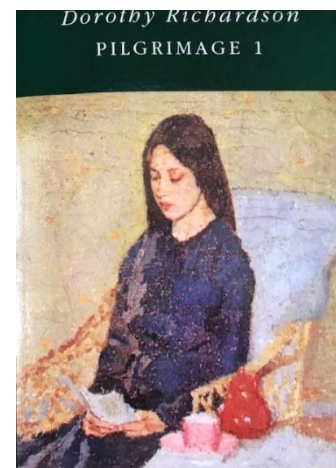
were the subject of the book, attracting readers who wanted to read about their literary history and shared, female perspectives and experiences. Both Coe and Cooke discuss the subject matter of the cover paintings. Cooke describes the cover of Stevie Smith's *Novel on Yellow Paper*, showing a detail from Dora Carrington's portrait of Catherine Carrington: "almond eyes, shingled hair, moony expression on her face that says: 'I think deep and perplexing thoughts'"



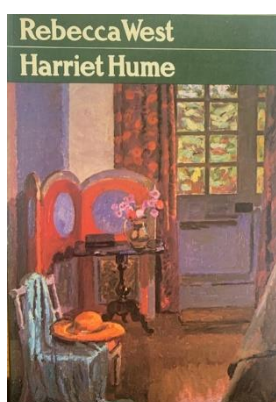
(*The Observer* 2008). Similarly, Coe's comments draw attention to the female subject on the covers of Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* series: "a young woman reading, the colours of the painting muted, the subject's eyelids half-closed, her features in repose, absorbed, self-contained, happy in herself" (*The Observer* 2007).

The covers of the *Pilgrimage* series of books use details of a series of paintings by Gwen John: *The Convalescent*, created between 1930 and 1924. "Like much of Gwen John's work, it relies rather on mood, atmosphere and closely toned harmonies of colour for emotional impact" (author unknown www.tate.org.uk).

The image of the women portrayed on the covers mirrors the content of the books in which women are the protagonists. The books often present their inner lives and thoughts – the covers imply educated, middle-class women who can spend time reading and thinking.

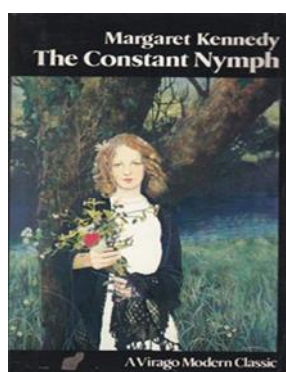
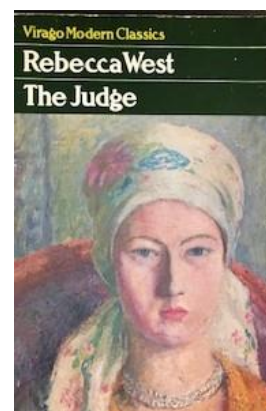


The cover paintings became an important factor in presenting the VMCs as mainstream books about and by women. In response to a reader's letter in 1984 asking how Virago chose the cover paintings, the (unsigned) reply from Virago explained that "the cover illustrations are chosen by the Modern Classics editor who chooses them for their mood, subject matter, period" (Add MS 88904/1/70). Correspondence between Rebecca West and Callil suggests the importance of the cover paintings, both to authors and to Virago. Callil wrote, in 1980, "how



pleased I am that you like the covers of your three novels. I had enormous pleasure choosing the paintings and indeed, *Harriet Hume* is a particular favourite" (Add MS 88904/1/440). The cover for *Harriet Hume* shows a detail from Vanessa Bell's *The Studio Door, Charleston*. Other books by West have paintings

depicting women, such as Carrington's painting of Julia Strachey for *The Judge*. Discussions concerning cover paintings emphasise Virago's aim of matching the



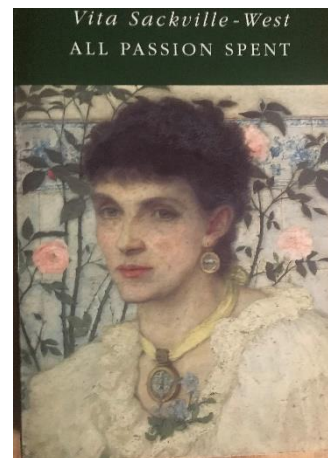
painting to the book, accentuating the female perspective presented within. Comments from Virago about Margaret Kennedy's *The Constant Nymph* specify that "I'd want a soft picture of a girl/woman on a hillside,

sitting looking off into the distance" (unsigned and undated memo Add MS 88904/1/234). The VMC cover design served to attract book buyers, and the choice of painting, with the suggestion of mood and the focus on women, indicated that the books offered a female perspective on society.

Virago's recognisable brand also served to publicise and market particular authors and their books. Goodings sees the marketing of authors as part of the 1970s and 1980s promotion of lifestyles and lifestyle choices and she explains that "the second wave of feminism rose alongside the 1970s/80s new style of 'marketing' authors as personalities" (*A Bite* 65). Thompson discusses the importance of "brand-name authors" and their "large stocks of symbolic capital", defining symbolic capital as "the accumulated prestige, recognition and respect accorded to certain individuals or institutions" (8). Its importance to publishers is in promotion of their image – "the way they see themselves and want to be seen by others" (8). Symbolic capital closely links particular authors with their publisher and Virago promoted some of their key authors as a means of defining their image as producers of a certain type of book. Rosamond Lehmann, discussed in chapter 4, was one of Virago's star authors, and her books were integral to the success of their compilation volumes and their publicity campaigns. Although not explicitly feminist, and in some ways Lehmann was anti-feminist, archival information supports the view that her books depicted lives familiar to many readers, who wrote appreciatively to Virago and to Lehmann herself. Margaret Atwood and Angela Carter (who wrote *The Sadeian Woman* for Callil in 1978) were also promoted as key writers representing the Virago brand – the Virago website has a page celebrating forty years of Margaret Atwood, with the comment from Goodings "Margaret Atwood is a Virago Classic herself". Atwood's *Surfacing* was published by Virago in 1979. The marketing of Atwood and Carter was likely to attract more overtly feminist readers than the readership of Lehmann, changing the way Virago is

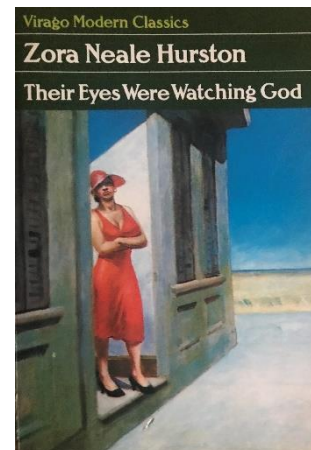
seen. Lehmann is a more problematic choice in the context of attracting feminist readers, although, as I demonstrate in Chapter 4, her work indirectly supports many interwar and second-wave feminist themes and she was undoubtedly popular among VMC readers. Goodings argues that “all social movements need charismatic leaders, need key books or speeches or song” (*A Bite* 64). For Goodings, authors were of fundamental importance in bringing about change and offering a leading role in inspiring women. Goodings’ view coincides with those of Owen and Murray when they argued that the women’s movement was led by writers, as discussed in Chapter 2.

The cover comments chosen by the Virago team enhanced and complemented the cover paintings by highlighting both the quality and the books’ relevance to readers, encouraging them to buy the books, or to look for work by particular authors. Examples from a range of VMCs serve to demonstrate how the comments were meant to attract women influenced by the feminist movement’s arguments on ending women’s dependence, and on the nature of marriage and patriarchy. The cover comments on Vita Sackville-West’s *All Passion Spent* (1931, republished as a VMC 1983), for instance, indicate the main character’s achievement of independence in her later life: “[she] finds at last – in this world of her own – a passion, one that comes with the freedom to choose ‘simply to be herself’”. Attention is also drawn to the quality of Sackville-West’s writing, comparing it to Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*.



The comments on Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937, republished as a VMC 1986) focus on the novel's relevance to women during the 1980s: after leaving the husband she does not love and going off with another man, "Janie comes to see that husbands are just things 'she grabbed up to drape dreams over'".

Both the Six Point Group and the WLM produced demands aimed at improving women's financial independence and their lives within marriage, sometimes portraying alternatives to marriage. The



cover also includes a quote from writer Alice Walker – "It speaks to me as no novel, past or present, has ever done" – a statement that emphasises both its contemporary relevance and the links between women writers emphasised by Virago's work practices. Walker's recent success with her novel *The Color Purple* – published in 1982 and awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1983 – gives her comment weight with audiences and unites Black American writers. (It is interesting to note that, in the UK, Walker was published by The Women's Press). It is particularly relevant to Virago's ways of choosing books to republish, often based on authors recommending other writers, as I discuss in Chapter 2. Drawing attention to the contemporary significance of the republished interwar novels was crucial to Virago's project of spreading women's writing to a new generation of readers and developing links between two generations. The cover notes further add that "Zora Neale Hurston [...] was one of the most influential and important writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Her work has been admired by each new generation of Black women writers

including Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Maya Angelou". The comments draw attention to Neale Hurston's ethnicity and establish links with other writers. But Virago published very few VMCs by Black women, and no Black British women, during the peak years of the predominantly white women's movement. As previously mentioned, the VMCs included writing by only four black writers: Zora Neale Hurston (*Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine*), Dorothy West (*The Living is Easy*), Ann Petry (*The Street*), and Paule Marshall (*Brown Girl, Brownstones*) (See Appendix). As discussed, their focus was on readers and writers from white, middle-class backgrounds. Publishing Hurston's book appears to be one of a very few instances at this time of trying to appeal to other sectors of society, prefiguring Virago's more recent recognition of intersectionality.

Back covers often include a quote from the novel itself, offering an example of how the VMCs were designed to speak to new WLM readers by focusing on the relationship between women's identities and marriage or family. The WLM made women aware of the extent to which their identities were defined by marriage and by the role of men in their lives, and limited by their lack of



financial independence. The movement campaigned against the limitations of women's ambitions in a patriarchal society that concerned itself with women's appearances rather than their abilities. The Six Point Group also campaigned to improve the lives and opportunities of both married women and those in paid

work. The cover comments on F. M. Mayor's *The Third Miss Symons* (1913,

published by Virago 1980) begin with the quote “Why was it that people did not love her? She was not uglier or stupider or duller than anyone else...Why had God sent her into the world if she were not wanted?”.

Similarly, E. M. Delafield’s *Thank Heaven Fasting*

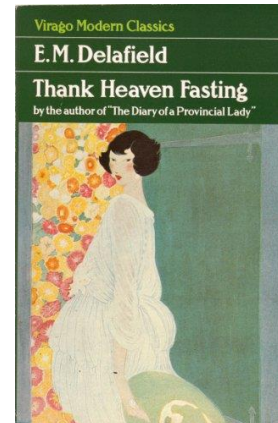
(1932, published by Virago 1988) offers a quote

underlining the importance of marriage for women in a

patriarchal society: “She could never, looking

backwards, remember a time when she had not known

that a woman’s failure or success in life depended entirely upon whether or not she succeeded in getting a husband”.



Drawing attention to the restricting influences on women’s identities in the interwar years was directly relevant to women in the 1970s and 80s, when women were beginning to expand their opportunities through higher education and work, questioning the expectation that marriage was the only goal for all women. The VMC covers and cover comments promoted the books’ focus on women’s lives and questioned their limited opportunities in a patriarchal society. The paratext of the VMCs is, in Genette’s words, “the means by which a text [...] proposes itself [...] to its readers” (261). Virago presented the VMCs to the readers as texts relevant to a new generation of readers during the years of the second-wave feminist movement. As discussed above, Genette argues that the paratextual elements of a text present the text in particular ways for particular audiences, emphasising the text’s relevance to its readers.

Developing commonalities between interwar writers and 1970s readers

Having established a loyal readership through marketing and branding, Virago needed to underline the relevance of interwar reprints for women from the second-wave period. Newly commissioned introductions by well-known contemporary writers highlighted the books' current significance, linking two generations of writers and readers through a sense of shared aims and experiences. Most of the introductions were provided by women writers but there are some exceptions, such as Jonathan Coe's introduction to Lehmann's *Dusty Answer*. Genette suggests that introductions are an important aspect of "positioning", which has particular significance in the case of reprints – "the *temporal* situation of the paratext may also be defined in relation to that of the text" (263-4). The paratext can function to give current relevance to a text, by raising issues relating to contemporary readers and events. Withers' discussion on the temporality of the VMCs illustrates Genette's argument. Withers discusses the ways in which "publicity stories constructed the timeliness of Virago's books" (*Reprints* 3). New introductions for reprinted novels are an important way of repositioning a book for a new political period and for readers of a different generation. Virago's awareness of the importance of the timeliness of the reissued books, together with Callil's astute use of marketing influenced the ways in which books were promoted. An example is Jan Struther's *Mrs Miniver*, which was "published to coincide with the publicity generated by the fiftieth anniversary of World War 2" (author unknown, Add MS 88904/1/40). Virago showed an ability to relate the VMC range to current events, not only to feminist debates, emphasising the relevance of the republished novels to their new audience. Similarly, Virago's understanding of their readers led them to

target bookshops in university towns for promotional campaigns (Add MS 89178/1/45). Marketing the VMCs involved recognising that readers were likely to be found in university towns, in terms of both class and age. Withers points out that, in the 1970s, Virago also benefitted from “the growth of a recognisable readership for left-wing books [...] underpinned by the expansion of independent, radical bookshops” (*Reprints* 11).

Reinterpretations of republished interwar novels challenged male dominated analyses of literature in the interwar years, highlighting meanings that had been ignored or unnoticed. Heilbrun’s discussion of twentieth century literature argues that male critics failed to discuss or notice “the degree to which [...] literature had come to question marriage in all its ramifications” (121). She discusses, in particular, the novels of Henry James, D. H. Lawrence and E. M. Forster. Not overtly discussed by male critics, the books of these writers frequently highlighted the inequality of marriage and its negative impact on women’s lives. The importance of reinterpretation is further emphasised by Showalter’s views on the ways in which feminist readers and critics challenge previous male-dominated interpretations of texts. She argues that feminist literary critics are “calling attention to interpretive strategies that are learned, historically determined, and thereby necessarily gender-inflected” (*New Feminist* 47). Kennard, in promoting the value of feminist literary criticism, discusses “the use of personal material as a deliberate rejection of that objective critical voice many of us were trained by our ‘new critical’ professors to adopt” (141). Promoting the value of personal material contributes to the acceptance of the diary format, perhaps the most personal written material, and

mostly favoured by women for cultural and historical reasons. Genette's analysis of the paratext indicates that paratextual elements, such as introductions and cover design, change over time, so are able to present the text in different ways, reflecting new interpretations "according to periods, cultures, genres, authors, works, editions of the same work" (262).

The predominant ideas in the interwar VMC introductions largely centre on challenging and changing assumptions about women's roles and questioning the dichotomous relationship between personal and private lives. The belief that the personal is political underpinned many of the actions and arguments of non-radical second-wave feminism. Miriam David's elaboration of Rowbotham's ideas argues that second-wave feminists reflected upon domestic issues surrounding the family, marriage, and motherhood, which "transformed personal family matters into power relations and broader political, rather than individual, issues" (28). Ursula Owen relates these arguments to writing, emphasising the importance of books to the second-wave feminist movement. She argues that feminists "found art and politics inextricably connected, [...] believing that daring to expose and discuss hidden [...] topics was a vital basis for attacking social and political issues" (in P. Owen *The Future* 86). She further explains that Virago "came out of the early years of a women's movement that concerned itself with silence [...]. Writing became one weapon to break that silence" (88).

During the earlier phases of women's campaigns, women learnt to be inventive in creating ways to make themselves heard. Women in the early twentieth century encountered the problem of being silenced, and all feminist campaigns

in the first-, second-, and third-waves of feminism have had to use legal and illegal ways to gain a voice. The campaigns have made “use of music, song and poetry [...] as methods of political engagement” (Roseneil in Russell and Jolly 159). Additionally, the suffragette movement employed specific colours in their clothing, giving them a cohesive visibility. By the time of second-wave feminism, some feminists chose to wear clothing that moved away from more feminine images. Subverting the choice of clothing used to identify women’s aims, the image of bra-burning, dungaree-wearing man haters was heavily employed by the mass media to undermine and silence women. Following on from the suffragettes’ use of song and poetry, women campaigning at Greenham Common in the 1980s made creative use of “storytelling and singing , with new songs composed to capture a mood or record a moment, and then passed down through the generations of campers in a shared culture” (Roseneil in Russell and Jolly 167). Women through the decades and through the various feminist campaigns have recognised that the use of a collective voice was vital in order to overcome the silence imposed by a patriarchal society. The focus on a collective voice led to the development of feminist publishing houses in the twentieth century.

Books based on women’s domestic issues and experiences made personal lives overt and political. By highlighting the books’ focus on personal lives, the new introductions offer contemporary interpretations which illustrate how the VMCs challenged existing power relations between women and men. In accordance with feminist arguments on the value of rereading, which offered the opportunity to reinterpret books, the new introductions presented new

thinking on interwar writing. Following the ideas of Adrienne Rich on the value of rereading (in Chapter 2), Joannou suggests that rereading offers insight into the “meaning prevalent at the historical moment of production and to present-day understandings of gendered experience” (*Ladies* 1). Her argument also applies to the process of reading by a new audience of a different generation, influenced by new social experiences and political thinking. The knowledge of gender inequality obtained in consciousness-raising groups, and through reading work by Greer, Friedan, and Rowbotham, enabled women in the 1970s and 1980s to re-evaluate interwar writing by women. Reading work highlighting the restrictions and dangers of childbirth and unwanted pregnancies, for example, – such as Lehmann’s *The Weather in the Streets* – is open to new, critical interpretation at a time of more reliable birth control and changing political values.

Wallace (in Joannou, *Women Writers* 63-75) analyses the content of interwar writing by women, focusing on marriage. She argues that some interwar novels focused on the marriage plot in order to explore how marriage might be changed in response to women’s changing expectations of life in the 1930s. She contends that many interwar women were keen to combine marriage with professional life and that their aims were reflected in the novels of several interwar women writers, including Vera Brittain, Winifred Holtby, and Rebecca West (all republished as VMCs). Wallace also contextualises interwar writing, arguing that women in the 1930s “were acutely aware of historical forces that threatened” the achievements made by women (*Historical Novel* 54). She explains that the British Union of Fascists in the 1930s saw women’s roles as

being in the domestic sphere. Offering a feminist interpretation, Stott indicates similarities between women's lives in the interwar period and the beginning of the second-wave feminist movement. She suggests that, as in the interwar years, during the years after the Second World War and leading up to the WLM women were encouraged to focus on their domestic lives, a sentiment reinforced by the prevalence of views on the benefits of full-time motherhood on children's well-being (in Cochrane 3-4). Beddoe comments similarly on attitudes to women who wished to maintain jobs after the First World War: "How quickly praise for our gallant wartime girls gave way to attacks on women who persisted in working" (3).

Whilst the concern for children's stability and welfare was an understandable reaction to the upheavals and displacements of the First and Second World Wars, women started to become resentful of their enforced return to the home and domestic duties, taking them back to pre-war and interwar lifestyles after being in paid work during the war. Rowbotham suggests that, in the interwar period when jobs were scarce, it was "exceedingly difficult [...] to defend women's rights and needs" ("A Taste of Freedom"). Rowbotham's argument highlights the continuing significance for the WLM of the VMC interwar writers, who presented challenges to social expectations and women's lack of choices through their books and their actions. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* addresses a similar sense of discontent among women in the 1960s, arguing that "we can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: 'I want something more than my husband and my children and my home'" (29). Many

discontented women during the period of the WLM found that the protagonists of the books reprinted as VMCs shared their experiences.

The second-wave feminist fight for equal rights included the demand for equal access to education, and equality in paid work for women, leading to women's recognition that marriage was no longer the only career option available to, or desired by, them. WLM campaigns concentrated on the lack of childcare provision, which kept women with children trapped at home and unable to pursue careers or be financially independent. With greater access to higher education, many women in the 1970s and 1980s opted for careers; leaving home for education rather than marriage opened up the possibility of leading independent lives which broke away from the traditionally expected move from the parental home to the marital home. Like Vera Brittain herself, one of her female characters in *Honourable Estate* "thankfully cherished the freedom and privacy that even at twenty-eight would not have been accessible to a young unmarried women of her type and background before the War" (449). Freedom and privacy became far more accessible during second-wave feminism. The development of the birth control pill also freed women from the inevitability of childbearing, enabling them to either avoid or plan pregnancies. Like F. M. Mayor, who was "unenthusiastic about marriage for its own sake" and opted for a career, many women in the 1970s and 1980s questioned the idea of marriage as the only life available to them (Janet Morgan's introduction to *The Squire's Daughter* vi). In a similar way, the Six Point Group campaigned for improvements in women's lives, recognising that many women either wanted to, or had to, work in paid employment.

Other interwar writers similarly criticised the lack of educational and professional choices for women. A letter to *The Evening News* in 1922 from Elizabeth von Arnim complains that marriage is seen to be “the most esteemed of the professions open to women” and this sense of inevitability was one of the main issues raised by the second-wave feminist movement (in Add MS 88904/1/422). After criticising women’s lack of choices, von Arnim argues that, rather than the expected happy outcome of marriage, women should pursue independence. In marriage, “she loves him, and he loves her, she makes him comfortable and he clothes her, she gives him children and he keeps her warm”; Von Arnim suggests that, for women, it is “better to have less to eat and pay for it themselves” (Add MS 88904/1/422). Von Arnim’s argument spoke to feminist campaigns for financial independence for women.

Echoing the cover comments on *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and almost fifty years after von Arnim’s letter, Greer’s seminal work *The Female Eunuch*, criticises both the myth and the institution of marriage. She argues that it is a myth perpetuated by “escapist literature of love and marriage” (214). She contends that most of the women who acted upon the myth “make an act of faith that despite day-to-day difficulties they are happy” (215). Referring to women’s growing unhappiness with the expected role of a wife, writer Ann Sebba’s introduction to Enid Bagnold’s *The Happy Foreigner* draws attention to the attitude of Fanny, the protagonist, who recognised that her happiness did not depend on a man and that she was able to ensure her own emotional wellbeing. Sebba comments on “this refusal to surrender to the emotional dependence expected of her sex” (xi). Rose Macaulay’s *Crewe Train* is

described in writer Jane Emery's introduction as "a story of the trapping of a child of nature by sex, love, marriage, social convention, domesticity, pregnancy and gossip" (xi). Emery continues by explaining that Macaulay had presented the heroine, Denham Dobie, as "a comic scenario of an attempted escape from female duties unpalatable to Rose Macaulay" but that ultimately the reader feels Denham's pain when she "discovers the wife's life is forced to conform to that of the husband" (xii). In Macaulay's *Told By An Idiot*, A. N. Wilson's introduction points to the contemporary appeal of the book, commenting that "today, one still feels that many of its points stand [...] we still inflict needless misery on ourselves [...] because of the rigid way in which we consider the roles of the two genders" (xvi). Writer, biographer, and columnist, Wilson is one of the few men to contribute introductions to the VMC series. Shared attitudes to marriage and family across generations are also highlighted in Jane Marcus' introduction to West's *The Judge* which describes how West challenges "our assumptions about love, marriage and the family [...] in the most fundamental way" (no page number).

Marriage as an institution was criticised by many second-wave feminists for its inherent benefits to men; as the heads of households, they controlled all financial decisions for the family. This was a situation that still existed in the late 1970s, with women unable to get a mortgage or a loan without a man's signature. When she obtained a business loan in the early days of *Virago*, Callil needed two men as guarantors (*Virago: Changing* 00:10:32-36). Discussing West's work on relationships between men and women in *The Thinking Reed* (1936), writer Victoria Glendinning's introduction draws attention to the

incompatibility of values and perceptions of gender roles in a male-dominated society “and the values and perceptions of women” (vi). Introducing Bagnold’s *The Squire* (1938, republished 1987), Sebba comments on the book’s focus on the changing nature of marriage. Referring to the main character, she writes that, by the age of forty-four, she recognises “that she is no longer dependent on men acting as her alcohol and stimulant”, adding that “men can no longer light her up, as they once had” (ix). The above introductions and comments present attacks on patriarchal views of marriage as an institution and on the myth of marriage as the principal aim of women – a myth with which most girls were raised prior to the WLM.

Many of the new introductions discuss how the writers and/or their protagonists, took control of their lives, refusing to be limited by the expectations of a patriarchal society. Morgan’s introductions to Mayor’s work frequently mention the ways in which Mayor “repeatedly sought independence from her family” (*The Squire’s Daughter* vi). Like most women at the time, Mayor’s choices were limited – “the most obvious escape route was marriage” (*The Rector’s Daughter* xiii). Within these limitations Mayor nevertheless made her own choices – faced with three options, acting, writing or marriage, she tried acting. Rejecting marriage, and being unsuccessful at acting, she “had a shot at her other escape route – writing” (viii). Discussing West, Marcus states that by 1922 “the name Rebecca West was a household word for the independent career woman” (*The Judge*, 1980, no page number). She elaborates on West’s career: “she has become this century’s great feminist literary critic, philosopher, novelist, historian and journalist [...] familiar [...] in England and America” (*The Judge*).

These strong, independent writers provided strong characters in their novels – women able to take control of their lives. In Bagnold's *The Happy Foreigner*, Sebba comments that Fanny's recognition of her ability to be independent adds to her happiness and empowers her: "Once she knows she can be happy without him she feels invincible" (xiv). Sebba compares Fanny to Bagnold, saying that Fanny's "refusal to surrender to the emotional dependence of her sex exposes a toughness shared by [...] her creator" (xi). Emery's introduction to *Crewe Train* draws attention to the independence of Macaulay, saying that she "controlled her own life, made many friends and did not depend completely on [her partner, Gerald O'Donovan] for a sense of herself" (xv). Macauley's novel is a satire on social norms, marriage, and women's lives. The heroine is presented as "a caricature of a young-woman-as-a-twelve-year-old-boy in order to put in [her] mouth and mind words and thoughts echoing [Macaulay's] own criticisms of fussily conformist adult society" (xi). Presenting strong women, both as characters and writers, provides inspiring role models and shows women readers that taking control and rejecting patriarchal expectations is possible. The new introductions drew attention to the books' criticisms of social norms. They reinterpreted the interwar books through the lens of a later period, offering criticisms of patriarchal attitudes to women – attitudes presented by the interwar writers but not discussed by male critics.

The questioning of assumptions about marriage and family brought about by second-wave feminist debates impacted upon women's sense of identity in the 1970s and 1980s. By challenging their roles in society, women argued against

subordination within patriarchy and questioned the stereotypical views associated with women. Rosamond Lehmann in a 1983 article, writes that, after her marriage, “the problems of identity and meaning started to become acute” (Add MS 88904/1/249). The work of many VMC interwar writers relates to questions of identity and the introductions discuss their interest in exploring the changing nature of women’s self-image. Morgan’s introduction to Mayor’s *The Squire’s Daughter* explains Mayor’s “obsession with a woman’s identity, and the nature of the choices that may present themselves before her” (xii). Morgan also comments that Mayor’s attempt to pursue an acting career was partly because “when she pretended to be someone else, she knew who she was” (vii). Experiencing the world of paid work impacts upon identity in West’s *The Harsh Voice*, and Pringle’s introduction explains that the character “cannot be content to be a wife and mother after she had ‘learnt to brood over Wall Street lists’. She is then gripped by ambition” (ix). The protagonist’s discontent would have been familiar to women in the 1970s and 1980s who were frustrated by the limited expectations and opportunities imposed on them by a patriarchal system, particularly after taking advantage of entering higher education.

Stemming from Friedan’s work on women’s isolation and depression, feminist debates discussed women’s identity in relation to a community of women, emphasising the importance of sisterhood. The reasons for women’s discontent were shown to be based on social limitations, not on individual failings. Mayor’s 1913 novel, *The Third Miss Symons*, focuses on the unhappiness of the protagonist: “It is difficult to imagine both the claustrophobia and the enervating oppressiveness of the tedious lives Henrietta and her kind were obliged to

pursue and, even more, to sympathise with a woman so depressed, so lacking in energy and spirit as to submit to its restrictions without a struggle” (Hill no page number). Although *The Third Miss Symons* is not an interwar book, I have included it as Janet Morgan refers to it frequently in her introductions to Mayor’s two later works, discussing it as the foundation of the other novels. Mayor’s description is almost identical to Friedan’s discussion of “the problem that has no name” in *The Feminine Mystique*; she writes of the “sense of dissatisfaction” in which women asked “the silent question: ‘Is this all?’” (13). Greer also raises the issue of women experiencing a lack of purpose and confidence related to a sense of isolation and lack of community. She suggests that the problem is exacerbated by women’s experiences of paid employment, arguing that “the working girl who marries, works for a period after her marriage and retires to breed, is hardly equipped for the isolation of the nuclear household” (224). The second-wave feminist movement encouraged women to develop a sense of community and shared experiences, arguing that isolation and depression – the feeling of alienation and powerlessness – were caused by a patriarchal society. Angela Holdsworth, in her 1988 book, discusses the National Housewives’ Register, started in 1960, which grew until “in the 1970s, it topped 25000 members” (31). The register had been started to overcome the isolation of women who “were reasonably well educated [...] and had had reasonably satisfying jobs” (31-2). It was a means of finding like-minded women for mutual support. As with Anderson’s concept of imagined communities, the National Housewives’ Register offered a sense of belonging and support to women who did not know each other. In this sense, the Register fulfilled a need in the same way as the “club” (to use Goodings’ word) that Virago offered.

The recognition of common experiences enabled women to act collectively for social change. The WLM was characterised by the “non-hierarchical organization of early-consciousness-raising collectives” (Whelehan 79). The sense of community is emphasised in several of the newly commissioned VMC introductions. Marcus’s introduction to West’s *The Judge* argues that “West has created an adversary relationship between writer and reader which holds us in her grip” (1980). Morgan emphasises the importance of the success of Mayor’s *The Rector’s Daughter* (1924, republished 1987) which was well-received by both reviewers and “by many of her women friends, who knew what she was driving at” (xviii). Marcus also refers to the continuity of shared ideas between writers, suggesting the idea of a community of women writers. Discussing the seventeen-year-old suffragette in West’s *The Judge*, she comments that she “is the natural daughter of the English nineteenth-century novel as it was shaped by women’s hands. Jane Austen, George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë would recognise in her their own heroines” (1980). A different sense of community and continuity is the theme of Bagnold’s *The Squire* and Sebba writes that “just as Caroline is the squire as a young woman, Lucy portrays her as a girl. The squire, believing she is one in a line of women, her mother before her, the child Lucy behind, takes ‘a stoic pleasure in *procession*’” (xiv).

These comments promote themes raised in the interwar novels that resonated with the feminist movement and to women readers in the 1970s and 1980s. Sisterhood was a word used frequently when women talked of other women and groups of women, often of different age groups, all offering support to each

other and sharing experiences. Goodings writes that “‘In sisterhood’ should read as a reminder that we’re all in this together” (*A Bite* 50). The ways in which the VMCs were presented, with the covers and introductions offering relevant interpretations, represented an important contribution to building communities of women. Callil’s decision to commission new introductions from women writers exemplified the possibility of women working together professionally, reflecting the model of Virago as a professional, all-female publishing house. The introductions emphasised the sense of shared aims and experiences by focusing on matters of importance to the VMC readers of the 1970s and 1980s, although the readers, and writers, were predominantly limited to those from white, middle-class backgrounds. Coe comments on the middle-class background of many of the writers republished by Virago, suggesting that the “the writers themselves all seemed to have been breathing the same fragrant upper-middle-class air” (*The Observer*). The newly commissioned introductions underline some of the most important questions and challenges raised in both women’s interwar writing and second-wave feminism. Focusing on women working together and interpreting Virago’s republished interwar books from the perspective of women’s non-radical second-wave opinions emphasised the relevance of the VMCs to new readers. The introductions highlighted the commonalities between two generations of women, uniting readers and writers

A separate study could analyse any ways in which the VMC introductions may have changed over time, although changes may also be due to different writers’ interests in a book for which they write the introduction. Elizabeth Bowen provided the introduction for the first VMC, *Frost in May*, in which she

emphasises the importance of recognising the book as a classic: “It is not the only school story to be a classic; but I can think of no other that is a work of art” (*Frost in May* v). In contrast, the introductions I analyse within this chapter focus on the relevance of the books’ themes to women during the WLM years. Jan Struther’s *Try Anything Twice*, one of the last VMCs to be published within my period of study in 1990, has an introduction by writer Valerie Grove. Like the works studied in this chapter, she draws attention to the ongoing interest of Struther’s book: “In small particulars, her essays may be period pieces, but in their larger truths they are universal and transcend time and class” (*Try Anything Twice* xvi). Grove’s introduction suggests the relevance of Struther’s work to the WLM’s focus on the wider political importance of women’s lives. Both the presentation and promotion of the VMCs were carefully managed and designed in order to maximise their appeal. Whilst the presentation made the VMCs popular for the target readership, they were not part of a mass market, or in Bourdieu’s terminology, part of the dominant field of large-scale production. The VMCs became less marginal through Virago’s use of paratextual elements to ensure their readership, but they did not entirely move out of the field of restricted production. But they did offer a challenge to the dominant field of production, and to cultural standards, by making women’s writing financially successful. The presentation of the VMCs played an important part in helping to develop a sense of community for second-wave feminists, reflecting the WLM’s focus on sisterhood. The sense of belonging enabled women to share ideas and to make themselves heard through a collective voice. In the next chapter I analyse a range of VMCs by four writers, illustrating how, through active reading

on the part of Virago and its audience, the books themselves fostered a sense of community and reflected many themes that were prominent in the WLM.

Chapter 4

“How was it that anyone living a comparatively sheltered life of forty years ago could think and behave so exactly like me?”: The relevance of interwar VMCs to women in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The appearance of the books was a major attraction, but it is important to consider the extent to which the content of the VMCs matched their promotional image as books for Virago's target audience. Virago presented the VMCs as books for non-radical feminists: novels that told women's stories. The unspoken implication was that the VMCs told the stories of all women's lives, but the thinking behind the VMCs was based on essentialist views of all women having the same experiences and aims, whereas the books were, in reality, aimed at a very specific readership. The careful marketing and design of the range curated by Virago helped to make them collectors' items for many white, middle-class women during the 1980s and onwards. The popularity of the range of reprints led to the VMCs being part of the mainstream: non-radical books that were widely read by the intended audience. The reprints maintained a position, in terms of my extension of Bourdieu's theory (Chapter 3), within a mainstream restricted field of production, rather than a field of large-scale production. Virago's curation and branding ensured that the books appealed to the market of WLM non-radical feminists, rather than to the mass market. Virago's concentration on branding was an important factor in selling the books to the target audience. But I suggest that branding alone would not sufficiently explain the success of the range: Virago's interpretation and promotion of the feminist

content needed to be matched by the feminists' reading of the books. In this chapter I analyse a range of interwar VMCs in order to consider whether, through a process of interpretive, active reading, the appearance and the content of the books correspond. Active reading was, as I will demonstrate, promoted by Virago's presentation and marketing, encouraging readers to interpret the VMCs through the experiences of second-wave feminist arguments and aims.

Readers came to expect a particular type of book when buying from the VMC range, a suggestion supported by surveys carried out by Virago in 1988. Interviews of women in bookshops led the researchers to conclude that, based on brand recognition, "many people view Virago as a feminist press and the VMC series as feminist novels" (Data Analysis of surveys Add MS 88904/2/11). The expectations of the audience perhaps became a self-fulfilling prophecy – second-wave feminists bought the VMCs and read them as feminist novels, actively reading relevance into them, and expecting to find relevance. Schweikart discusses the concept of the reader as "an active producer of meaning", an idea applicable to the Virago readers and emphasised by Virago's curation (in Showalter *Speaking* 24). Reading republished novels written for, and by, an earlier generation of readers can offer new interpretations of texts, as new experiences allow different readings. David Lodge suggests that texts "have gaps and indeterminacies which may be filled by different readers in different ways" (159). Women who shared experiences in the second-wave period could "fill in the gaps" in ways that made the VMCs relevant to their experiences of the WLM and to the WLM campaigns. Humble adds to

Schweikart's argument, suggesting that the active consumption of a book is an experience that "binds the woman reader into a community of other readers" (9). Virago's creation of commonalities between generations of women engendered a sense of imagined communities. The sense of community and the books' appeal to a wide – but specific – readership were instrumental in Virago's challenge to male-dominated literary culture. Kennard suggests that the increased numbers of female and feminist readers – a community of readers – brought about by the WLM and the establishment of feminist publishers has resulted in a "wealth of feminist criticism", enabling reinterpretations of writing from female perspectives (145). These reinterpretations redressed the balance by offering literary criticisms that challenged the tradition of male critics and male literary interpretations.

There has been a lack of investigation into reasons for the popularity of the interwar VMCs among middle-class women in the 1970s and 1980s, and I intend to demonstrate the relevance of their content to the second-wave feminist generation by looking in detail at the work of four VMC writers. Analysing a range of interwar VMCs will add to our understanding of the publisher's role in curating the republished books for a specific audience, presenting them in ways that reflected feminist campaigns during the interwar years and the 1980s. Looking in depth at the novels will help to explain both the similarities in women's lives over two generations, and the popularity of republished interwar novels by women. Additionally, questions are raised implicitly about the reasons for these writers having been allowed to go out of print. Coonan raises this point in her discussion on reviving books. Asked in

2019 why books go out of print, Coonan suggests that there are several reasons, including the fact that “most of the acquiring editors at the time were male” (*Revival* 00:07:09-14). Her argument demonstrates the importance of Callil’s intention of redressing the balance when starting the VMC range.

I have chosen to analyse interwar books by Rosamond Lehmann, E. H. Young, E. M. Delafield, and Winifred Holtby, partly because they each had several books republished as VMCs. Being English, they are also representative of the majority of VMC writers republished between 1978 and 1990 (see Appendix). Although many books by white writers from other countries were republished, as well as a small minority of books by writers of colour, the list largely comprised novels by white, English, heterosexual women. I refer here to writers who are specifically English, rather than British: as the Appendix shows, there are ten Irish writers with VMCs during the period of study, seven Scottish writers, and two Welsh writers. Although some of them had several titles published as VMCs, the vast majority of books were by English writers. These four writers differ both stylistically and in their views on women and feminism and their work reflects their different outlooks and stylistic choices. Stylistically, Lehmann’s books might initially be read as romances offering no challenge to the gendered status quo, but, as Simons argues, her books expose the myth of romance (83 and 85). Young wrote within a tradition of domestic novels, in which she presented the home as a site of gender conflict and of women’s agency to challenge patriarchal norms within the private domain. In her most popular books, Delafield used the diary format, which she subverted, producing a fictional diary intended for public consumption. She used this fictional form in

order to make fun of families and gendered roles within them whilst highlighting the narrator's role as a breadwinner, presenting a woman involved in both the private and the public spheres. (The relationship between gender and the diary genre is explored by Raoul, Huff and Dale Spender, and their explorations are discussed below in my analysis of Delafield's work). Holtby's books are predominantly based on rural lives, presented in a traditional narrative style. But her work presents new ideas without using a modernist format; she discusses spinsterhood as a viable, and sometimes welcome, alternative to marriage, and she subverts any sense of the rural idyll. Her female protagonists often have to choose between the private and public spheres.

The feminist credentials of the four writers vary considerably. Lehmann, in spite of being a graduate of Girton College, Cambridge, and being "one of a new breed of women, enjoying a freedom of movement and expression that had been denied her predecessors" (Simons 9), often looked to the past and "the more conventional way of life that had always been familiar to her" (Simons 11). Rosemary Hill's review of Hastings' biography of Lehmann discusses the recurring theme of Lehmann's nostalgia as a contrast to the modernity of her subject matter, "just as her sensitivity to women and her obsessive interest in female experience sat oddly with her *entrenched anti-feminism*" (Hill 2002, my emphasis). As I discuss, Lehmann's novels present women in unsatisfactory relationships, and she deprives them of the agency to make alternative decisions. E. H. Young was a supporter of the suffrage movement and contributed stories to the feminist journal *Time and Tide*. Her work offers different perspectives to those of Lehmann. Her domestic novels present

women who take control of their lives, accepting that they are limited by patriarchal values but refusing to accept that they have no choices or agency. Mezei and Briganti suggest that Young's work "suited the questioning of social conventions and of morality" (2001 7). They further suggest that her characters "resist [...] a traditional femininity", presenting women who reflect feminist campaigns of the interwar years, campaigns that fought for improvements to women's lives through non-radical means, just as Young's characters challenged gender roles. (318). Delafield is described by Nicola Beaman as "not a radical feminist, [but] a realistic one" (introduction to *The Way Things Are* x). Delafield's books offer characters who can make fun of patriarchal standards and who have the talents, abilities, and desires to take on necessary paid employment, blurring the distinctions between public and private lives more than both Lehmann and Young. Delafield was involved in *Time and Tide* as "a valued member of the board" (Powell 73). The magazine is frequently mentioned in her *Provincial Lady* books and Delafield often contributed to the journal, sharing views with Lady Rhondda on feminism. Powell explains that Rhondda became "attached to the feminist cause" (73) and Delafield's books reflect her critical view of patriarchal social norms, as I discuss in the analysis of her work.

Although, like Lehmann, Holtby was part of the generation of women graduates in the early twentieth century, in contrast to Lehmann's interest in the past and conventionality, Holtby was an active campaigner for feminism and pacifism, influenced by the First World War and by the threat of another war during the 1930s Holtby is the only one of the chosen writers who was overtly feminist.

She was known not only for her fiction writing, but also for her contributions to journals and newspapers, including *Time and Tide*. She became a director of *Time and Tide* in 1926 at the invitation of its founder, Lady Rhondda. Joannou writes that “the appointment confirmed Rhondda’s respect for Holtby’s acumen as a professional journalist and placed her at the hub of feminist activity, political ferment, and cultural commentary” (in Regan ix). Holtby’s feminist beliefs and campaigning are summarised by Joannou as “an ‘equal rights’” feminism (ix). Beddoe explains that feminism in the 1920s split into two different camps. She argues that Lady Rhondda and Holtby were “‘old feminists’ [...] who regarded feminism as being about equal rights”. In the opposing camp were “‘new feminists’ [who] concentrated on the special position of women as mothers” (136). Beddoe associates the different types of feminism with different social classes, suggesting that women with, or aiming for, successful careers supported old feminism’s fight for equal rights, while “working-class women had more to gain from new feminism” and its focus on women in the home (139). Holtby’s feminist ideals reflected her lifestyle as a writer and an unmarried woman. Holtby also produced a critical study of Virginia Woolf in 1932 and *Women and a Changing Civilisation* in 1936, which presents her account of women’s history and the feminist movement. Joannou argues that *Women and a Changing Civilisation* adds to Woolf’s work in *A Room of One’s Own*, with both writers focusing on the changing position and attitudes of women during the interwar years (in Regan ix). While Woolf and Holtby shared some views on equality and gender struggles, they differed in their choice of writing style. Holtby wrote in a non-experimental, narrative style, and Shaw sees Holtby’s study of Woolf as the representation of “a coming together of two kinds of

writers and writing during the inter-war period: modernist and traditional, highbrow and middlebrow, experimental and conservative, innovative and familiar” (in Regan 52).

Although Lehmann, Young and Delafield were not campaigning feminists, the presentation of the books of all four writers and the active reading encouraged by Virago illustrate the ways in which their books offered challenges to the socio-political status quo, highlighting their relevance to second-wave feminists. Virago’s presentation of the VMCs as feminist novels, particularly through their cover comments and introductions as discussed in Chapter 3, was designed to emphasise generational commonalities and to encourage readers to view the books as feminist novels, or novels open to being read as feminist texts. I investigate how Virago chose to present these four authors to the reading public, referring to any relevant archival information as well as to the paratextual elements, including marketing, introductions, cover illustrations, and cover notes. Analysis of the styles employed by these four writers indicates the extent to which they subverted the stylistic genres emphasised by Virago’s curation and presentation. The styles subverted are, respectively, the romance genre, the domestic novel, the diary format, and the rural romance idyll. I argue that they employed genres frequently associated with women’s writing but used them to question gender roles in patriarchal society. By analysing the chosen novels thematically, I illustrate how themes of importance and familiarity to second-wave feminists were evident, but not necessarily overt, in the novels written forty and fifty years earlier. These were novels that, to varying degrees, exhibited the influence of interwar feminist arguments and the aims of the Six

Point Group, and Virago's curation emphasised the similarities between the non-radical campaigns of interwar feminism and the WLM.

Republishing books based on female experiences and perspectives was a fundamental aspect of the movement to make literature a focal point of second-wave feminism. A 1999 memo from Jill Foulston at Virago referring to Lehmann's work summarised Virago's intentions in curating the VMCs, saying that the books "should encapsulate something of the beauty and power of women's voices and sustain the extraordinarily rich tradition of women's writing" (Add MS 88904/1/248). Joannou argues that "women-centred texts which are still read by women (even if they are not feminist texts) must always be of interest to the feminist critic as the essential building blocks of a politics of feminist change" (*Ladies* 158). Todd's discussion of literary history considers the differences between male and female experiences, concluding that the female experience cannot be understood "outside of the patriarchy in which we and women of the past have all lived" (138). She stresses the importance of female perspectives in literature as a means of demonstrating the different experiences of women and men in a patriarchal society. Reiterating Woolf's earlier arguments put forward in *A Room of One's Own*, Penny Brown elaborates on Todd's discussion, explaining that "the nature of women's experience is different from that of men, the social pressures and expectations are different, the options are different and the ways in which women react to experience is different" (2-3). Making women's experiences and views central to writing challenges patriarchal values in literary culture.

Discussing interwar women writers and the importance of their women-centred texts, Simons considers their focus on the representation of “their own concerns as women, to question the legitimacy of practices that exclude or marginalise such concerns” (2). Lonsdale suggests that the work of interwar women writers “foregrounded issues concerning women such as divorce, living independently, and inequalities in the workplace” (*Female Friendships*). Lonsdale’s argument is particularly applicable to the novels of Holtby, which reflected her own lifestyle as a single woman. The writers’ concerns presented the upheavals of the interwar years from female perspectives. For many women, the social expectation of marriage and children became less inevitable after the First World War, with more women staying single and having to support themselves, as discussed, for example, in Nicholson’s *Singled Out – How Two Million Women Survived Without Men After the First World War* (2007). Those who married sometimes expected more than the promise of position and security, but not necessarily happiness, that was offered by a socially suitable marriage, a marriage that satisfied societal and familial expectations. Lehmann commented on the inevitability surrounding her first marriage: “I don’t think I was really in love with him, or he with me, but it was very suitable, and everyone was pleased” (in Chamberlain 152). Reflecting the number of women who remained single after the war, some books by women writers of the interwar period featured a single woman as the protagonist. E. H. Young’s *Miss Mole* (1930) and Winifred Holtby’s *Poor Caroline* (1935) – both republished as VMCs – presented single women as the main character of the novels. Even when her books focused on the lives of married women, Holtby frequently promoted spinsterhood in favour of marriage, particularly in *The Crowded Street*.

Joannou's discussion of the unmarried woman as the subject of interwar novels explains that the topic was frequently found in women's novels of the 1920s, reflecting the specific historical situation. There was much talk after the War of the large numbers of spinsters, and Joannou suggests that "the terms 'superfluous woman' and 'spinster' became interchangeable", with negative connotations associated with the word spinster (*Ladies* 78). But the negative image of unmarried women that was promoted by patriarchal social values led to women writers contesting the negativity through their writing. Joannou argues that "women writers felt personally the weight of ideologies which constantly threatened to reduce the spinster to the status of object" (88). The novels of writers, including Holtby, Mayor, and Young, illustrate women's refusal to accept the patriarchal denigration of unmarried women, and Joannou concludes that interwar spinster novels "invest the life of the spinster with dignity [and] these texts were progressively aligned within the wider social and political debates of the day" (101). Other books of the period, not based on the concept of the spinster novel, portrayed women in dull marriages, including Lehmann's *A Note in Music* (1930) and Holtby's *Anderby Wold*, while books such as E. M. Delafield's *Diary of a Provincial Lady* (1930) portrayed a married woman who was pursuing a career and juggling finances, at the same time as caring for her husband and children (with paid help, but keeping the responsibility). The themes of many books written by women in the interwar years reflect ways in which the major social changes of the period affected women's lives.

Some interwar writers used their writing to subvert the marriage plot of romance novels, exploring how marriage might be changed to reflect women's increasing

confidence and expectations “in sexual, political and professional life” (Wallace in Joannou *Women Writers* 63). Brittain’s *Honourable Estate* is perhaps the clearest example of a writer challenging the norms of patriarchal marriage. Gindin comments on the changing representations of sex and love in thirties’ writing, arguing that “the treatment of sexuality in terms of human feelings, emotions and psychological responses is particularly noteworthy”, offering a different perspective on relationships (15). This is seen in E. H. Young’s *Jenny Wren*, which focuses on the relationships between a mother and her two daughters, and their relationships with men. Drawing attention to the book’s relevance to its new generation of readers, Sally Beaman’s introduction to the novel emphasises Young’s treatment of norms relating to sexual decorum in her novels. She suggests that, by her emphasis on the women’s feelings and emotions, Young “questions and mocks [...] moral assumptions” (ix). The focus on unmarried women and on relationships between women in interwar writing reflects campaigns to view women independently, rather than as belonging to men, or only able to exist within heterosexual relationships – ideas that were relevant to both interwar women and those of the WLM years.

Women’s attitudes to sex and relationships changed dramatically in the 1970s with the development of the contraceptive pill – allowing women more freedom and confidence – altering their views on marriage and relationships. At a time when the second-wave feminist movement was encouraging women to question their identities and to challenge the patriarchal nature of marriage as an institution, interwar novels that had asked similar questions a generation earlier could speak to the new generation of readers. The freedom envisaged from

better contraception was commented upon by one of the main women characters in Brittain's *Honourable Estate*. Attitudes to sex outside marriage were questioned in the face of the First World War and the likelihood of young men being killed. On being told that methods to avoid pregnancy were possible, Ruth, a young nurse in France, says "it seems as if it might mean quite a revolution in the position of women if they needn't have children unless they want them" (371). Interwar writers' discussions of women's perspectives in a changing society and, particularly, of changing attitudes to identity and marriage, were presented by Virago as both relevant and important to second-wave readers. These commonalities helped to develop a sense of a community of women, empowering them to develop ways of challenging patriarchal norms.

The changing social traditions and assumptions apparent in many novels of the 1920s and 1930s are closely linked to a sense of betrayal. In addition to the belief that the previous generation had let down the younger generation whose lives were lost or damaged by the First World War, the 1930s were overshadowed by the likelihood of another major war; the growing threat of the Second World War is reflected in some of Holtby's writing. Holtby believed, like Woolf, that the spread of fascism indicated a promotion of extreme masculinity that disadvantaged women. Fascism's ideology promotes the domestic role of women as carers and producers of the next generation of genetically acceptable children – women's roles would be firmly in the home, not outside. Shaw suggests that fascism's "ominous militarism was of concern [to Holtby] but its domestic ideology was no less disturbing to her" (*Stream* 157-8). Both Woolf and Holtby viewed the move towards the war through feminist eyes.

Brittain's 1936 book, *Honourable Estate*, reflects the bitterness and betrayal felt by the generation impacted by the First World War. One of the characters, whose fiancée had just been killed on the Somme, bitterly says: "All this 'ere talk about waitin' for marriage, with these bloody battles goin' on and yer boy at the front – it's all my eye! The old 'uns have 'ad their bit of fun and no interference, but they'd rather see the lot of us bleedin' corpses than let us 'ave ours if it means breakin' their blarsted rules and regerlytions!" (322). As exemplified by Brittain, Gindin comments on betrayal as a frequent theme in interwar writing, arguing that "in social, political, religious, personal or sexual terms, referring to both individuals and societies, the pain of betrayal, of disastrously broken promise or expectation, reverberates through all the literature" (16).

Betrayal is evident in the writing of both genders, but it is manifested in different ways for women and men. The above quote from Brittain's novel (published as a VMC in 2000) presents the betrayal associated with the war, but from a woman's perspective, rather than focusing on life in the army or in battle.

Having initially disliked Brittain's work, in 1980 Callil wrote to Claire Hardisty that she agreed with her thought "that Vera Brittain reflected very accurately not only the historical incidents of a very eventful period but the preoccupations of large numbers of people [...] Of all the novels, the one I much prefer is *Honourable Estate*" (in Add MS88904/1/194). Whilst Brittain also indicates the potential for positive long-term effects of the war on women's lives and the social norms affecting them, Holtby and Woolf saw betrayal in the damage likely to be

caused to women's emancipation if fascism became the dominant ideology. Much interwar writing reflects the unfulfilled hopes for change in social norms and in the pre-war restrictions on women's lives, reflecting the desire for improvements for women during the interwar period. But many of the improvements turned out to be temporary, as shown in Lehmann's work.

Lehmann's writing, in particular *The Weather in the Streets*, portrays women betrayed by men in both actions and expectations – “Olivia of *The Weather in the Streets* is [...] the woman on the outside, betraying and in her turn betrayed” (Laski). Lehmann presents betrayal through the eyes and lives of women, showing a different form of betrayal to that experienced by men – she portrays it on a very personal level. Wallace suggests that Lehmann's work reflects the promise of post-war opportunities for women, “particularly university education and sexual freedom” (*Sisters* 160). She argues that Lehmann's frequent use of the love triangle is a response to the promises leading nowhere and offering a “lack of new alternatives to the wife/mistress/spinster roles” (160). Women in the interwar years also felt betrayed by the expectation that their role was still in the home, after being able to choose paid employment, as they had done during the war. The expectations of women's domestic roles were challenged by Holtby and Brittain's lifestyle choices in which they shared domestic duties so that they could both work as writers. These expectations were encouraged by insults to working women and by government policies that financially favoured stay-at-home women and made men financially responsible for supporting their family and home. In a similar way, second-wave feminists frequently felt betrayed by raised expectations of a more equal and fulfilling lifestyle after the

Equal Pay Act of 1970 and the Equal Opportunity Act of 1972 – expectations that were not adequately fulfilled. The gap between women's desires for more equal opportunities and treatment and the realities of social pressures was similar for both generations of women.

The sense of dissatisfaction and betrayal felt by both interwar and WLM women was exacerbated by the growth of the middle-classes and the resultant isolation of women's lives in the home. Humble comments on the rapid growth of suburban housing in the interwar period, which became "the heartland of a new middle-class existence" (110). It was an existence that felt isolated because of the physical distance between the new houses and urban centres, a physical isolation that was intensified by an ideological focus on domesticity and the life of the housewife during both post-war periods. Moving from large, unmanageable homes to new ones designed to enhance the life of the housewife is reflected in books republished as VMCs, most obviously in Lettice Cooper's 1936 *The New House* (VMC 1987), based on the move of the remaining (female) members of a family to a new, easy-to-maintain home, while the old family home is demolished to make room for a new housing estate. In her introduction, writer Maureen Duffy describes Cooper's book as exploring the lives of women "at a clearly defined place and time in English society which has begun to change for the majority of people but not for its women" (xv).

As with other books written by women of the period, the suburban idyll is subverted in Cooper's work, with the least likeable characters living unhappy, isolated lives in new suburban villas where fitting in with neighbours becomes

all-important. As during the interwar years, house building rapidly increased after the Second World War, exacerbating the isolation of women. Women influenced by second-wave feminism in the 1970s reacted against the ideology of the housewife and the post-Second World War pressure for women to maintain the perfect home and family and to offer social stability, finding familiarity in the attitudes portrayed by VMC writers such as Cooper. In a similar way, Holtby unsettles ideas of the rural idyll, exposing its harshness and difficulty for women. The expectations to maintain a perfect home and adhere to the social norms of expected behaviour in a harsh and impoverished farming environment are represented and challenged most clearly in Holtby's 1927 *The Land of Green Ginger*.

Virago's targeted readers were influenced by second-wave feminism and they could approach interwar writing with ideas and experiences that enabled a new understanding of the VMCs. Looking at a range of interwar novels in depth demonstrates the relevance of the work in the late 1970s and the 1980s. I will consider Lehmann first, as the least feminist of the writers I am analysing, followed, in order, by Young, Delafield and Holtby, thus finishing with the most actively feminist of the writers under discussion. Analysis of Lehmann's work illustrates her challenge to the romance genre and her critique of patriarchal norms which she blames for many of the limitations of women's lives.

Rosamond Lehmann (1901- 1990)

Virago republished seven of Lehmann's novels, as well as her 1967 autobiographical work *The Swan in the Evening* (revised version published by Virago in 1982). In this chapter I will consider her first four novels: *Dusty Answer* (1927, VMC 2000), *A Note in Music* (1930, VMC 1982), *Invitation to the Waltz* (1932, VMC 1981) and *The Weather in the Streets* (1936, VMC 1981). As previously explained, *Dusty Answer*, Lehmann's first novel, was a late inclusion to the VMC range due to copyright issues. Although it was not republished during the WLM years, I include it as its themes lead into Lehmann's following books. Later novels republished as VMCs are *The Ballad and the Source* (1944, VMC 1982), *The Echoing Grove* (1953, VMC 2000), and *A Sea Grape Tree* (1976, VMC 1982). In Lehmann's novels female experiences are central, with each book having a girl or woman as the main character, fulfilling one of the main criteria for inclusion in the VMC range. Writer Anita Brookner, in a review of *A Note In Music* in 2000, described Lehmann as "[...] the first writer to filter her stories through a woman's feelings and perceptions" (in Add MS 88904/1/247). Lehmann's books were presented by Virago in ways designed to emphasise her relevance to 1970s and 1980s readers influenced by the ideas of second-wave feminism. In addition to showing that the novels are about women and their lives, the presentation suggests the meaning available through interpretive reading. The paintings and cover comments chosen by Virago begin to question the assumed romantic implications of Lehmann's genre.

The Virago Advance Information sheet on *Dusty Answer* described it as "one of the best-loved novels of the inter-war years" (Undated Add MS 88904/1/247).

The internal information sheets in the British Library Virago archive are an indicator of the ways in which the books would be republished. Lehmann's reputation as an interwar best seller suggests that Callil's business sense saw the economic possibilities of republishing her work and emphasising its continuing relevance. This is also the case with Young and Delafield, both of whose books had been bestsellers. But the possible economic importance, although likely to be an influence on Callil's decisions, could not explain the renewed popularity of Lehmann's work on its republication by Virago. Books that were bestsellers in the 1930s are not automatically successful forty years later. Lehmann's use of the romance genre might appear to be dated and anti-feminist but reading from the perspective of second-wave feminism, encouraged by Virago's curation, allows a different meaning to emerge from her books, indicating that her work can be understood as a subversion of the romance novel. Being able to give Lehmann's books new feminist meanings could offer a sense of agency to readers of the reprints, whilst appealing to WLM criticisms of marriage as an institution.

As I will demonstrate, Lehmann uses the format of the romance novel in order to emphasise the inequality of male/female relationships by critically presenting their patriarchal bias. As Wallace argues, Lehmann's use of the triangle romance, particularly evident in *The Weather in the Streets*, is a way to "explore the male economic and social power" that keeps women in a powerless position (*Sisters* 160). The romance novel focuses on romantic love and marriage, generally concluding with a happy ending provided by matrimony. Lehmann avoids the happy ending, questioning the role of marriage as the aim of all

women's lives and the source of their happiness. For example, Olivia's – the protagonist of *Invitation to the Waltz* and *The Weather in the Streets* – marriage ended unhappily, leaving her in the isolated position of being separated. Simons contends that Lehmann's work, based on nineteenth-century romances, reflects interwar cultural upheavals by reworking the “staple ingredients of the [...] ‘woman's novel’ [...] so as to invest them with a significance appropriate to the climate of cultural destabilisation” (5). In her autobiographical work, *The Swan in the Evening*, Lehmann describes “the general post-war fissuring and crack-up of all social and moral structures” during the interwar period (69). She wrote that her time at Cambridge was characterised by a mood that was “dislocated, feverish and rather sombre – not carefree” (Add MS 88904/1/249).

Lehmann's work reflects the period in which she was writing but her focus on the precariousness of women's lives, especially women who are separated, like Olivia, also relates to campaigns in the WLM period. The Campaigns for Legal and Financial Independence “started early in 1975, to work around the ‘Fifth Demand’ adopted by the Women's Liberation national conference in 1974, the demand for legal and financial independence for women” (“Disaggregation Now!” 13). Lehmann's avoidance of marriage as the happy ending of her novels, highlighting the plight of women, is relevant to 1970s' campaigns which emphasised the legal and financial inequality of women. Criticisms of marriage were put forward by women in the 1920s, particularly by unmarried women who, in some interwar fiction, rejected marriage “precisely because it is seen as an imposed rather than a natural condition, a threat to their personal sense of personal autonomy” (Joannou *Ladies* 86). Lehmann's work, through her use of

the romance genre, represents the difficulties for women during the interwar years, whether married or unmarried. The difficulties she portrays are reflected in the WLM campaigns that were intended to improve the lives of all women.

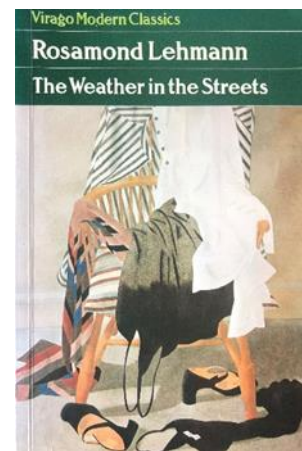
Simons argues that Lehmann's characters are often depicted finding marriage unhappy and unfulfilling. She further explains that Lehmann based her novels on the "age-old device of the love story", which she exposed as a myth by highlighting its patriarchal bias (26). Simons' argument agrees with the earlier work of Nicola Beaman, who describes Lehmann's work as "tragedies of wish-fulfilment" (153). Lehmann's criticisms of marriage and the romantic love story coincide with the views of second-wave writers such as Greer, whose 1970 *The Female Eunuch* criticises the myth of marriage that girls aspire to. Simons' discussion of Lehmann's writing emphasises her relevance to a new generation of readers who, influenced by the arguments of the WLM, challenged the patriarchal bias of marriage and the social expectations that women's roles restricted them to the home, marriage, and family.

Virago's curation of Lehmann's novels situates them within the WLM, making them attractive to the new readership. The covers show details of paintings of

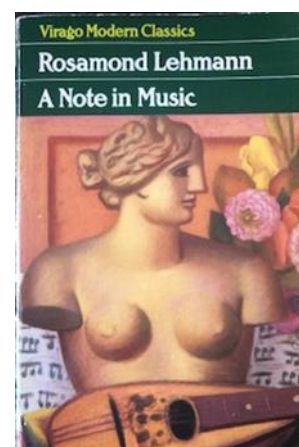


women or their possessions – and, in the case of *Invitation to the Waltz* and *The Weather in the Streets*, paintings by women. Both books used paintings by Barbara Balmer. Balmer was an English artist and teacher working mainly in Scotland (1929-2017). Her obituary describes her work as “not attribute[able] to

any individual school of painting” (*The Scotsman*). The stillness and pose of the solitary sitter on *Invitation to the Waltz* imply that her private thoughts and life are the subject of the novel. The cover of *The Weather in the Streets* shows a woman’s clothes on a chair and shoes on the floor, again showing the prominence of a female character, and suggesting that the clothes had been discarded casually (perhaps also reflecting the life and events of the main character, who is ultimately viewed casually by her lover, as shown by his comment on the ‘fun’ of their relationship). Olivia knows, by the end of the novel, that her lover will stay with his wife and that she is unimportant to his future. The ordinariness and feminine focus of the image reflect the content of much of Lehmann’s writing, with its emphasis on the private, domestic lives of ordinary women.



This is most clearly the case for *A Note in Music*, her second novel. The cover uses a detail from a Mark Gertler painting, although many VMC covers were based on paintings by women. A British artist from a Polish immigrant family (1891-1939), Gertler was associated with members of the Bloomsbury group. The detail of the painting, *Homage to Roger Fry*, has as its central image the bust of a woman. Like the covers based on Balmer’s paintings, the image centres on a female figure. But focusing on a painting of a bust also signifies silence, a woman with no voice. The modernist cover is juxtaposed with the traditional life



and choices available to the protagonist – the choice of twentieth-century art for the covers emphasises the modern and relevant appeal of the books to a later twentieth-century audience. The covers present Lehmann's books to appeal to feminists, by focusing on the centrality of women – portraying women who are not defined by their relationships but as people in their own right. Although, as I discuss, Olivia in *The Weather in the Streets*, contradicts the notion of an independent woman.

The cover notes further highlight the importance of female characters and their experiences, as well as raising ideas and themes that were relevant to second-wave feminists of varying ages. The cover of *Invitation to the Waltz* states that "Rosamond Lehmann perfectly covers the emotions of a young girl on the threshold of life". The cover notes on *The Weather in the Streets* act as a means of attracting women who are considering their own lives, relationships, and financial situations: "Olivia Curtis, heroine of *Invitation to the Waltz*, is now ten years older. She lives in a tiny house in London eking out a hand-to-mouth existence [...]. With a disastrous marriage behind her, Olivia is still vulnerable and open to love". During the years after the Second World War, many of the more famous novels by men included women only as peripheral characters, reflecting the male gaze and male-centred views on relationships. The post-war years also saw work by the Angry Young Men, whose work was critical of the English class system. They "frequently expressed raw anger and frustration as the postwar reforms failed to meet exalted aspirations for genuine change" ("Angry Young Men"). Their criticisms, often made by young men from working-class backgrounds, echo the work of Hoggart and Williams in their work on the

limited definitions of good literature made by Leavis. But, at the same time, new literature by women was indicative of attempts to challenge male-centred novels. The 1960s saw the work of Margaret Drabble, and Doris Lessing, among others. The decades after World War Two exhibited many challenges to the socio-political status quo, as seen in literature by many male and female writers. Virago's emphasis on female characters and their everyday experiences offered an alternative to the many novels that relegated women to the role of peripheral characters, providing books that presented social norms through women's eyes. In an echo of Callil's statement that White's *Frost in May* told her own story, Lehmann commented on the letters from readers in the 1920s claiming that *Dusty Answer* had related their own story (Add MS 88904/1/248).

The WLM's focus on the importance of understanding and making known women's personal lives and issues is reflected in the cover notes for Lehmann's books, which draw the attention of readers to their emphasis on ordinary lives. *Invitation to the Waltz* mentions women's everyday lives, saying that the embarrassment of the dance to which the protagonist is invited "is nevertheless a vast improvement on the Sheer Ordinarity of normal life". Drawing attention to the tedium of women's everyday lives is likely to resonate with interwar women and second-wave women: both generations had lives that were restricted by a patriarchal society, resulting in limited opportunities to leave the domestic world. Being restricted to the domestic, low-paid sphere after being able to work in more varied jobs during the war was experienced by women after both wars. Pugh equates the two post-war situations: "In every sphere of

employment the instinctive male assumption was [...] that women must be the first to move aside” (238). Post-1945 women’s employment increased so that “by the end of 1947 there were 800,000 more women in employment than in 1939”, partly due to the increase in office work and the higher demand for teachers and nurses caused by the growth of the welfare state (Pugh 239). But they were mainly employed in lower-paid jobs and, in spite of being a major employer of women, the welfare state encouraged women to stay at home: “since the welfare system was to be based on the Victorian principle of benefits in return for contributions it followed that women would be disadvantaged” (Pugh 245).

The welfare state prioritised families and the wellbeing of children, backed up by new writing on childcare by Spock in 1947 and Bowlby in 1951, resulting in mothers being blamed “for the social and psychological disorders of [their] children” (Pugh 246). Whilst feminists in the post-1945 years found it hard to unite and to gain public attention, they achieved some success in the form of government promotion of equal pay, although actually obtaining equal pay was subject to many delays and political disputes. But, like the granting of partial suffrage, equal pay only benefitted some women. There was no united feminist movement and “nothing [...] arrested the declining fortunes of organised feminism during [the 1940s]” (Pugh 250). The rise of the feminist movement in the 1960s was not restricted to Britain and it was linked to other causes, but Pugh suggests that the WLM was also facilitated in Britain by the large numbers of younger women able to take advantage of greater affluence, full employment, and access to university. Although “it was precisely during the

early 1960s that concern over rising unemployment and the deterioration of the British economy began to pose a threat to rising expectations” (Pugh 262).

Competition for jobs and university places still prioritised men over women. The threats to women’s employment, combined with changing attitudes to marriage and divorce, caused “disquiet about the status quo” (262). The introductions to the VMCs offered relevance to women who had been restricted by patriarchal society and who were starting to unite to change the situation.

Like the cover notes, the introductions to Lehmann’s novels draw attention to feminist themes from the perspective of women in the 1980s. In 1981 and 1982 journalist Janet Watts wrote introductions to three of the novels: *A Note in Music*, *Invitation to the Waltz* and *The Weather in the Streets*. Watts frequently mentions the monotony of the characters’ lives, saying that *A Note in Music* is “a study in nothingness” (xv). Grace Fairfax, the main character, “has nothing to do all day, and she does nothing”, and, like women experiencing Friedan’s widespread problem with no name, she feels a sense of nothingness, depression, and isolation (xv). Watts further highlights the characters’ unhappiness, commenting that all the characters “contain a world of pain, usually imperceptible to everyone else [...] they are such ordinary pains as they are such ordinary people” (xii). Simons sees Lehmann’s work as part of an “enterprise of other contemporary women artists who, like Virginia Woolf, were intent on validating experience that had hitherto been marginalised” (24).

Because Lehmann’s novels, particularly *A Note in Music*, are about ordinary people (although white and middle-class), readers can identify with some of the characters’ experiences. The sense of identification emanates from the readers’

ability to read their own experiences in fictional lives, enhancing the sense of community derived from literature. In the introduction to *The Weather in the Streets* Watts writes that the “sense of identification has perhaps been Rosamond Lehmann’s greatest attraction for her women readers. In her books they have found themselves: their own confusions and pleasures, sorrows, passions and episodes of farce” (The pages in the introductions to *The Weather in the Streets*, *Invitation to the Waltz*, and *Dusty Answer* are unnumbered). The sense of identification is discussed in 2008 by a contemporary writer, who explains her sense of recognition – “of discovering a writer who seems to understand you through and through, reflecting your experience in their stories, so that you know you’re not alone [...] was how I felt when I read Rosamond Lehmann’s novels” (Picardie).

Lehmann’s novels are particularly invested in investigating gendered identity. She shows an understanding and awareness of changing identities and centralises “the issue of identity as a social construct” (Simons 68). Lehmann’s novels reflect awareness of how her own identity was put under pressure by her first marriage. In an interview with Lehmann from 1983, Lehmann explains that “After a year or so [after graduating] I married and went to live in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. It was then that the problems of identity and meaning started to become acute” (interview in Add MS 88904/1/249). Second-wave feminism’s focus on sisterhood as an important aspect of women’s empowerment and confidence emanates from a recognition of the impact of friendships on identity. Although Lehmann’s characters are frequently portrayed as being isolated, the cover comments on *A Note in Music* draw attention to the friendship between

Grace, the main character, and Norah. Watts further comments on their shared “curious, intangible friendship” (x). Watts’ introduction to *Invitation to the Waltz* mentions that the two main characters are sisters, sharing background and experiences, but the introduction to *The Weather in the Streets* emphasises the loneliness of Olivia’s later life when her lifestyle leaves her isolated and disempowered, unable to be close to friends or family. In this instance, Olivia’s decision to abandon her other relationships in order to prioritise her affair can be read as a decision that leads to isolation and powerlessness, with no support.

Lehmann highlights the ways in which marriage limits the lives of Norah and Grace in *A Note in Music*, impinging on their sense of identity as individuals, as Lehmann felt her first marriage had challenged her own identity. Norah reflects on her meeting with Gerald as, in his words, “two worn out relics of war service thrown up by the Armistice”, but looking back on their relationship she feels that, ever since their marriage, “he had tried to do her down”, and that she was now living with “my enemy” (*Note* 144). For Grace, marriage is an unbreakable bond, with no escape. Coming towards the end of a holiday alone, she accepts that her role and identity as a wife are inescapable: “she had come here, not to prepare for change, for further flight, for love and life, but for the resumption, after a little rest and change of air, of her duties as a housewife. Let her remember there was no escape” (226). Lehmann’s work illustrates Wallace’s argument that some interwar writers used their novels to challenge both romance and the marriage plot, presenting marriage as part of patriarchal society, rather than as the happy-ever-after aim of some romantic novels

(Wallace in Joannou *Women* 63). By her focus on ordinary lives and occupations, Lehmann offers novels that resonate with the WLM's interest in the everyday lives of women, moving the focus away from an emphasis on male achievements and lives outside the domestic sphere.

Coe's introduction to *Dusty Answer* contrasts Judith's lonely upbringing and her friendships with the young men in the neighbouring house with her intense friendship with a female friend at university. Lehmann's novels indicate both the positive aspects of shared experiences and the negative result of her characters' isolation. Lehmann's focus on the characters' personal, individual lives and experiences presents a challenge to the male values that are the basis of accepted canonical norms. Simons discusses the refusal by many women artists "to accept objectivity and impersonal form as the absolute criteria of canonical value [which] has led to their marginalisation from the literary critical hierarchy" (22). By her prioritisation of the characters' personal lives and emotions, Lehmann's work challenges male writing as well as appealing to the values that were fundamental to second-wave feminism.

In his introduction to *Dusty Answer*, Coe frequently discusses Lehmann's writing style, praising her technical skill. He comments on her "brilliant use of the shifting viewpoint (note how the second person singular keeps recurring in the second half of the book, at moments when Judith is feeling especially insecure and vulnerable)". The shifting viewpoint moves the reader between outward description and inner thoughts, enabling readers to understand, and empathise with, the perspective of the female protagonist. Towards the end of

Part 3, as Judith is getting ready to leave university, Lehmann switches from a description of her final glimpse of the friend she loved to Judith's feelings, insecurities, and doubts about the relationship: "At the door Judith turned, forcing her mouth into a smile, but Jennifer was not looking at her. Once again, only the tangle of her hair was visible, burning in the lamplight. The end of the term. There had been no word from Jennifer. She had vanished. But she was to be trusted: you only had to wait and she would write. Or was she not to be trusted?" (*Dusty* 180). The shifting viewpoint denotes a style that distances itself from the outward, active narrative depicting the lives of men, moving Lehmann's books away from a straightforward narrative style to more innovative writing. The changing viewpoint also indicates the complexity of women's lives in a patriarchal society, and Gindin relates Lehmann's style to her focus "on women's intense need to articulate an interior self" (98). Wallace discusses the ways in which Lehmann uses the modernist techniques of Woolf and Dorothy Richardson "to draw the reader into the text, into the subjective consciousness she is exploring, and to establish an emotional identification between reader and character" (*Sisters* 166).

Simons discusses *The Weather in the Streets* and the ways in which Lehmann changes from first to third person, which "helps to reflect these dual aspects of Olivia's identity – the social persona and the private individual", particularly relevant to the dual life lived around her secret affair (79). Tindall's analysis of the shift in perspective notes that the narrative switches to the first person during the first phase of the affair between Olivia and Rollo. The return to a third person narrative occurs "when the spell is broken [...] she becomes 'she' again,

with a change that is then desolating by contrast with what has gone before, when love was a place of safety and refuge” (69-70). Tindall argues that Lehmann’s use of shifting perspectives removes her work from the purely romantic novel, explaining that her skill is to show love as “an artificial and partial refuge” (70).

Lehmann’s novels frequently emphasise the inequality of relationships between women and men, and *The Weather in the Streets* unambiguously presents the imbalance between Olivia and Rollo, making it clear that, as Joannou comments, Rollo “has never thought of their situation from her point-of-view” (*Ladies* 147). Simons argues that Lehmann’s narrative style emphasises the distance between “male impositions of cultural practice and women’s unvoiced personal feelings” (32). Lehmann’s use of first-person narrative enables the reader to understand the extent to which Olivia is limited by a patriarchal establishment that leaves her in a powerless and vulnerable position, while her lover has everything he wants, including social position. Wallace, Simons, and Tindall discuss the importance of the presentation of Olivia’s pregnancy and abortion and the inclusion of what Tindall refers to as “this all-too-common female ordeal” (75). Wallace sees the representation of Olivia’s abortion as “the culmination of Lehmann’s deconstruction of the power differential of the romance plot – an exposure of its suppressed underside” (*Sisters* 179). Joannou suggests that Lehmann’s focus “on the aspects of love that men do not see” offers a challenge to the continuation of women’s hidden and undiscussed lives, adding that hiding aspects of women’s lives “enables the story to continue in the old way” (*Ladies* 144). On its original publication in

1936, the book was thought to be shocking in its open discussion of illegal abortion and its presentation of the ways in which women's lives can be negatively impacted by love. It offered a very clear challenge to the romantic myth. The myth was ongoing in the WLM years, and illegal abortions were still taking place prior to the 1967 Abortion Act in England. Because of the illegality, it is impossible to obtain definite figures, but "even the most conservative estimate of the number of illegal abortions before the Abortion Act put the figure at 10,000 a year" (Cavadino, 63).

Olivia's affair in *The Weather in the Streets* increases her isolation because of the necessity for secrecy and her desire to be available to see Rollo when he is able to meet her, at times preventing her from seeing friends. Ironically, the only time Olivia feels any sense of sisterhood and shared experiences is when she decides to have an abortion. The revelation that her cousin, Etty, had previously had one comes as "a shock, definitely. That narrow, miniature body, that, too, trapped, subjected to the common risks and consequences of female humanity" (*Weather* 238). On hearing that another acquaintance had the same experience, Olivia "began to feel fatally cosy and consoled", but she quickly realises that, in spite of shared experiences, this is something she has to go through alone, mainly for the secrecy involved in the illegal practice (239).

As an outwardly independent twentieth-century woman living away from her family home and (just) earning a living, Olivia's life offered some familiarity to second-wave feminist women, whose lives, like hers, were still restricted financially and in terms of choices available. Lehmann's presentation of her

characters' public and personal lives through her narrative style highlights the disparity between the lives of women and men. At the end of the book, when Olivia visits Rollo after his accident, Lehmann switches from their conversation about the car crash to Olivia thinking "He will go on saying darling – as if everything was the same" (*Weather* 381). But, having just heard that Rollo's wife is expecting a child, Olivia is fully aware that she will remain powerless and hidden in the relationship. Women are portrayed as leading private lives that are both secondary to men's lives and restricted by their powerlessness and lack of independence. Simons suggests that, in *The Weather in the Streets*, Lehmann's presentation of "the other woman" as the main character "offers an unusual perspective on a familiar situation" (85). Lehmann further challenged the conventions of the romance novel by not providing a happy ending. The final words are given to Rollo, who reminisces about their affair – "It was fun, wasn't it darling?" (383). There is no recognition on his part of how much it means to Olivia or how much she has sacrificed.

Like Judith in *Dusty Answer*, Olivia's sense of sisterhood and shared lives is something she only feels temporarily, at a time of crisis. Lehmann's novels portray women who strive for sisterhood, desiring to fit in with other women, but who are frequently isolated and powerless. Judith seeks friendship and sisterhood with Mariella, the female member of the Fyfe family, and with Jennifer at university. As an only child who is not very close to her mother, Judith tries to find closeness to other women; during a discussion of Mariella's son, and her lack of confidence in her role as a parent, Mariella starts talking to Judith, who feels that this is an opportunity to understand her. "To herself she

said: 'in another minute I shall get to know Mariella': and she almost held her breath to listen, waiting for the moment of revelation" (*Dusty* 210). But then conversation turns to the actions of Julian, and the moment of possible sisterhood is over. At Cambridge, Judith is solitary before and after her passionate friendship with Jennifer, apart from a relationship of inequality and duty with the sad Mabel. There are very few instances of close female understanding in Judith's life. The isolation of women in Lehmann's work helps to emphasise the importance of community and sisterhood to women in the 1970s and 1980s for their empowerment. It also reflects both the intention of the Six Point Group to unite women, and Rowbotham's arguments that women need to belong to a community in order to be heard and to enable social change.

It is through Grace in *A Note in Music* that Lehmann shows the greatest understanding of how women's lives are seen in relation to others. Describing her friendship with Winifred Holtby, Vera Brittain comments on ideas put forward by May Sinclair in her introduction to Elizabeth Gaskell's work on Charlotte Brontë. Sinclair suggests that women writers cannot be seen in isolation but are always and necessarily linked with family. Applying this to Holtby, although it applies to many women writers, Brittain says, "we cannot understand her without knowing something of those relatives" (*Testament* 10). Revealing Grace's thoughts at the end of *A Note in Music*, Lehmann demonstrates agreement with Brittain's argument, emphasising the extent to which women's identities are defined by family and relationships. Grace's reflections on her life encapsulate the impact of family on a woman's identity,

showing that she is identified only in relation to others: “Yes, and who am I... I? What is I? What is knowing? And what is dying? Christina Grace...daughter of...wife of...born...died...That is I” (*Note* 310). Earlier in the book Lehmann shows Norah’s view of her identity as a wife and mother, and Norah’s comparison of herself to Clare, an unmarried friend from London. Her conversation with Clare leaves her with “mingled feelings of inferiority, yearning and defensiveness. For, after all these years, Clare still dined out and danced in London, bought Paris models, went abroad [...]” (75). Although being a wife makes her socially acceptable, the sense of inferiority associated with Norah’s identity as a wife and mother emphasises Rowbotham’s argument on women’s oppression in *Woman’s Consciousness, Man’s World*. She is critical of the Marxist-feminist position that only working-class women suffer oppression, and that it does not impact on the lives of middle-class women (ix). Lehmann’s characters are all clearly from a narrow sector of upper- or middle-class society, but their identities indicate the oppression caused by patriarchal values, by the limited expectations of women’s roles, and by the invisibility of their lives.

Lehmann consistently subverts the format of the romance novel by allowing the reader to know the thoughts of the female characters and by exposing their feelings of inequality and isolation – feelings sometimes exacerbated, rather than solved, by marriage. Lehmann’s novels criticise the patriarchal nature of marriage as an institution that favoured men, resulting in a form of restriction for women and leading to a loss of independence, both financially and personally. A review in the *Daily Telegraph* from 1997 describes *The Weather in the Streets* as a “classic novel which shocked readers when it was first published in 1936

[...] a quality of bleak pessimism which is still relevant today” (in Add.MS 88904/248). *Spare Rib* carried articles on marriage, arguing that the magazine “offered an alternative perspective on women’s lives as wives and mothers, questioning the validity of marriage and drawing attention to the fundamental flaws of the conventional family structure” (www.bl/sparerib). Whilst giving the women characters social acceptability, some of the marriages in Lehmann’s novels portray the lack of freedom and power experienced by women in the interwar period. In 2003, in *The Week*, Alexandra Shulman (editor of *Vogue*) chose to include *The Weather in the Streets* in her list of best books. She described it as “the ultimate tragic and indulgent love story”, adding that “Lehmann is unbeatable on social nuance, both among the London bohemian set and Rollo’s more conventional upper-class milieu” (in Add MS 88904/1/248). Shulman’s praise, nearly seventy years after the book’s original publication, suggests its ongoing relevance in both content and style. Other reviews of *The Weather in the Streets* also indicate the recent relevance of the book; a review in *What’s On* from 1997 states that “the world Rosamond Lehmann describes is long gone, but she is such a creator of moods, writes so beautifully of her characters’ inner feelings and vulnerabilities that the novels are as relevant and readable as they were 60 years ago” (in Add MS 88904/1/248).

In common with other VMC novelists, Lehmann’s novels reflect the major themes of second-wave feminism. But her characters’ isolation and lack of sisterhood indicate some ways in which her work is different from the novels of other VMC writers. The wish to belong, to uphold the status quo in her characters’ lives, can be read from a later perspective as an unwillingness, or

inability, to depict women who are empowered and confident. Drawing attention to her dislike of strong feminist opinions, Lehmann said, in conversation with Watts, that she “was simply horrified” when the reviews of *Dusty Answer* called her “one of these new post-war emancipated women” (in Chamberlain 154). This is particularly evident in Olivia’s decision to remain attached to her lover in *The Weather in the Streets*, rather than being strongly independent. Acceptance of their situation is common to Lehmann’s characters. Grace, in *A Note in Music*, stays with her husband and their unexciting marriage. Grace’s isolation is associated with her questioning of her role in society, and the reader is not given a romantic happy ending – only acceptance. Acceptance differentiates Lehmann’s protagonists from E. H. Young’s characters, who use their agency and discontent to avoid accepting their lives as they are. Lehmann uses the non-feminist genre of the romance novel and subverts it in order to present the inequalities of patriarchal relationships. But Lehmann does not challenge the status quo or suggest changes to relationships. Her work presents critical acceptance rather than challenge. In contrast, E. H. Young presents characters who outwardly conform and appear to follow the lives expected of them in a patriarchal society, but who recognise the restrictions of social expectations and try to break free, retaining an individuality and agency that differentiate them from Lehmann’s more passive characters.

E. H. Young (1880-1949)

Virago published all seven of E. H. Young's interwar novels as VMCs – *The Misses Mallett* (1922, VMC 1984), *William* (1925, VMC 1988), *The Vicar's Daughter* (1928, VMC 1992), *Miss Mole* (1930, VMC 1984), *Jenny Wren* (1932, VMC 1985), *The Curate's Wife* (1934, VMC 1985), and *Celia* (1937, VMC 1990). They also republished Young's 1947 *Chatterton Square* in 1987. When first published, Young's novels had been popular both in the UK and America, with *Miss Mole* winning the James Tait Black Fiction Prize in 1930, "one of the two oldest book prizes awarded annually for best fiction and best biography" (Mezei and Briganti *She Must* 311). The advert in *The Publisher and Bookseller* for the 1930 publication of *Miss Mole* comments on what it calls "An Important Literary Event" – the new book "by a well-known and popular writer [...] whose work has always been successful since her novel *William* was published in 1925" (reproduced in *She Must* 310).

By the 1970s and 1980s, Young's books were largely unavailable, with novelist Susan Hill observing in 1982 that "second-hand copies are like gold" (Add MS 88904/1/469). Letters by readers referred to the difficulty of obtaining Young's books, asking Virago to include them in VMC republications. In response to a reader's letter, an undated memo from Alexandra Pringle (of the Virago team) to Callil recommends several of Young's books. Pringle enclosed notes on why she believed Virago should republish *William*: "It's artistically assured, controlled, beautifully written, and light-heartedly serious about families and marriage" (Add MS 88904/1/469). The memo from Pringle went on to summarise the strengths of Young's other books in order to offer advice on

publication. She wrote of *Celia* that she is a “classic E. H. Young creation with all the wit and quiriness that implies”, whilst *Chatterton Square* has the “same theme of the trap of marriage, the horror of unwanted physical intimacy – sex with the wrong man being one of the worst things a woman can suffer, and the fact of marriage still makes it rape” (Add MS 88904/1/469). Marital rape was not illegal in the UK until 1992.

Writer Susan Hill, who was approached for new introductions, commented in a letter to Callil dated February 1982 that Young’s books “are enormously pleasing, and beneath the quiet surface, really rather unusually perceptive and pleasing about women” (Add MS 88904/1/469). (Hill was unable to provide the introductions, and Sally Beauman replaced her). Hill’s comment indicates Young’s concentration on female experiences in her writing, a focus that was important to the ethos of Virago and its project of situating itself within contemporary feminist debates. Callil wrote to writer Susan Hill in January 1980, whilst Callil was “buried in reading for Virago Modern Classics, so I read more of E. H. Young. A thought struck me: do you think she modelled her plots on Jane Austin (sic)?” (Add MS 88904/1/469). In a foreword to Young’s 1947 *Chatterton Square* writer Bel Mooney wrote that Young is “like Jane Austen, another novelist who worked on a small scale, but within whose novels we find the largeness of human experience” (Add MS 88904/1/496). Both comments emphasise the Englishness and continuity of Young’s work.

I discuss *Jenny Wren*, *The Curate’s Wife*, *Celia*, and *Miss Mole*. *Jenny Wren* and *The Curate’s Wife* have been chosen because, like Lehmann’s *Invitation to*

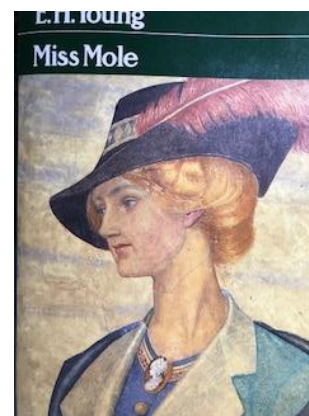
the Waltz and *The Weather in the Streets*, they focus on two sisters, with the books set a few months apart (rather than the ten-year difference in Lehmann's books). *Celia*, like *A Note in Music*, centres on a woman in an unromantic marriage, offering a comparison of different presentations of the heroine and her choices. The heroine of *Miss Mole* is a forty-year-old unmarried woman, which I discuss for Young's atypical presentation of this representative of a large sector of the population in the interwar period. Rather than presenting a woman to be pitied, Joannou describes Hannah Mole as "jauntily sailing under spinsterhood as a flag of convenience" (*Ladies* 82).

Briganti and Mezei's 2006 discussion of Young suggests that her work belongs to the domestic genre, with the focus on her female characters' day-to-day lives rather than on romance. Jenny and Dahlia Rendall, the sisters who are the subject of *Jenny Wren* and *The Curates' Wife*, dream of romantic love and marriage as the escape from their present lives, but Jenny, learning from the failure of her parents' marriage and in complete contrast to Lehmann's Olivia, ends any potentially romantic relationship with the young squire, recognising the inequality of any possible relationship between them. Dahlia chooses to marry the curate, telling Jenny that "it's best to be friends first", arguing that "it will be romantic afterwards" (*Jenny Wren*, 338). The sisters' unromantic views on marriage are made clear at the end of *The Curate's Wife*, with Dahlia explaining to her husband, Cecil, that if she and Jenny had "chosen to be doctors or nurses or schoolmistresses we should have been very serious about it because we'd chosen [...]. It's so easy to forget that marriage can be a career too" (333). Young's domestic novels are, for Briganti and Mezei, based on "the domain of

the private, the interior and the everyday replacing the public sphere” (*Domestic* 1). They argue that Young “experimented with the domestic genre” (2). Young’s experimentation helped her to create characters with agency, able to interpret their environment in ways that allow them choices.

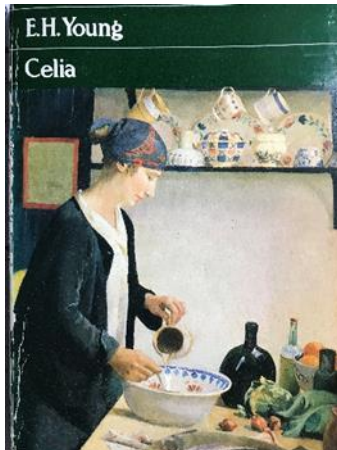
The covers on Young’s books are based on details of paintings showing women. *Miss Mole* incorporates a detail from *Portrait of Mrs. William Smedley-Aston*, by Joseph Southall (1861-1944), an English

painter who was associated with the Arts and Crafts movement. Artists belonging to this movement were known for their challenge to societal values, in reaction to “not only the damaging effects of industrialisation but also the relatively low status of



the decorative arts” (www.vam.ac.uk). It is a choice that perhaps also draws attention to the low status of women and their writing. The woman is central to the painting, clearly suggesting that the content of the novel also focuses on the life of a woman. A memo from Callil to Pringle dated September 1982 suggests that the cover illustration “could either be a splendid portrait of an Englishwoman aged about 40 or the cottage described on p 264” (Add MS 88904/1/469). The cottage described is from Hannah Mole’s childhood and she remembers “a four-roomed cottage washed in pale pink which was stained with drippings from the roof; there were overgrown, weedy flower-beds under the windows” (*Miss Mole* 263-4). The idyllic image of a country cottage is upset by the details of weeds and dripping water, perhaps partly explaining the decision to show a woman rather than a cottage.

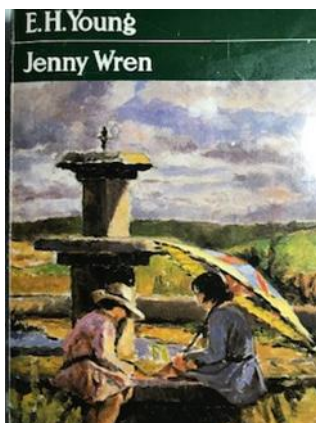
Continuing the practice of emphasising women on the covers, *Celia* shows a painting by Harold Harvey (1874-1941), a Newlyn School painter famous for scenes of working-class people. The painting used, *Gertrude in the Kitchen*,



shows a woman working in her kitchen, a domestic scene not commonly used as the focus of art or literature, and reflecting what Mezei and Briganti refer to as Young's "focus on middle-class domesticity" (*She Must* 303). This focus differentiates Young's work from Lehmann's predominantly upper- or upper-middle-class characters and lives – kitchens are

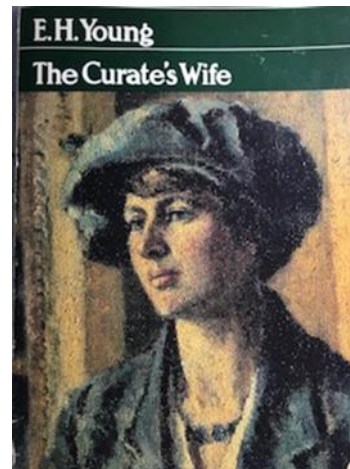
never mentioned in Lehmann's novels. Coming from a different background to Lehmann's, Young's characters and experiences all relate to middle-class people who have to manage their lives and their barely sufficient finances, and, in the case of Hannah Mole, work for a living whilst aware of the limited number of working years left. Unlike Lehmann's Olivia, Hannah Mole is older and without family to turn to.

Both *Jenny Wren* and *The Curate's Wife* have covers featuring paintings by



Mainie Jellett (1897-1944), an Irish painter, designer, and lecturer, who was "one of the most important pioneers of modern art in her country" (www.artuk.org). Both paintings are of women, with *Girls by a Fountain*, the cover of *Jenny Wren*, showing two young women together, indicating the centrality of the sisters who are

the focus of these two novels. *The Curate's Wife* has a detail from a portrait by Jellett as its cover. The painting of a young, thoughtful woman, looking confident, reflects the content of the novel as well as the likely readers of the VMC republication – often women becoming more confident through the ideas and campaigns of the WLM. Like many of the VMC covers, work by a woman artist is promoted.



Featuring paintings by the same artist on these two books draws attention to their connection, their development of the same characters' lives. Choosing the same artist for both novels also suggests the closeness between the sisters.

The VMC cover comments on Young's novels focus on domestic issues; their relevance to the concept of relating women's private lives to social values is stressed, highlighting the distinction between male and female roles and responsibilities in society. Rosie Boycott, founder of *Spare Rib*, commented, "We took that phrase, the personal is political [...] it was how you lived. Who did the shopping? Who did the cooking? Did you have sexual rights?" (*Virago: Changing* 00:05:41-58). She explained that women's lives were ruled by personal and domestic actions, such as shopping, cooking, and washing, but with no power or rights over decisions. These hidden, domestic lives were solitary, without the sense of community that was brought about by the WLM and furthered by Virago's curation of the VMCs. Young's work is presented as an example of an interwar writer using the genre of the domestic novel to bring women's private lives into the public, focusing on areas of lives that had been

ignored by male literary culture. The cover notes for *Celia* discuss the protagonist's "scrimping and saving to bring up a family". Dahlia, in *The Curate's Wife*, "battles with domesticity" whilst her husband, Cecil, "struggles with his sermons" (cover notes). The choice of verbs used to describe their work suggests that she portrays a power struggle within the domestic world, between the public and the private spheres, a struggle "over who controls the domestic space" (Briganti and Mezei *Domestic* 133). Drawing attention to the agency and potential empowerment of women, Hannah Mole is described as "being blessed with wit, intelligence and the splendid ability to call a spade a spade", and Dahlia Rendall in *The Curate's Wife* "has intelligence, determination and a sense of humour" (cover notes). Relations between women and the concept of sisterhood are important themes in Young's work, particularly in *Jenny Wren*, based on an all-female household which is "eyed with alarm and distrust" by neighbours (cover notes). The cover of *Miss Mole* draws the readers' attention to the "motherless daughters [...] sadly in need of care and good food" – Hannah Mole steps in to provide these needs and develops close relationships with the girls, but without being a potential mother figure.

The new introductions commissioned for the reprints further highlight the relevance of the books to the 1970s and 1980s readers. Writer and journalist Sally Beauman wrote the introductions to *Miss Mole*, *Jenny Wren*, and *The Curate's Wife*; Lynn Knight of Virago wrote the introduction to *Celia*. Beauman's introduction to *Jenny Wren* draws attention to the changing identity of a young woman as she grows up. She explains that the sisters in *Jenny Wren* and *The Curate's Wife* "are both seeking the same thing: an identity of their own, one

that is neither inherited from their parents, nor acquired by means of a husband” (*Jenny Wren*, v). Young’s work shows the lack of inevitability or desirability of marriage; she presents heroines who are more aware of their own lives and strengths as individuals. *Miss Mole* concludes with Hannah Mole about to marry, but she “saw something whimsical and unlikely in their love [...]. She could trust herself to see it with other people’s eyes and laugh, with them” (*Miss Mole*, 288). In a further subversion of the romance novel’s tendency to end with the characters happily arranged and married, in her thoughts Hannah Mole ties up all the loose ends: “Ethel would marry Mr. Pilgrim, and, surely, Uncle Jim would rescue Ruth, and Robert Corder would marry Patsy Withers and find her somewhat dull after the incalculableness of Miss Mole [...]. The miracle had happened” (287). In the romance genre, the aim of the happy ending is marriage for the main characters; Hannah Mole’s imaginary marriages between the characters comments on this as “the miracle”, indicating the unlikelihood of marriages to complete the plot.

Young set her novels among middle-class people and districts, so there is a focus on domesticity and the impact of limited money on women’s domestic lives and identities. Lehmann’s novels are set in richer, more upper-class sectors of society; despite Olivia’s “genteel and specifically feminine poverty”, she comes from a wealthy background and mixes socially with Rollo’s upper-class family (*Wallace Sisters* 177). Financial limitations are particularly evident in *Miss Mole*, “a spinster, and a housekeeper/companion” who is always conscious of having to work within both her own limited budget and that of her employer (introduction, vi). The cover notes of *Celia* cite her thoughts on the

role of middle-class wives: “‘Must we do everything?’ she asked herself angrily... ‘Bear their children and bring them up, manage the money, do without nearly everything we want and pretend we don’t want anything’”. In *Jenny Wren*, Young presents the class distinctions around the mother’s financial need to take in paying lodgers and the disapproval of their neighbours for her choice of lodgers and her lack of formal education. Sally Beauman’s introduction argues that the novel “focuses on the question of class, on a social structure so rigid, so confining and ultimately so absurd, that it distorts and twists people’s lives, spawning hypocrisy, inhumanity and unhappiness” (viii). Young demonstrates the impact of limited resources on women’s lives, showing the impact of poverty on their decisions and concerns in their domestic lives. Like the Six Point Group, the WLM campaigned for women’s financial independence and for equal pay. Young’s work emphasises the need for these campaigns.

Hypocrisy is a theme in Young’s work, with Beauman drawing attention to Young’s “brilliant eye for moral fudging and verbal hypocrisy” (vii). Her introduction points out that a major theme in *Jenny Wren*, and in Young’s other novels, is the hypocrisy surrounding sexual desire. “Writing [...] at a time when [...] sexual decorum was still regarded as a prime female virtue, Young relentlessly and courageously, in novel after novel, questions and mocks such moral assumptions” (*Jenny Wren*, ix). In *The Curate’s Wife*, Dahlia and Cecil argue over the pregnancy of an unmarried young woman, with Cecil condemning her as “worse than her fellow-sinner [...] because it seems worse in a woman [...] and we expect women to be better” (175). His attitude leads Dahlia to respond “But you’ve no right to! You’ve simply invented that for your

own convenience" (175). Young's characters draw attention to the double standards attached to the behaviour of women and men, and Beauman's comments highlight the significance of Young's novels to the generation of second-wave feminists who were campaigning for gender equality in all aspects of society, including sexual relations. The campaigns were spurred on by the advent of the contraceptive pill in the 1960s, which changed women's attitudes to sex and marriage. Young's characters exercise choice and the ability to argue for equality.

Young's critical treatment of sexual norms and marriage include a focus on power relations in marriage, presenting relationships "bound by emotional evasion and repression" (introduction, *Jenny Wren*, ix). Knight's introduction to *Celia* draws attention to Young's "skill in laying bare the nuances of relationships", and she goes on to highlight the lack of romanticism in Young's work by explaining that "the person who thinks that *Celia* will conclude with its marital creases nicely smoothed and ironed out will be mistaken" (i). Knight argues that, in Young's work, "marriage is the arena which allows but also discloses [deceptions]" (vi). In contrast to Lehmann's portrayal of Grace, in *A Note in Music*, as limited and trapped by her domestic life, "with Young, we enter into a domestic space that elevates a private, feminine space into an ironic blueprint for the art of living the everyday" (Mezei and Briganti *She Must* 325). Analysis of *Celia* clearly demonstrates that Young's treatment of domesticity and the role of women in the private sphere endows her characters with more agency to direct their own lives.

In her introduction to the novel, Knight comments that Celia is a character we like, a woman “who makes clear her ambivalence to housekeeping and is far more concerned with the content than the appearance of things” (i). Celia’s ambivalence prevents her from passive acceptance of her role as an “isolated, suburban, lower-middle-class” housewife (Mezei and Briganti *She Must* 320). Like Young’s other characters, she takes some control of her situation. We first see Celia in the flat she shares with her husband and two children, on a morning when she is supposed to be cleaning but is “standing on a wooden stool and looking out of the high-set window”, admirably involved in the view and the sun, asking “what’s spring cleaning compared to a spring day?” (9-12). Talking to her husband, Gerald, about their lives, he suggests that her life is dull because it is the same every day, but she argues that “things are never quite the same. Except, I’m afraid, the things you get to eat” (102). Celia demonstrates the ability to interpret her everyday life in a way that entertains her, showing “a calm air of indifference to what anyone might think of her [...] because [...] she had no apologies to make for what she was not, or explanations of what she was” (212).

Like Dahlia Sproat (in *The Curate’s Wife*) and Hannah Mole, Celia exhibits the ability to “transform the life of a dreary housewife or housekeeper into drama and adventure” (Briganti and Mezei *Domestic* 53). Discussing arguments about housework put forward during the 1970s, Jolly suggests, “if feminists start by saying that everyday life needs to be transformed, it is also obvious that home can be a domain of retreat and renewal” (*Sisterhood* 121). Through humour, imagination, and empowerment, as well as a refusal to conform, Young’s

characters change their restricted lives into enjoyment and creativity, rather than domestic tedium. Young portrays characters who use their domain of the home to develop a sense of agency, positively taking control of their lives, rather than feeling powerless. As Rosie Boycott argued (above) in *Virago: Changing*, women in the domestic sphere had no power to make decisions, and Young allows her characters agency to decide on some aspects of their domestic lives. The VMC range of books highlighted the plight of women during both the interwar years and the WLM. By emphasising the tedium and lack of independence of many women's lives, *Virago* reflected the arguments of Friedan, Greer and Rowbotham, and enabled women to become more empowered through a sense of community. Young's work suggests ways in which women could challenge and subvert social expectations of women's lives, confronting isolation and tedium with humour and creativity.

In *Jenny Wren* and *The Curate's Wife*, the main relationship of support and closeness is between the two sisters, Jenny and Dahlia. Although their lives differ, in a way reminiscent of Kate and Olivia Curtis in Lehmann's books, unlike the Curtis sisters, the two Rendalls remain close, to the extent of posing a potential threat to Dahlia and Cecil's marriage. On their wedding day, Cecil reflects on the bond between the sisters: "She held his hand firmly, but he thought her real grip was on Jenny [...]" (*Curate* 25). Undermining the more commonly presented gendered identities within marriage, Young suggests that the empowerment felt by the closeness of the sisters serves to isolate and disempower Cecil. When Jenny and Dahlia are reunited after living apart, Cecil's "real trouble was a sense of isolation. Dahlia's joy at seeing Jenny, the

quick intake of breath she had never given him in welcome [...] had thrust him into another world” (146). The relationship between the sisters is stronger than their link with Louisa, their mother, but the all-female household in *Jenny Wren* presents a powerful unit.

The protagonist of *Celia* enjoys a strong bond with her children, especially her daughter, Catherine, as well as with her friend Pauline. Celia and Pauline frequently see each other and are content to sit in amicable silence at times, able to “acknowledge each other’s right to keep their motives unexplained” (28). Celia comments to Pauline on the lack of any form of sisterhood in the life of her mother-in-law, saying, “it’s absurd for a woman of her age to come and live here where she has no friends and cannot possibly make them”, recognising the importance of relationships to women (31). *Miss Mole* presents the character most likely to be disempowered and isolated in Young’s books, but Hannah Mole, rather than being the expected poor, ageing housekeeper/companion, is, in Beauman’s words, only “*ostensibly* the quiet, plain spinster” (my emphasis) (vi). Knowing that she needed to be acceptable to the Corder family who employ her, she acts in the way expected of a housekeeper, as “she had to persuade Robert Corder that she was useful before she let him suspect her of a mind quicker than his own, and she behaved discreetly” (67). Young presents a character who exercises agency over her situation as an older unmarried woman, avoiding the disempowerment of isolation by developing close relationships with the daughters of the house in which she is employed as well as making frequent visits to her cousin and her previous landlady.

As with second-wave feminism's concentration on sisterhood, the confidence and empowerment of Young's characters are largely due to their sense of sisterhood and a community of shared experiences. Sisterhood gives them the ability to avoid isolation, and to understand that they have control over their lives. Similarly, the Six Point Group's aims were to empower women in the interwar years, uniting them through common objectives. In *The Curate's Wife*, Dahlia recognises her expected role as the wife of Reverend Sproat but retains her individuality and, like Hannah Mole, sees her role as a part to be acted: "Still essentially Dahlia Rendall, she had to present Dahlia Sproat to her new acquaintance; when she received visitors or carried messages for Cecil or went with him to the Mission, half of herself was watching the other and seeing that it played its part in a seemly fashion" (83). Young presents Dahlia's dual sense of self – a public and a private persona. Hannah Mole retains her individuality and private persona partly through her clothes, insisting on buying good shoes and being proud of her feet, but continuing to wear a coat "that was impossible not to notice" as it gave "Miss Mole a waist where waists no longer existed and a breadth of shoulder out of all proportion to her thin frame" (95). Although her decision is also related to her financial situation, she happily refers to the coat as "an old friend" (96). Celia wears clothes that make her look "almost beautiful and like the lady of the manor who chooses to do the gardening in her old clothes or can safely ignore them altogether" (212).

Through her characters and her use of "the unexpected glance, ironic speech act and narrative sleight of hand", Young challenges ideas on women's limited domestic roles, presenting the reader with questions about accepted gender

roles and patriarchal power (Briganti and Mezei *Domestic* 34). Young's characters avoid passivity and acceptance, using humour and confidence to take control of their lives and identities. Their sense of agency has a clear appeal to women involved in the second-wave feminist movement. Like Young's characters, their sense of identity and agency came through changing perceptions, rather than through radical social change. Choosing to republish Young's work represents active reading by the publisher, recognising the similarities between her interwar characters and the women of the WLM. Virago's presentation of Young's books emphasised the characters' empowerment and agency, contributing to a sense of community and commonality between readers and writers. Young uses the genre of the domestic novel to present the public/private dichotomy, writing of power struggles within marriage and empowering her characters so that they can negotiate their own identity and individuality through sisterhood and community. Delafield's work blurs the public/private dichotomy through her choice of a diary format – usually a private form of writing – as writing intended for publication.

E. M. Delafield (1890-1943)

Virago published the four books in the *Provincial Lady* series and two of Delafield's other novels as VMCs: *The Way Things Are* (1927, VMC 1988), *Thank Heaven Fasting* (1932, VMC 1988) and *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* series of four books (1930-1934), published in one volume by Virago in 1984.. *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* was first published as a column in *Time and*

Tide. Callil was reluctant to republish any of Delafield's work apart from the *Provincial Lady* series, which was one of the best-selling VMC titles, in 1997 "selling over 540,000 copies to date" (Add MS 88904/1/97). It had also been a best-seller on its first publication: "from that first week [of publication], she would become one of the most popular fictional creations of the 1930s, entertaining her readers, who saw in her only too much of themselves, and guiding them through the 'political decade' of financial depression, rapidly mutating social relations and the rise of extremism" (Lonsdale *Rereading Delafield*). My analysis of Delafield will largely focus on the first two diaries – *Diary of a Provincial Lady* (1930) and *The Provincial Lady Goes Further* (1932). Focusing on these two *Diaries* will enable me to investigate Delafield's use of the diary format and the ways in which her style and her focus on the private lives of women accord with second-wave feminist aims. Examining the *Diaries* allows an assessment of the importance of her use of the diary format to challenge both canonical writing and the gender roles expected in a patriarchal society. Like Young, Delafield employs humour in her criticism of social norms in the *Provincial Lady* series, giving her characters the ability to see comedy in their everyday situations, and suggesting that their humour can undermine patriarchal society by refusing to take it altogether seriously. The women fulfil the gendered roles expected of them, but they do so whilst laughing at the expectations of their lives – and at the men around them.

An undated memo from Alexandra Pringle to Callil attempted to persuade her to republish *The Way Things Are*: "I know you're going to hate this [...] but I really think we should publish the Delafield you don't really like. [...] I like it, Lynn

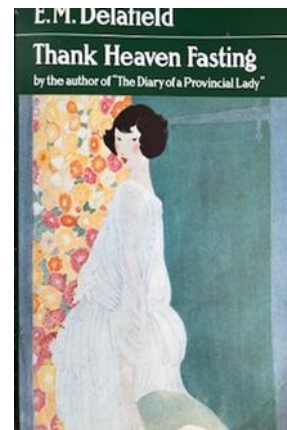
[Knight] likes it and Nicola Beauman adores it. I think it would sell to the *Provincial Lady* audience” (Add MS 8904/1/97). A further memo from Pringle explains that she had read several other Delafield titles and “sadly none are up to the standard of *The Provincial Lady*” (Add MS 88904/1/97). But she argued that, given the success of *Provincial Lady*, Virago should publish more of her work. Callil was reluctantly persuaded but worried that the books would “lose readers who love her humorous books”, insisting that the Virago introductions needed to explain why they were publishing the books (Add MS 88904/1/97). Nicola Beauman’s introduction to *The Way Things Are* opens with a reference to the feminist theme of the novel, adding that “it mixes the lightly amusing read demanded by the lending libraries with a statement about the female condition that is so crushing in its implications as to be almost unbearable” (i). Similarly, Penelope Fitzgerald’s afterword to *Thank Heaven Fasting* draws attention to the patriarchal power within society and families, saying that Monica “has been carefully trained to behave to men – beginning with her own father – exactly as they expect, and to say to them only what they want to hear” (225). Both books include the strapline “by the author of *The Diary of a Provincial Lady*” on the front covers, ensuring their appeal to readers familiar with Delafield’s work.

All three books (referring to the *Provincial Lady* series as one book) were

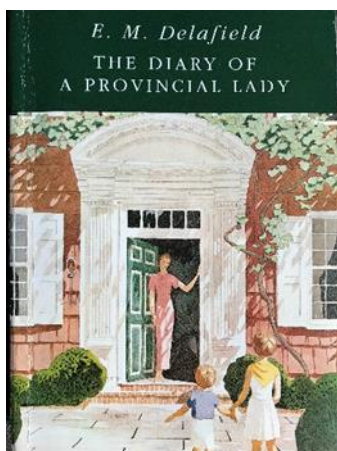


published by Virago with covers featuring images from *Vogue* magazine, clearly aimed at Virago's middle-class readers. The choice of covers seems to recognise the irony in Delafield's work, suggesting that the *Diary* series, in particular, presents characters who are unable

and unwilling to conform to the *Vogue* image of perfection and elegance expected by their social



situation. The covers show elegantly dressed women and, in the case of



Provincial Lady, two immaculate children, although within the book, the narrator frequently bemoans the state of her children and herself, comparing them all, unfavourably, to friends and neighbours. She constantly worries about her children's behaviour and their straight hair, with many comments on her feelings about her own clothes and style: "on reaching

party and seeing everybody else, at once realise that I am older, less well dressed, and immeasurably plainer than any other woman in the room (178 – page numbers refer to the 1984 VMC volume of the *Provincial Lady* diaries).

Withers discusses the covers of the VMCs in relation to the 1980s interest in heritage: "Virago's design aesthetic converged with and reflected popular visual tastes grounded in a disposition to heritage" (*Reprints* 60). Withers suggests

that the choice of covers “smoothed the passage of the publisher’s books as they locked into mainstream cultural flows” (60). Their suggestion emphasises the importance of the VMC cover design for situating the books within a time period, as well as their importance in indicating the predominance of female characters. The particular English focus of the *Vogue* covers for Delafield’s books is significant for Nicola Beauman’s contextualisation of Delafield’s writing within a tradition of English novels. She refers to the “self-deprecation” in Delafield as “a particularly English occupation” found in novels “from *Emma* through *Cranford*, to *The Diary of a Nobody*, E. F. Benson’s *Lucia* books, *1066 and All That* and *Mrs Miniver*” (introduction to *PL*, 1984, viii). Similarly, Spence’s 1999 review of Delafield’s work for the *Book and Magazine Collector* refers to *Provincial Lady* as “a mix of Jane Austen and *Punch*” (43), commenting on the similarities between the styles and humour. Beauman’s views on Delafield’s English humour and style can also apply to other VMC writers: the majority of VMCs published between 1978 and 1990 were by white, English women, although there were many other English-speaking writers included who were not English (see Appendix). Beauman writes, in her introduction to the *Provincial Lady*, that “Delafield’s heroines behave in exactly the same way as thousands of other Englishwomen living in the country in the period between the two World Wars” (vii). Beauman describes the humour of Delafield, as well as that of Jan Struther, as exhibiting the English trait of being able to laugh at their own peculiarities. She also suggests that the two writers share “a love of all things English and [their] preoccupation with minor domestic mishaps” (xiii). Valerie Grove’s 1989 introduction to the VMC publication of *Mrs. Miniver* comments on the request to Struther for articles “to brighten up the Court Page

of *The Times*", specifying that the articles were to be about "an ordinary sort of woman [...] although her style of life, her acute perceptions and her talent were all far from ordinary" (x). in a similar way, Delafield's *Diaries* were originally serialised in *Time and Tide*, although the readerships for *The Times* and *Time and Tide* were different. The concept of Englishness portrayed by Delafield and Struther may have been typical of a certain class but cannot be said to be representative of anyone outside their class, and their "Englishness" is perhaps more akin to Anderson's concept of an imagined national community.

Delafield's self-deprecating style, presented through the unnamed narrator, can be read as an ironic criticism of the advice on how to dress and use make-up constantly presented in the women's magazines criticised by the WLM. As White comments, "the image of women [magazines] portray is a conventional one [...] closely geared to the social role considered proper for women" (279). Second-wave feminists were critical of "the imagery of everyday life – films, television, radio, newspapers, magazines, books – [in which] women are depicted as inferior to men" (Rowe 25). In an implicit criticism of magazine ideals and advice for women, the use of stylised *Vogue* images as VMC covers looks back to a stylish, but impossible, presentation of women. At a time, during the 1970s and 1980s, when clothes for women were becoming more varied and sometimes representative of women's feminist beliefs, the nostalgia of *Vogue* images appears both undesirable and unattainable. But as Withers argues, the nostalgic covers reflect trends of the time, suggesting the contemporary interest in fashions provided by shops such as *Biba*, opened in 1964. The narrator of the *Provincial Lady* books makes half-hearted attempts to follow the advice

given to women but shows the impracticality of doing so for the majority of women who are busy and on limited incomes. In this way, Delafield presents the reader with an ordinary, middle-class life – the type of life ignored in male-dominated culture. Feminist publishing advanced the ideas of Woolf when she discussed the ways in which publishing had too often prioritised male perspectives, ignoring the private, domestic lives of women (*Room 74*). Publishing and republishing books based on domestic lives challenged male-dominated literary culture.

The mocking self-deprecation of Delafield's work was recognised and appreciated by readers of the VMC reprint, and a 1985 review comments that "the diaries are composed in an equable, disenchanting, gloriously self-mocking tone [...]. No one else has dealt so entertainingly with daily domestic annoyances [...]" (Craig 479). Craig's comment suggests that attitudes to domestic lives and "annoyances" had not changed much since the books were first published in the 1930s. Similarly, writer Susan Hill's review of the VMC reprint for the *Daily Telegraph* in 1985 draws attention to the ongoing interest in *Provincial Lady*, referring to it as an example of one of "those precious, special, idiosyncratic favourites [...]" which have been faithful companions through fair days and foul, on long journeys, during bouts of influenza, at times of stress and distress" (in Add MS 88904/1/97). The humour and domestic focus of the books were clearly relevant to VMC readers, showing an appreciation of Delafield's subversive and humorous approach to impossible ideals of family life expected in a patriarchal society.

Nicola Beauman suggests that Delafield's books are concerned with "the theme of the devouring of the individual's needs and emotions by society" (46). The cover notes on *The Way Things Are* explain the subject matter of the book: "in the poignancy of Laura's doubts about her marriage, she presents a dilemma which many women will recognise". The central character's marriage was, as she admits to herself, due to her desire to be married, to be like the women around her. There are similarities between *The Way Things Are* and *Thank Heaven Fasting*. The latter is described by Callil as a "portrait of women's lot in post-Edwardian times" (Add MS 88904/1/97). The cover notes further describe the book's focus on the notion that a woman's "failure or success in life depended entirely on whether or not she succeeded in getting a husband".

Delafield dedicated *Thank Heaven Fasting* to Margaret Rhondda (founder of *Time and Tide*), saying that the idea for *Thank Heaven Fasting* had developed from discussions between them on "the fate of young girls with no future except matrimony" (Powell 103). Powell explains that their discussions and awareness of the limited expectations of girls' lives had given Margaret Rhondda an impetus towards a formidable feminism. Angela John suggests that Rhondda was also influenced by her background, explaining "Margaret's marriage coincided with discovering women's suffrage though she was not rebelling against her family. Her mother became president of the Newport, Monmouthshire branch of the WSPU - Margaret was its secretary for its entire existence - and her father a national vice-president of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage" ("Looking at Lady Rhondda"). On the theme of marriage expectations, Delafield's narrator in the first *Provincial Lady Diary* makes an ironic aside about the need for women to marry through the views of the

formidably self-important Lady B., “who adds that *she* always advises girls to marry, no matter what the man is like, as any husband is better than none, and there are not nearly enough to go round” (56). The narrator of the *Diaries* does not exert agency to completely escape the expectations of her role, but she approaches her life with humour and irony, unlike the characters in her other books published as VMCs.

Delafield’s use of the diary as a mode of writing draws attention to a traditionally female, private writing format. It is a format frequently used by Virginia Woolf, who “began regularly to write a diary [in 1919]. She continued to do so until 1941” (Leonard Woolf, preface to *Virginia Woolf – a Writer’s Diary* vii). The diary format is discussed by Briganti and Mezei, who contend that “E. M. Delafield and Jan Struther adopted the diary form to reproduce the immediacy of everyday life, redefine the heroic and reconsider the validation of public over private space” (*Domestic* 31). (Struther’s *Mrs Miniver* (1939) and *Try Anything Twice* (1938) were both republished as VMCs in 1989 and 1990, respectively). The immediacy and randomness of the diary is discussed by Woolf as an entry in her 1919 diary. She comments on the “rapid haphazard gallop at which it swings along”, adding, “if I stopped and took thought, it would never be written at all; and the advantage of the method is that it sweeps up accidentally several stray matters which I should exclude if I hesitated, but which are the diamonds of the dustheap” (7). Woolf further praised the diary format as it allows women to commit their thoughts to paper – the diary “being a kindly blankfaced old confidante” (30).

Valerie Raoul's work on the gendered nature of the diary genre clarifies the place of diary writing within women's history. She explains that the private nature of letters and diaries excluded them from "literary production [and] canonic 'Literature'" (58). Her argument follows Dale Spender's explanation that writing private diaries was historically acceptable for women, who were not permitted to enter into the business world of writing commercially or for public consumption. Spender argues that "the dichotomy of male/female, public/private is maintained by permitting women to write for a private audience [...] but discouraging them from writing for a public audience" (*Man Made* 192).

The private nature of diaries establishes them as a female form of writing, a genre referred to by Adrienne Rich as "profoundly female, and feminist" (217). Her suggestion that this genre is feminist highlights the importance of women's writing as a means of expression. Rich sees the diary format as more than hidden writing seen only by the writer; it is a means of conceptualising ideas and personal thoughts. Cynthia Huff's analysis of the published diary genre helps to situate it within the second-wave feminist movement by highlighting its ability to connect the reader and the writer as well as its focus on "community, not hierarchy" (6). For Huff, the diary "stands as an emblem for feminist practice", as it indicates an unwillingness to accept or "reiterate the patterns privileged by male dominance of the pen in art and criticism" (8). Discussing a recently published book of letters between Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain, journalist Rachel Cooke's consideration of the importance of letters between the two women raises similarities between letters and diaries. She suggests that their regular correspondence "was a means of sorting out their ideas about how

proudly modern women like themselves should live and work” (“A Strange Sisterhood” 38). Like Rich, Cooke reads their correspondence as feminist way of conceptualising ideas about women in a patriarchal society.

Delafield’s unnamed narrator in her fictional diary recognises the predominant, dismissively patriarchal attitudes to diary writing as a private form of writing, adding an ironically self-deprecating comment at the conclusion of the first volume: “Robert says, Why don’t I get into bed? I say, Because I am writing my Diary. Robert replies, kindly, but quite definitely, that In his opinion, That is Waste of Time” (*PL* 121). Using the diary format (in a fictional form) for work intended for publication subverts its traditional place in private literary production, and it becomes a means of challenging accepted literary norms. Although the use of the diary in fiction pre-dates the second-wave feminist movement, it came to represent a central aspect of the WLM, challenging patriarchal writing forms. It offers, in a published format, a traditionally hidden female writing form which promotes the personal lives and thoughts of women. By giving readers an insight into women’s day-to-day lives, diaries enabled an understanding of the ways in which patriarchal society limited women’s everyday lives and activities.

The privacy and solitary nature of women’s diaries was challenged at times and Simons explains that “women diarists were not always as solitary in their writing as we might suppose. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for instance, journals [...] were also often thought of as a collective activity” (*Diaries* 4).

Women’s writing has, historically, been restricted to the personal and domestic

spheres but their diaries are indicative of “how women’s writing for publication was most carefully stage-managed so as to stay within accepted limits” (*Diaries* 189). The publication of the diary or the fictional diary format unites the forms of women’s writing and male-dominated publishing, as exhibited by Delafield and, earlier, by Anne Brontë in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). More recently, Dodie Smith’s *I Capture the Castle* (1948), and Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (1996) are among other more contemporary novels to use the fictional diary or journal format for published work.

Delafield’s diaries are interspersed with comments by the narrator on her constant battle to juggle the household finances, her duties in the village, her writing (vital to the family finances) and the running of the family, while she generally finds her husband, Robert, “asleep behind *The Times*” (PL 83). With increasing numbers of women in paid employment during second-wave feminism, there were complaints that women ended up doing all the work at home as well as working outside the home, leading to campaigns such as Wages for Housework. The campaign led to marches from the early 1970s onwards, the publication of a manifesto and several books, some of which were published by Pluto Press, the left-wing publishing company, founded in 1969, although the 1975 publication *All Work and No Pay* (Edmond and Fleming) was published by Falling Wall Press. Louse Toupin’s *Wages for Housework: A History of an International Feminist Movement, 1972-77*, a Pluto Press publication, describes the Wages for Housework “perspective [as] a completely original school of thought, and a toolbox for action, at the beginning of second-wave feminism” (Toupin). The Wages For Housework Manifesto, reproduced in

Toupin's book, includes the statement "This crime of work and wagelessness brands us for life as the weaker sex and delivers us powerless to employers, government planners and legislators, doctors, the police, prisons and mental institutions as well as the individual men for a lifetime of servitude and imprisonment" (plutobooks.com/blog). Many of the VMCs I discuss in this thesis allude to the powerlessness of women and to their financial dependence on men or on their families, making the Wages For Housework campaign relevant to the readers interpreting the novels through second-wave feminist ideas and knowledge. Pluto Press describes itself as "an anti-capitalist, internationally and politically independent publisher" (Pluto Press website). Whilst not specifically mentioning feminist campaigns, there are obvious overlaps between Pluto Press and feminist publishing houses, both of which aim to "make timely interventions in contemporary struggles" (Pluto Press website).

Delafield's narrator also uses her self-deprecating humour to discuss male power in society (and women's attitudes to it) by describing an event in her London flat (rented from the proceeds of her successful novel), in which several women from the neighbouring flats try to help her stop an incessantly ringing doorbell. Eventually, "we all look at the ceiling and say Better Fetch a Man. This is eventually done, and I meditate ironical articles on Feminism [...]. Man arrives, says Ah, yes, [...] and at once reduces bell to order, apparently by sheer power of masculinity" (*PL* 185). She comments on societal attitudes to women in her frequent, bracketed, queries: "(Query, mainly rhetorical: Why are non-professional women, if married and with children, so frequently referred to as 'leisured'? Answer comes there none)" (99). The narrator in *Provincial Lady*

raises questions throughout the books on women's restrictions in a patriarchal society, using humour to subvert and challenge accepted social norms. Using the diary format allows Delafield to include her character's comments as her private thoughts. By doing so, Delafield offers the readers analysis of social norms and their impact on women's lives, whilst creating a link between the reader and the writer.

Young, Delafield, and Holtby all contributed to *Time and Tide*, the monthly journal established in 1920 by Lady Rhondda to address "the lack of a paper which shall treat men and women as equally part of the great human family, working side by side" (Margaret Rhondda's introduction to the first edition, 14/05/1920, reproduced in Dale Spender *Time* 7). Rosalind Delmar described *Time and Tide* as developing "out of a feminist desire to create a weekly run by women and dedicated to continuing problems of feminism" (afterword to Brittain's *Testament of Friendship* 447). Delafield "reviewed books and contributed short stories" to *Time and Tide* (Spender *Time* 123). Additionally, *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* was originally published as a series in *Time and Tide*, first appearing in 1929. Catherine Clay considers the weekly publication of Delafield's work as "evidence that Time and Tide still consciously catered for the ordinary woman reader" (274). As with the appeal of the VMCs, avoiding the promotion of radical feminism was an important factor in audience reach. Clay also points out that Rhondda avoided a separatist position, "and she continued to recruit men to the paper whose views and/or writing she particularly admired" (274).

The *Time and Tide* contributors encompassed several other future VMC writers, including Rose Macaulay and Rebecca West. Nicola Beauman's introduction sets *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* in the context of its publication in weekly instalments in the magazine *Time and Tide*, described by Dale Spender as "a periodical which could help remedy some of the gaps in women's education [...] and which could help to organise and unite the women's vote" (*Time* 6). For Beauman, Delafield's involvement with *Time and Tide* indicates that "she was a pragmatic feminist who felt that self-knowledge was a necessary prelude to improvement" (viii). Beauman's view could accurately be applied to second-wave feminists who extolled the virtues of consciousness-raising groups, highlighting an important link between Delafield and the WLM readers. *Time and Tide* ran from 1920-1986. The *Diary of a Provincial Lady* contains several references to the magazine, contextualising the *Diary*, and the journal, as having feminist, educated views: "Read admirable, but profoundly discouraging article in *Time and Tide* relating to Bernard Shaw's women, applying to most of us" (*PL* 53).

Beauman's description of Delafield as "a pragmatic feminist" supports Rich's argument that the diary genre is feminist – the diary enables women to develop self-knowledge by providing a means of conceptualising thoughts. Written as a diary, *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* reflects the separation between the public and private worlds and between the roles of women and men. Intended for publication, the fictional diary blurs the public/private dichotomy. While Delafield's narrator is seen to be writing a private diary, it is intended for a reading public. Delafield's *Provincial Lady* books exemplify the self-awareness

important to both Delafield and to second-wave feminism: sharing ideas that empower women by ending their isolation and supporting the understanding that society treats women and men differently.

Huff argues that the nature of diaries helps to join modern readers to the past by offering personal recollections; Delafield's fictional presentation of daily events takes on the important role of providing VMC readers with a picture of their history; Nicola Beauman's introduction to the VMC publication of the *Provincial Lady* suggests that her life would be familiar to many interwar women. A reader's letter to Virago in 1988 confirmed that *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* provided information on (some) women's lives in the interwar years, saying, "I have clear childhood and young adult memories of the sort of world she depicts" (Add MS 88904/1/97). Huff's work on the diary form also comments on its value in "establishing ties between the reader and the writer, between one human being and another", in a similar way to Virago's establishment of ties of sisterhood between writers and readers (6). Delafield further develops these relationships by her narrator's use of bracketed memos, notes, and queries to herself, asking questions as if she is asking the reader to enter into a conversation with her. The narrative of *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* is frequently interspersed with her comments and questions, questions that often challenge patriarchal views of women: "(Query: Does motherhood lead to cynicism? This contrary to every convention of art, literature, or morality, but cannot altogether escape conviction that answer may be in the affirmative)" (95).

A clear link is also made between the narrator of the *Provincial Lady* books and the reading public through her many references to current books and book of the month recommendations, some of which would have become familiar to second-wave readers as VMCs. Lonsdale refers to Delafield's comments on current publications. "The interwar period also saw middlebrow writers, including E. M. Delafield, [...] emphasising the pleasures of reading" (*Rebel Women* 21). Lonsdale explains the importance of the links between women writers: "their novels foregrounded issues concerning women such as divorce, living independently and inequalities in the workplace" (21). The links between interwar women writers is mirrored by the WLM's focus on sisterhood and a community of readers sharing ideas between women for empowerment. Virago's project of reprinting interwar writing by women indicates acknowledgement of the relevance of the books' themes for second-wave readers.

Illustrating the importance of, and interest in, reading to the *Diary's* protagonist and her friends and acquaintances, the narrator of is trying to see what a young man is reading, a book "mysteriously shrouded in holland cover [...] conjectures waver between *The Well of Loneliness* and *The Colonel's Daughter*" (169). *The Well of Loneliness* was published as a VMC. *Time and Tide* is sometimes referred to in relation to the narrator's lack of confidence in her literary knowledge – "Pamela turns to me [...] and talks about books, none of which have been published for more than five minutes and none of which, in consequence, I have as yet read – but feel that I am expected to be on my own ground here, and must – like Mrs. Dombey – make an effort, which I do by

remembering Literary Criticisms in *Time and Tide's* issue of yesterday" (193). The above conversation concludes with one of the narrator's asides as she ponders an "interesting little problem [which] hovers on threshold of consciousness: How on earth do Pamela and her friends achieve conversation about books which I am perfectly certain none of them have read? Answer, at the moment, baffles me completely" (193). Although feeling intimidated by Pamela, the narrator's comment develops a sense of community with many of the readers, and with any woman who has felt out of her depth in conversations. Delafield's frequent references to books also reinforce the sense of shared interests and a tradition of women's writing and reading. Taylor refers to the importance of shared reading for women, arguing that "over the centuries, women of all nations have come together to read" (176). Delafield's repeated mentions of books she has read, as well as new books, supports the sense of community, involving the reader in her interests as well as indicating the ongoing relevance of the books mentioned for second-wave feminists.

Through her narrator, Delafield subverts patriarchal depictions of life in art and literature. She refers scathingly to ideas of romance, as seen in her thoughts and conversation with a friend/acquaintance suffering yet another broken heart: "Life, declares Pamela, is very, very difficult, and she is perfectly certain that I feel, as she does, that nothing in the world matters except Love. Stifle strong inclination to reply that banking account, sound teeth and adequate servants matter a great deal more [...]" (181). The *Diary of a Provincial Lady* is critical of traditional ideas of romantic writing, with its ultimate aim of a happy marriage. Criticisms of the romantic happy ending are the subject matter of many VMCs,

and all the writers I discuss criticise the romance novel in their own styles. Showalter discusses the social pressure on women to write about romance and happy endings, criticising the notion that there are biological and essentialist explanations. She explains, “if there was a female literary tradition, I was sure, it was not because women were biologically different to (sic) men, nor because they were inherently more interested in romance or homemaking. Women’s writing had to do with literary conventions and the pressures of the marketplace” (in *A Virago Keepsake* 83). Delafield’s satirical criticism of the romance genre resonates with the WLM’s challenges to the institution of marriage and its patriarchal bias.

The humorous diary format retains its popularity as writing by and for women. The fictional diary continues to be enjoyed, with Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (1996) sometimes being described as a modern-day *Provincial Lady*. Writer and journalist Rachel Cooke chose her top ten VMCs in 2008. Her list included *The Diary of a Provincial Lady*, which she summarises: “The Provincial Lady has a nice house, a nice husband – usually asleep behind *The Times* – and nice children. She never raises her voice, rarely ventures outside Devon and only occasionally becomes vexed by the servant problem. Much funnier than *Bridget Jones*” (*The Guardian*, 2008). Having been advised to read *Provincial Lady* in the early 1970s, writer Jilly Cooper managed to track down a copy after being told that “there wasn’t much call for Delafield anymore” (*The Guardian*, 2008). Cooper comments on the appeal of Delafield’s book to women from a range of backgrounds – in discussion with other fans of the book, she comments, “so there we were: a dying old lady, an ardent American feminist

and a scruffy Putney journalist, with nothing in common on the surface, yet all identifying totally with E. M. Delafield's gentle, disaster-prone, yet curiously dry-witted heroine" (*The Guardian*). The enjoyment, for Cooper, is partly due to Delafield's style, which she refers to as a combination of subtle talent and an "unerringly accurate social sense" (*The Guardian*). Author Sue Hepworth, writing in the *Derby Evening Telegraph* in June 2006, when introduced to Delafield's book, was of the opinion that "this fusty-sounding novel [...] written and set in the 1930s, [...] has nothing to say to readers living in a different social milieu, in another century" (in Add MS 88904/1/98). But Hepworth's opinion changed on reading the book, "which had me smiling in recognition on every page", calling the book "timeless". Producing the *Provincial Lady* series as a VMC brought this social sense and humour to a new generation of readers. On the occasion of Virago's 30th birthday celebrations and the publication of a new version of *Provincial Lady*, Cooper writes "I am so glad [Virago] are celebrating it with this lovely new edition [...]. I am sure it will introduce her to a legion of new readers and make her once again the household name she deserves to be" (Add MS 88904/1/182).

Known for her contributions to *Time and Tide*, as well as for her novels, Delafield is linked to Winfred Holtby, also a contributor to, and a director of, the journal. Although sharing views on the importance of feminism, Holtby was a more overt and campaigning feminist than Delafield. Whilst they included similar themes in their work, their styles and approaches differed. Holtby's position as an unmarried woman and a feminist activist gives her work a different focus to Delafield's. Where Delafield's work contains criticisms of gender roles within

marriage, and of the social expectations of women's roles, Holtby was critical of the institution of marriage, producing novels that promoted the life of the unmarried woman.

Winifred Holtby (1898-1935)

Virago republished all six of Holtby's novels as VMCs. Her first novel, *Anderby Wold*, was published in 1923 (VMC 1981), followed by *The Crowded Street* in 1924 (VMC 1981), *The Land of Green Ginger* in 1927 (VMC 1983), *Poor Caroline* in 1931 (VMC 1985), *Mandoa, Mandoa!* in 1933 (VMC 1982), and her most famous novel, *South Riding*, published posthumously in 1936 (VMC 1988). Like Young's *Miss Mole*, *South Riding* was the "winner of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize" (cover notes, *South Riding*). In addition to her novels, Holtby was known for writing two volumes of short stories, poetry, essays, a critical study of Virginia Woolf (1932), and *Women and a Changing Civilisation* (1936). She was also a prolific contributor to several journals and newspapers, including *Time and Tide*. Holtby was additionally recognized for being a campaigner, fighting for pacifist causes and for women's rights.

Holtby's feminist views make her an ideal addition to the VMC range, but Callil was resistant to the idea of republishing her books. Writing to Mary Stott in 1978 in reply to Stott's request for Holtby's books to be republished, Callil wrote "I've just finished all Winifred Holtby's novels and except for *South Riding* they're not good, but nothing like as bad as Vera Brittain's, which I've also just finished and which are really grim" (Add MS 88904/1/194). Callil did, however, like Brittain's

Honourable Estate, recognising its relevance to modern feminists (Add MS 88904/1/194). Mary Cadogan, who was to write the new introduction for the VMC republication of *Anderby Wold*, wrote an article on Holtby and Brittain's political lives for *The Morning Star* dated February 1980. She explained that both writers became "lifelong converts to the cause of pacifism" as well as being supporters of the feminist movement (in Add MS 88904/1/196). Cadogan, too, was of the opinion that Holtby was the better writer, explaining that her "predominant theme is the conflict between progressive ideas and traditional attitudes", a theme apparent in all her novels (Add MS 88904/1/196). This theme in Holtby's work has great relevance for the second-wave feminist movement, reflected in Rowbotham's work on women in the 1970s (in *Woman's Consciousness*). Women influenced by the ideas and campaigns of the WLM found that their progressive ideas were in conflict with the traditional values and norms of society. This conflict relates to women after both World Wars; having been used to being in paid employment during the war efforts, women then found that they were pushed back into the domestic life within the home. In her discussion of the origins of the second-wave feminist movement, Bruley found that women of the baby boomer generation "were particularly influenced by the frustration and resentment of their mothers, whose lives were artificially bounded by domesticity" (75). Bruley also found, during the interviews she carried out, that "several women sought to place themselves within a continuing feminist tradition dating to the early suffrage movement" (69). Her comment implies that the conflict between progressive and traditional ideas raised in Holtby's work resonated with both post-War generations of women.

In the light of Callil's dislike of both Holtby and Brittain, it is hard to know why Virago republished the work of both writers, although it is possibly, in part, a response to reader requests. As well as Stott's request, for example, an unnamed male reader wrote to Virago in 1981 asking for Holtby's books to be republished, and Paul Berry (Holtby's literary executor) points out in 1977 that "there has been an enormous upsurge of interest in the works of Winifred Holtby since 1970 [...] three of her novels – *Anderby Wold*, *The Land of Green Ginger* and *The Crowded Street* were published in paperback by Transworld Publishers last year" (Add MS 88904/1/194). Like some of Callil's other publishing decisions, she was likely to have based her choice partly on financial considerations. Nevertheless, George Davidson's 1984 introduction to Holtby's *Poor Caroline* comments on the poor sales of her first three novels when first published, saying that they "had more or less dissatisfied her [Holtby], and been commercially unsuccessful" (PC xi). Later film and television productions of *South Riding* (1974) and Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1979) would draw attention to both writers' books. (There had also been an earlier film of *South Riding* in 1938, starring Edna Best and Ralph Richardson). Withers discusses the impact of the successful television adaptation of *Testament of Youth* on Virago's book sales, arguing that "the success of the BBC's *Testament of Youth* gave Virago further opportunities to exploit rights held in the book" (*Reprints* 44). The 1979 adaptation helped to make the VMC publication "a clear best-seller" (46). In addition to the popularity of the television adaptation of *South Riding*, Withers also argues that Brittain's success impacted on decisions to republish Holtby's work, as the two writers are frequently considered together.

Analysing the republished editions of some of Holtby's novels gives insight into how they were marketed by Virago for the WLM generation of readers.

There has been much written on *South Riding*, generally recognised to be her best work and the book for which Holtby is remembered. It seems to be the only one of her books that many people have heard of, partly due to television adaptations in 1974 and 2011, and partly due to its never having been out of print since its first publication in 1936 (Shaw, preface to Holtby *Virginia Woolf* xix). The cover of the 1988 VMC edition highlights the television adaptations.

Rather than add further discussion on the well-known book, I will instead focus on Holtby's less well-known first three novels – *Anderby Wold*, *The Crowded Street* and *The Land of Green Ginger* – looking at

Virago's presentation and at their content, analysing the books' relevance to WLM readers in the 1980s.

Discussing these early novels allows an insight into Holtby's representation of her feminist views and her approach to the changing identities of women. They also show her challenge to opinions on unmarried

women, particularly in what Wallace refers to as her "spinster novels" (*Sisters* 132).



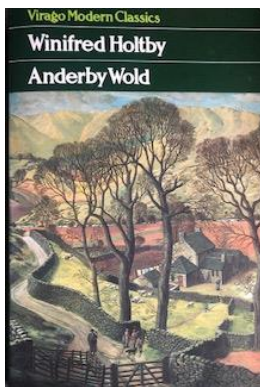
Holtby's work is frequently discussed together with that of Vera Brittain, promoting the suggestion that, because of their shared lives, their work was similar, but I will focus on some major differences between them. Their close friendship was clearly of enormous importance to them both – their work

focuses on the changing roles and identities of women in the interwar years and reflects their joint lifestyles of shared childcare and work. Gorham's discussion suggests that they "consciously and deliberately set out to establish a household that would represent a rejection of conventional middle-class mores" (51). With Holtby helping to care for Brittain's children, they attempted to be a practical example of women being able to have children and still work, challenging, at the same time, the expected role of women as mothers. Delmar's afterword to Brittain's *Testament of Friendship* comments on the important role played "by both Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby in helping to shape feminist ideas in the twenties and thirties" (450). Their novels reflected their chosen lifestyles, but Holtby's work differs from Brittain's, and I will suggest ways in which their personal lives influenced Holtby's writing, referring in particular to Holtby's promotion of her views on spinsterhood as an alternative to marriage and Brittain's ideas on evolving roles within marriage.

Several critics have discussed Holtby's political and feminist beliefs and, while some of the newly commissioned introductions draw attention to Holtby's political campaigning, internationalism, and writing, the VMC republications seem to largely ignore these aspects of the author's life in their choice of cover paintings. It is perhaps because of Virago's determination to appeal to non-radical feminists that her books were not promoted as feminist novels. Aiming at a middle-class non-radical audience, or to all women as Callil suggested, may have influenced the choice of cover paintings and the presentation of the books. Holtby's promotion of spinsterhood as a lifestyle choice was not reflected in some of the campaigns of the second-wave feminist movement, although

reading her critical views on societal attitudes to gender roles in marriage coincided with many WLM ideas. The WLM was, largely but not exclusively, more closely aligned to Brittain's suggestions of changes within the institution of marriage in order to challenge its patriarchal bias. Virago's decision to avoid promoting Holtby's novels as overtly feminist books cleverly avoided alienating their audience of non-radical feminists.

The majority of the novels I discuss in previous sections feature cover paintings



that focus on images of women, immediately drawing attention to the books' content and interest to women readers. Of Holtby's novels, only *Poor Caroline* and *South Riding* conform to the pattern of most VMCs. The cover painting on *Anderby Wold* focuses on its rural setting, with a detail of a painting by Scottish artist James McIntosh

Patrick (1907-1998). *Springtime in Eskdale* was painted in 1934 and depicts "a typical Dumfriesshire scene", based on the early home of engineer Thomas Telford (liverpoolmuseums.org). Neither the painting nor its topic make any reference to the lives of women. Taking the cover picture in conjunction with the cover notes indicates Virago's decision to present *Anderby Wold* as a rural love story.

Although the cover notes make it clear that the main character is female, there is no hint of Holtby's feminist views in the description of *Anderby Wold*: "Mary Robson is a young Yorkshire woman, married to her solid unromantic cousin, John. [...] Into her purposeful life erupts David Rossitur [...]: how can she help

but love him?" (cover notes). Like several other VMCs, such as Lehmann's *A Note in Music* and Young's *Celia*, the book depicts a mundane, passionless marriage: "John [...] had asked her to marry him. Well, her acceptance had been a matter of convenience rather than passion, and no courtship could have been more decorous" (AW 55). In her own mind, Mary "had dreamed of a romance she did not know" (55) and she is portrayed as a dissatisfied woman looking for a role in life. Mary recognises that many of her activities and involvements in village life are a means of trying to make her life satisfying: "Possibly she was wrong. Her obstinacy about the water-paddock, her advice to Violet, her wistfulness in the morning, were all part of a sentimental legend, invented by people to hide the emptiness of their lives" (AW 64). In this, her experience is not unlike the second-wave feminists' frustration discussed by Rowbotham. She argued in 1973 that women were unfulfilled on finding that their education and ideas were not applicable to the lives available to, or expected of, them (in *Woman's Consciousness*). In accordance with Holtby's "old feminist" beliefs, as discussed above, Cadogan's introduction suggests that, like many women, "in a different society [Mary] would almost certainly have pursued a successful career" (xv). Holtby's beliefs in the importance of equal rights and women's access to careers are behind her portrayal of Mary Robson's dissatisfaction with her limited life choices.

The novel reads as an extension to the domestic novel more than as the rural love story suggested by Virago's curation and presentation. Mary Robson is shown to have agency and dominance within the domestic setting of her home, but she also exerts a level of control over the district through her attempts to

help others by involving herself in their domestic lives. Unlike Young's protagonists, particularly Celia, Mary does not view the domestic sphere as a means of escape through imagination – it is seen to be her only lifestyle option. Her work in her home and throughout the village are Mary's attempt to exert her independence and agency, and to find a role that gives her an identity. Unable to play an active role in non-domestic duties outside the home, Mary's pursuit of activity through the domestic affairs of the village both challenges and blurs the dichotomy between the public and private spheres of life. Her work and involvement in local matters is restricted to traditional areas of women's caring work, but in a public sphere outside her own home.

Mary believes her role in the village compares favourably to her cousin Ursula's role of motherhood. Whilst Ursula felt superior "having consumed vast quantities of literature on the subject of their upbringing [and] had learnt all [...] that was to be known", Mary had "nursed several dozens of Anderby infants through croup and colic and teething [...] (*AW* 162). In her introduction, author Mary Cadogan summarises Mary's life as "putting down roots, not only in struggling to maintain her farm but in mothering and moulding the whole village" (*AW* xvii). Cadogan's argument refers to the overlap in Mary's life between her public and private lives, in which her public role is also based on domestic activities and "mothering". Holtby portrays Mary's struggles for independence and social position: "she hated being seen at a disadvantage, and thought that her dignity could only be maintained by independence" (*AW* 109). Later, when Mary's position is threatened by events, she realises that "further progress could bring her no increase of power, only enforced abdication from the only

dominion she could hold" (AW 174-5). Ultimately, she finds there is no escape from the sphere of caring and domesticity, not unlike Lehmann's character, Grace, in *A Note in Music*.

Joannou argues that Holtby's writing reflects a lack of certainty about women's roles in society (*Ladies* 191). The uncertainties result from women's militant campaigning for suffrage and their active roles in society during the First World War compared with the role still expected of women. Mary's life depicts the conflict between her desire to be actively involved in society and the limitations imposed by social expectations and attitudes. The conflict in Mary's life reaches a crisis by the end of the book when she confronts the men on strike. She is taking the place of her husband, John, because of his illness. Her confrontational attitude, which exacerbates the problems, leads to criticism from her family. The women comment on her lack of self-control, implying that, as a woman, she should not have been involved in work matters. Her behaviour is criticised as unwomanly: "She either has extraordinary notions of behaviour or very little self-control – though, of course, I always feel inclined to excuse her a great deal, because she hasn't any children" (AW 252). Holtby emphasises the difficulties experienced by women, especially married women, who wish to have roles outside the home.

The most outspoken critic of Mary's involvement in matters outside the home is Sarah, her husband's sister. In contrast to many other VMC novels promoting the importance of friendship between women, Sarah is viewed by both Mary and Sarah as a rival for social position and for control of John Robson – Mary's

husband and Sarah's brother. Their competitive relationship, based on their wish to control John, reflects the lack of any satisfactory role available to either woman, as well as the impossibility of obtaining financial independence – one of the aims of the WLM. Although the female members of the family see each other quite often, there is no sense of supportive friendship or sisterhood between them. The visit to Anderby at the beginning of the novel is viewed by Sarah as an unpleasant duty, and her husband Tom recognises her mood with dismay: "Noticing the uncompromising angle of Sarah's bonnet, Tom decided he was in for an uncomfortable afternoon" (*AW* 14). Sarah feels strongly that women's identity should not be as a possession of a man; she is critical of her female relatives, "known familiarly as 'Mrs. Donald' or 'Mrs. Richard', as though their only claim to recognition lay in the identity of their lord and possessor" (*AW* 12). In contrast to the women known as belonging to their husbands, Sarah's husband is depicted as her inferior in their marriage. Looking at "Tom's shrinking figure on the seat beside her [shows] he only crept through life like the shadow cast by the flame of his wife's vitality" (*AW* 12). Sarah is portrayed as a woman who wants independence, but can only exercise agency within the acceptable social norms of marriage.

Mary and Sarah vie for power in a society that views women's most important role as that of motherhood. Mary's success in maintaining the farm and her position in Anderby Wold are viewed by her female relatives as having far less significance than producing children. Her cousin Ursula is seen, by her relatives, as having fulfilled her expected function and the childless Mary feels isolated. Visiting Ursula and her baby along with the other women, Mary reflects

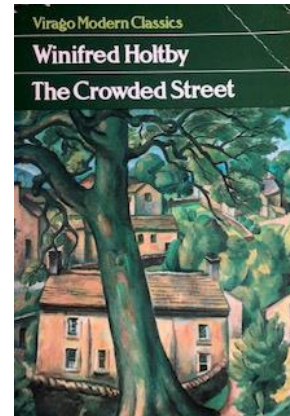
that “usually she was rather sorry for Mrs. Toby. To-day, seeing her permitted as an experienced mother to hold Thomas for the unprecedented period of five minutes, she felt inclined to be spiteful” (*AW* 164). Mary’s position as owner of her farm and patroness of the village means nothing when she is isolated as the childless woman in Ursula’s company: “She was not used to being out of it and disliked the sensation. Even Mrs. Toby seemed to assume an air of faint patronage towards her uninitiation” (*AW* 164).

Although not emphasised by Virago’s republished edition, Holtby’s novel clearly contains several themes that make it relevant to its new VMC readership, as do the lives of Holtby and Brittain in their decision to choose a lifestyle that combined work and family. The challenges of their novels are reflected in the later WLM debates and campaigns. Women were achieving access to higher education and the ability to postpone having children, but were still viewed as belonging to the private, domestic sphere by patriarchal cultural and social values. Wallace argues that Holtby and Brittain were representative of the “first generation of university-educated women” (in Regan 228). These earlier university-educated women are comparable to the larger group of women attending university in the WLM years. Both generations had to contend with the difficulty of finding satisfying roles in patriarchal societies. Reflecting the demands of the Six Point Group for improvements in the lives of mothers as well as women in paid employment, Holtby’s characters epitomise the dissatisfaction of women in the interwar years; it is a dissatisfaction recognised by the book’s second-wave readers, who were continuing the campaign for improved conditions for all women. Holtby draws attention to the limitations of

women's expected roles offering, in her life and her writing, alternative ways of living.

Holtby's novels reflect her feminist views on the difficulty of women combining careers with motherhood. Her frequent focus on spinsterhood, particularly in *Poor Caroline*, *The Crowded Street* and *South Riding*, highlights the difficulty of married women being able to pursue careers. Shaw puts Holtby's work "in the context of interwar feminist arguments on the grounds of principle that marriage and children ought to be compatible with a career" (*Stream* 118). In *Anderby Wold*, Mary is portrayed as unable to continue to successfully run the farm when she needs to care for her husband. By the end of the book, John had suffered a stroke and the young man, David, had died. Mary blames herself: "Then John's stroke, and Coast's invitation to Hunting, and the strike, and the fire, and David's death. All somehow connected with things she had done or left undone" (*AW* 307). Ultimately, Holtby presents a situation in which Mary's desire to succeed outside the home meant failure for both her personal and her public roles, reflecting a debate that remains unresolved today. The bleak ending of *Anderby Wold* can be seen as Holtby's critical view of a society that encourages women to marry but then prevents marriage from being satisfactory. The WLM campaign specifically fought for free nurseries to enable women to take on paid employment, attempting to end the choice to be either a mother or to have paid work. The desire to combine both had not progressed sufficiently since Holtby presented Mary's dilemma. Her next novels tackled the issue by more overtly promoting life without marriage for women.

Holtby's second novel, *The Crowded Street*, was also published as a VMC with a cover painting that reflects its rural setting rather than its focus on women's lives. The painting is by Roland Vivian Pitchforth, a landscape artist (1895-1982). *Hebden Bridge in Yorkshire* is described as "a stylised view [...] looking down over the village" (artuk.org). It is possible that Virago felt that Holtby was already well-recognised as a feminist so further promotion was not necessary, although it is unclear how widely known her books were before the VMC republications of her work. In these two early novels by Holtby, the cover paintings clearly promote the rural setting more than the feminist appeal. The non-feminist marketing and branding of Holtby's novels minimised her feminist credentials and avoided alienating readers holding more moderate feminist views.



The cover notes on *The Crowded Street* refer to a rural love story, as with *Anderby Wold*, but they additionally place emphasis on the book's appeal to women and to feminist ideas, although the work of Vera Brittain is also promoted. The book is described as "powerfully tracing one woman's search for independence and love" adding that "it echoes in fictional form the years autobiographically recorded by her close friend Vera Brittain in *Testament of Youth*". The frequent discussions of the writers as a single entity perhaps minimise the achievements of both, but particularly Holtby. Marion Shaw, Holtby's biographer, suggests that Brittain herself is partly responsible for this attitude. Shaw argues that Brittain's depiction of Holtby in *Testament of*

Friendship “deprived Winifred of her independent status as a successful woman of action [and she] was more famous, more heroic and less pathetic than Vera paints her” (*Stream* 292). Shaw contends that Brittain’s presentation of Holtby as less independent and successful than she was during her life suggests that “Vera did not wish to promote” Holtby as entertaining and humorous, choosing instead to present a “dignified record of a remarkable friendship” (292). Shaw also argues that the friendship between Holtby and Brittain “became a feminist icon, an example of ‘sisterhood’ at its most admirable” (3). Although later interpretation of the friendship, following the second-wave feminists’ promotion of sisterhood, seems an appropriate understanding of their lives, Shaw’s previous comments on Brittain’s presentation of Holtby indicate that there was perhaps as much rivalry as sisterhood in their friendship. Rachel Cooke’s review of the recent publication of letters between Holtby and Brittain (2022, edited by Showalter) suggests that Brittain believed that Holtby was the better writer: “[Brittain] struggles to hide – and sometimes doesn’t even bother to try – her envy of Holtby’s talent, of the fact that, initially, her friend is to be published while her books are rejected” (“A strange sisterhood”). The common acceptance of Holtby and Brittain as united in sisterhood avoids discussion of the two women as rivals, an idea far less palatable to second-wave feminists.

The cover notes on *The Crowded Street* highlight its focus on women’s fight against the limited expectations imposed by society. The notes additionally draw attention to the impact of the First World War on the main character, reflecting the changing aims and attitudes of many women and their sense of identity in the interwar years: “Then comes the First World War, a watershed

which tragically revolutionises the lives of her generation” (cover notes *The Crowded Street*). This argument is part of the focus of Hardisty’s introduction. She suggests that *The Crowded Street* is based on two issues of great importance to Holtby: firstly, the book offers a fictional critique of women’s limited ambitions in the face of their changing sense of identity. After the War, Holtby and Brittain “were determined to live by writing novels” as well as teaching and journalism and Holtby was critical of what she saw to be “her sister Grace’s purposeless life” (Hardisty in *The Crowded Street* x). Shaw explains that Grace, who died in childbirth, “was a reminder of the historic fate of women to attend upon men [...] and Winifred found such passive femininity a threat to the kind of feminism she and Vera professed” (*Stream* 23).

The more important second issue in *The Crowded Street*, according to Hardisty, is Holtby’s concern over “the necessity to escape the blighting frustration of life as a ‘home daughter’” (xi). Although Holtby’s upbringing was enlightened enough to allow her freedom and choice, with her mother actively encouraging her to go to Oxford, Hardisty comments that “family responsibilities made claims on her time and strength, as indeed they always have for women” (xi). Oram argues that, in *The Crowded Street*, Holtby presented a criticism of the social expectations that limited the lives of unmarried women. Muriel is depicted as slowly recognising that she needs to reject the social norms and find value in her own choices. Oram concludes that Holtby was not alone in challenging the narrow expectations imposed on women, suggesting that “the negative psychological view of spinsters was not hegemonic and was continuously and strongly contested by feminists” (429). In 1980 Callil, writing to

Hardisty about the introduction to Holtby's novels, suggested that "Holtby was writing within a tradition of novels which tried to expose the position of the single unmarried woman within the home" (Add MS 88904/1/194). Callil recognised that Holtby's work was important in its attempts to counter dismissive and pejorative attitudes to unmarried women, views that Holtby shared with Young and her portrayal of Hannah Mole. The WLM was important in challenging negative views of women in society, making Holtby's work relevant to the second-wave generation.

Wallace discusses *The Crowded Street* as one of Holtby's "spinster novels" (*Sisters* 132). Her discussion highlights a fundamental difference between the work of Holtby and Brittain; like many interwar novels by both women and men, Brittain's work revolves around marriage, partly as plot resolution. Wallace suggests that the differences between Holtby and Brittain are made clear in "the intertextual dialogue between *South Riding* and *Honourable Estate* [which] centres around what was their greatest difference in both personal and political terms – Brittain's advocacy of marriage and Holtby's defence of spinsterhood" (*Sisters* 144). In *The Crowded Street*, Muriel worries to herself "what on earth shall I do when I get home? Read? All books are the same – about beautiful girls who get married" (CS 219). Brittain's *Honourable Estate* presents marriage critically but nevertheless offers the possibility of more equal marriages that do not keep women in a position of dependence. In contrast, Holtby presents "spinsterhood as a positive choice" (Wallace *Sisters* 132). In this aspect of her writing, Holtby also differs from Young – *Miss Mole* presented the protagonist as a strong woman, but ended with her decision to marry, on her own terms, but in

recognition of what was expected in novels about single women, although the irony subverts Young's plot resolution.

In *The Crowded Street* Muriel voluntarily rejects marriage. Talking to her father, she explains "it isn't marriage I object to – only marriage as an end of life in itself, as the ultimate goal of the female soul's development" (CS 230).

Joannou's discussion of the spinster novel comments on its frequency in interwar writing, which is understood as a response to historical events and the large numbers of unmarried women resulting from the war. Her discussion draws attention to the novels that contested, and transformed, "the derogatory image of the spinster" (*Ladies* 82). Holtby's work is part of the body of writing that challenged images of spinsterhood, presenting an alternative to the "spectre of loneliness, the chimaera of romantic love [...] a life that never quite begins" (*Ladies* 83). By means of cultural production, women challenged both the social limitations of their lives and their literary representations. Joannou concludes that "the women's novels of the 1920s acquire new meanings as symptoms of women's unwillingness to submit uncomplainingly to those values, images and ideas, which ensure that the dominant social relations are perceived by most people to be 'natural'" (89). Like women in the interwar years, women during second-wave feminism campaigned for an end to derogatory images and for freedom from all intimidation, allowing them to choose their own paths in life. Women from both eras raised questions about relationships between men and women, and reading Holtby's spinster novels from the perspective of the WLM years offers a sympathetic reading and interpretation.

Virago's presentation of Holtby's work tends to ignore themes highlighted in Gindin's discussion. His analysis of *Anderby Wold* suggests that it includes many themes common to all of Holtby's novels. One of the themes he highlights is "the strong, independent woman [and] the struggles for power and social control between like-minded women" (62). In *The Crowded Street*, the main character, Muriel Hammond, differs from Mary Robson in appearing to be under the control of her mother and the social expectations surrounding unmarried women. Muriel's passive attitude is clearly summarised when she says "Men do as they like. That's where they're different. We just wait to see what they will do. It's not our fault. Things just happen to us or they don't" (CS 132). Later, following the War and after meeting Delia, a woman "liberated by education" Muriel's attitude changes (xii). The professional and personal friendship between Muriel and Delia, like that between Holtby and Brittain, represents "a powerful force to challenge traditional power structures in the world of work" (Lonsdale *Rebel Women* 23). The relationship helps Muriel to understand that she has choices and opportunities, saying "I thought that the only means of escape for me was marriage. [...] You said that I never made a choice. I only didn't because it seemed to be no use. It's no good choosing a thing that you can't do" (CS 237). The increased opportunities available to women because of the First World War are, in some ways, comparable to the increased choices offered to women during second-wave feminism. Like Brittain, and like Holtby's arguments, many women influenced by the WLM attempted to combine careers and marriage, and to campaign for equality, while others rejected the institution of marriage.

Holtby's investigation of alternative forms of domesticity and households, in her life and in her books, presented criticisms of women being forced to choose either family or career. Muriel in *The Crowded Street* chose work and friendship over marriage and family, realising that both were impossible. In *Anderby Wold* Mary, having taken the only option of marriage, realises that she is unable to choose work outside the domestic sphere. When Muriel in *The Crowded Street* rejects Godfrey's marriage proposal, a proposal which earlier had been her dream, she tries to explain: "You want a good wife, Godfrey, someone who'd be the hostess of shooting-parties, who'd listen to your hunting stories, and who'd be interested in your tenants [...] Your interests are not my interests" (CS 270). Muriel recognises that, as a wife, her interests would be dismissed and ignored in favour of those of her husband. Young's characters in her domestic novels exhibited agency within the domestic setting, and Celia is the obvious example of making her domestic life more enjoyable and more within her control. To a lesser extent, Mary Robson in *Anderby Wold* does the same, gaining power within the home. Muriel is more of a representation of Holtby's feminist ideals, seeing the decision to pursue a career as the only way to gain agency and control over her own life.

Wendy Gan's 2003 study of Holtby's spinster novels focuses on the difference between her work and that of other novels about unmarried women. Comparing Holtby's work to F. M. Mayor's, looking in particular at *The Third Miss Symons* (1913, VMC 1980), Gan argues that Holtby's work is more radical in its treatment of spinsters. "*The Crowded Street* is Holtby's strongest pro-spinster novel and a great deal of its power derives from the firm breaking away from

romance at the end on the part of Muriel" (210). In contrast, Mayor's novel depicts the unmarried woman as a sad, lonely character whose situation is imposed on her by circumstances, and is not her choice. Joannou had made a similar point, suggesting that *The Crowded Street* is "a good deal more scathing about domestic obligations imposed upon the married daughter than is [Mayor's 1924] *The Rector's Daughter*" (*Ladies* 95). Muriel makes a positive choice to refuse Godfrey's offer of marriage – "an act of agency on the part of the spinster" (Gan 210). Gan sees this as Holtby's most positive spinster novel, in its portrayal of the positive and definite departure from the romance plot. Her other spinster novels, *Poor Caroline* and *South Riding* offer positive depictions of the main characters' unmarried lives, but it is only in *The Crowded Street* that she portrays the protagonist making a positive decision to refuse the marriage option offered to her. Gan suggests that at the end of the book, Muriel "faces away from the heterosexual economy and towards new horizons" (210). Muriel ponders the options available to her, saying "and perhaps in the end I'll never be a wife at all. [...] The thing that matters is to take your life into your hands and live it" (CS 270).

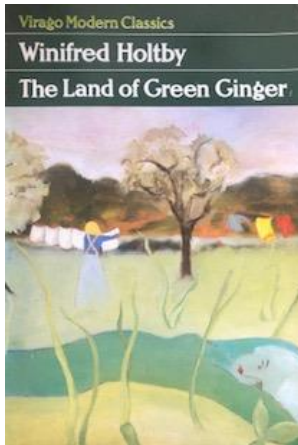
Like the arguments of the WLM and the characters portrayed in many of the VMCs, Muriel's attitude can only apply to some women; not all women could make the choice. Holtby was aware of the middle-class appeal, and relevance, of her books. Regan discusses Holtby's understanding that, by writing in a realist, non-modernist style, she had the ability to reach a wide public of readers: "Holtby realised that in the popular appeal of novels such as her own lay the power to shape middle-class identity" (10). Regan argues that *The*

Crowded Street, in particular, offers a challenge to middle-class values that affect women's lives. The novel's ending presents Muriel rejecting the acceptable middle-class lifestyle expected of her "in order to secure personal and financial autonomy" (Regan 11).

The historical content of Holtby's writing, showing, for example, shifts in local government and in agricultural practices, in *South Riding* and *Anderby Wold* respectively, demonstrates her interest in the ways in which social and cultural changes affect everyday life and the lives of women. In this aspect of her fiction writing Holtby challenges the exclusion of women from historical narratives.

Shaw describes *South Riding* as Holtby's realisation that "fiction itself can be a vivid historical record and a powerful agent of change" (*Stream 2*). Wallace argues that "she points out what is, in fact, the bias of much mainstream history [and challenges] the construction of women as defined by biology and therefore somehow outside historical change" (in Regan 229). Joannou develops the arguments on women's exclusion from history and from the literary canon, and she suggests that the exclusion of women writers, such as many of the VMC writers, "is not because their competence has been questioned [but that those] literary histories themselves have often been framed in terms which have marginalised" women writers (*Ladies 8*). These aspects of Holtby's work are clearly comparable to Virago's project of giving women their history, through the VMCs and through developing their archives. Both Virago and Holtby appeal to middle-class, non-radical women, believing that change can be effected through this potentially powerful group.

The Land of Green Ginger, Holtby's third novel, continues several themes from the previous books, questioning patriarchal society and its institutions.



Reflecting the slight unreality of the book's title – and the protagonist's dreams – the cover painting, *Bodie*, by Mary Toms, has a mystical element, in which the foreground river becomes an image of a woman, although the rest of the detail depicts a woman carrying out the female, domestic pursuit of hanging up washing. The

juxtaposition of the reality and the dreamlike image indicate the subject matter of the novel. Its focus, emphasised by Virago's presentation, is that a happy, egalitarian marriage is no more than an impossible dream for most women. In this, as in her spinster novels, Holtby differs from Britain's depiction of the possibility of marriage relationships that do not oppress women and their interests. The cover notes clearly draw attention to the theme of disappointment in a life that held the promise of love and excitement for the protagonist, Joanna Burton. Having been born abroad, Joanna always dreamt of travel and adventure. But at the age of eighteen, she marries just as the First World War begins, seeing marriage as the route to achieving her dreams. "Joanna has frequently been in love before – with Hiawatha, with the Scarlet Pimpernel, with Coriolanus and Christabel Pankhurst" (cover notes). Teddy Leigh promises her excitement and romance but "after the war, the magic land turns out to be the harsh reality of motherhood and married life on a wild Yorkshire farm" (cover notes). This dominant theme is comparable to Virago's early publication of Mary Chamberlain's *Fenwomen: A Portrait of Women in an English Village* (1975), a theme apparent in many republished VMCs, in which the reality of married life is

disappointment and hardship for many women. Although, like the first two Holtby novels, *The Land of Green Ginger* is presented by Virago in a way that emphasises the rural love story, unlike *Anderby Wold* and *The Crowded Street*, it also highlights the impossible, dreamlike nature of happiness.

Margaret Waley's introduction to *The Land of Green Ginger* suggests that "the idea which runs through the novel is that crucial help can come in times of trouble from vivid imagination" (xi). While Young's characters (particularly Celia) gain agency through their imaginative approach to unsatisfactory lives, this does not seem to be the case with *The Land of Green Ginger*, the theme of which is broken dreams. The novel focuses on Joanna's difficult life until the end, when she eventually goes abroad to try and follow her dreams. It is worth noting that Callil was unhappy with Waley's introduction. She wrote to Paul Berry in 1983 asking for suggestions of writers for an introduction to *Poor Caroline*. "I was rather disappointed in Margaret Waley's effort, though it had its own charm. This time I'd like something more authoritative" (Add MS 88904/1/195). The reasons for her disappointment are not specified but it is possible that she felt that Waley's interpretation did not sufficiently promote, or relate to, the themes of Holtby's work. Much of Waley's introduction discusses *Anderby Wold* and *South Riding*, rather than *The Land of Green Ginger*, and her brief discussion of the latter book adds little to any analytic reading of it, or to its relevance to interwar or second-wave feminisms, both of which were critical of the establishment of marriage and gendered relationships.

Like Holtby's previous two novels, *The Land of Green Ginger* has a predominantly rural setting. Shaw discusses information from Holtby's correspondence, explaining that the novel is set in the Dales, where her mother had been born. Shaw describes the fictional farm as being similar to "many of the small, unrewarding holdings of the area where farming was, and is, harshly embattled against wind and poor soil" (*Stream* 13). Waley's suggestion that Joanna's imagination allows her to have agency over her situation is contradicted by Joanna's own words towards the end of the novel.

Circumstances lead her to question her own motives and aims: "she had thought her mind free to create its own enchanting world. She had refused the evidence of her eyes and ears and of her anxious heart" (*LG* 240). She realises that her reality – the circumstances of an unprofitable farm, poverty, and her husband's illness could not be overcome or alleviated by her imagination: "Fool, fool, to feed upon fantasy till the life of the flesh betrayed you" (*LG* 241).

Like Lehmann's novels, Holtby's work does not always emphasise female friendships and sisterhood for the adult characters, in spite of the importance to Holtby of her close friendship with Brittain. The exception to this, amongst the books I discuss, is *The Crowded Street*, in which Muriel's friendship with Delia enables her to make independent decisions and to change her life, as discussed above. Joannou describes it as a "loving and committed relationship" (*Ladies* 86). Joanna, in *The Land of Green Ginger*, had close friends at school and they continue to correspond, but in her adult, married life she is isolated from other women. Her schoolfriends try to offer consolation when Joanna's

father dies and she had failed her matriculation, leaving her unable to pursue her plans. Her friends display an interest in the suffragette movement and one of them advises Joanna to pursue her plans independently, reflecting Holtby's own life choices, as well as Muriel in *The Crowded Street*: "It's the curse of women to think of themselves just as 'somebody's daughter.' What do you think of men who think of themselves as 'somebody's son'?" (LG 24). Her friends continue to advise Joanna and when one of them, Rachel, is home from university for Easter she expresses her horror of Joanna's decision to marry Teddy Leigh, warning her – rightly – that it will be the end of all Joanna's dreams and plans. "You're all the same. I hear you sound so frightfully keen on things, work and books and a career, then the first man comes who says he loves you and away you go ... everything forgotten. Oh, what is the use of fighting and struggling to make it possible for women to work? You don't care. You don't care." (LG 32). Rachel's sentiments would not be out of place in a women's liberation meeting in the 1970s, or in discussions around the aims of the Six Point Group, with its focus on improving the lives of women through better financial legislation to enable women to have choices, and more equality.

Shaw contends that Holtby's novels present "the failure of heterosexual love" (*Stream* 236). *The Land of Green Ginger* is perhaps her most clearly pro-spinsterhood novel, focusing on the hardship and unhappiness for women brought about by marriage and motherhood. Where her spinster novels – *South Riding*, *The Crowded Street* and *Poor Caroline* – promote the positive aspects of an unmarried life for women, *The Land of Green Ginger* is more overtly critical of marriage, representing a development in Holtby's ideas and writing.

This novel allows Holtby to be critical of the male assumption that women are natural carers and mothers, reflecting the way in which her lifestyle of shared childcare with Brittain challenges this assumption. Joanna's husband, Teddy, "cherish[ed] a thought common to many men that mothers possessed a standard of values unknown to husbands and spinsters which made the presence of their children essential to their happiness" (LG 96). Childless Mary Robson in *Anderby Wold* also challenges this belief through her work in the village, which she compares to Ursula's role as a mother. Holtby offers a challenge to such essentialist views of women both in her life and her novels.

Indicating further resentment and unhappiness in her role as wife and mother, Joanna asks herself "Did friendship only belong to schooldays? When a woman married, was she always having to consider people ever after?" (LG 119). She concludes that many of her problems arise from a lack of women friends: "You always live among men, and although they may be darlings, they just won't *do*. Not as friends" (119). Young's work emphasises the value of female support and sisterhood, both within marriage and elsewhere, where Holtby points out a potential danger of marriage in removing women from such support, isolating them within a nuclear family unit. *The Land of Green Ginger* is a clear reflection of the lives led by Holtby and Brittain, and Wallace suggests that Joanna is "an idealised version of Holtby herself" (*Sisters* 142). The friendship between Holtby and Brittain was familiar to, and welcomed by, the WLM generation of women. Rosalind Delmar agreed to write the new introduction for the VMC publication of Brittain's *Testament of Friendship* in 1980, saying that "as a portrait of a

friendship it stands on its own [...] all the feelings I recognised as part of my own patterns of friendship” (Add MS 88904/1/194).

By the end of *The Land of Green Ginger* Joanna understands that marriage and “the miseries of these men” have taken away her dreams (LG 189). Her sense of being stripped of all her dreams and hopes is compounded by her husband’s illness, leaving her bound to care for him as part of her life and duties. Fifield considers the presentation of illness in middlebrow writing and he discusses illness in *Anderby Wold*, *The Crowded Street* and *The Land of Green Ginger*, as well as in *South Riding*. He highlights the focus on illness as a major difference between Holtby and modernist writers like Woolf. Fifield’s contention is that Holtby’s inclusion of so much illness in her writing categorises her work as “female and domestic” (186), but Holtby’s own ill health may have influenced her interest in portraying illness in her novels. Fifield’s distinction emphasises the difference between Holtby’s work and Woolf’s modernist approach, and he argues that the focus on domestic, female lives “is central to middlebrow writing” (185). Emphasising Holtby’s critical concern with domestic issues is applicable to many, if not all, of her novels, and particularly *The Land of Green Ginger*. Joanna’s life, like May Robson’s in *Anderby Wold*, is restricted by domestic duties and caring for an ill husband increases the limitations on her choices and freedom. Holtby’s work, in its frequent inclusion of domesticity and caring could be interpreted as reproducing essentialist concepts of women, but her depictions represent a challenge to essentialist notions of women’s roles by emphasising the negative impact of caring on women’s choices.

Holtby's work, in its promotion of spinsterhood as an alternative lifestyle choice to marriage, reflects the large numbers of unmarried women after World War One, but Holtby does not see the situation in a negative way. Holtby's spinster novels confronted the concept of the sad, pathetic unmarried woman, and the interchangeable use of "the terms 'superfluous woman' and 'spinster' [with] 'spinster' [being] used as a pejorative term" (Joannou *Ladies* 78). Her novels also belong to a tradition of women's interwar writing that challenged and questioned the roles available to women, particularly after the new roles taken on by many women during and after the war. It is thus unsurprising that Virago chose to reprint her work as part of the VMC range, although they were not promoted as feminist books. It is likely that, in their aim to attract non-radical readers, Virago felt that Holtby's feminist, campaigning views would be apparent in her books and they were at risk of alienating some readers if her feminism was promoted. Virago avoided the radical feminist views on social change, creating an audience of readers who recognised the VMCs as feminist books that appealed to moderate feminist views. To present Holtby's work as anti-marriage risked alienating many women for whom marriage was still a goal, although presenting them as promoting the positive aspects of being single may have offered an appeal to second-wave feminists who either chose to avoid marriage or who had different sexualities. The WLM demands included the right for women to define their own sexuality, and Holtby's attitude to being single would resonate with later generation of women who chose not to marry, with many second-wave feminists criticising the patriarchal bias of marriage. Virago was careful to create and attract a specific non-radical market; promoting

Holtby's more radical views, which challenged the status quo around marriage, risked upsetting, or losing, some readers. In this respect, Britain's books challenging the nature of marriage, without being anti-marriage, aligned more closely to the views of the WLM and the thinking behind the VMCs.

Nevertheless, Holtby's work related to the lives of second-wave feminists in her approach to the possibility of women being able to combine careers and marriage, and in her criticisms of attitudes to unmarried women. The WLM's demand for free childcare and the campaigns for workplace creches, in order to enable women to combine paid work and family, make Holtby's work familiar and relevant. Her critical outlook on romance and her subversion of the rural romance novel offered women in the 1970s and 1980s familiarity at a time when the inevitability of marriage, and marriage that lasted a lifetime, were being questioned and challenged by second-wave feminists.

Different genres, the same presentation?

Virago's presentation of the VMCs, and their choice of books to republish, enabled them to develop the overlaps and commonalities between two generations of women, drawing attention to the continued challenge to male literary culture. Virago's project proposes that cultural change could be brought about by re-presenting women's words and enabling them to be heard by means of a variety of genres. Virago illustrates the multiplicity of women's voices in women's interwar writing, implicitly criticising the dismissive categorisation of 'women's writing' as a single genre. The diverse styles of the republished range attracted women with feminist interests, and the writers I have analysed are

representative of the nationality and class of the range republished by Virago. But they used different genres to express their views on women and feminism. Lehmann's use of the romance novel questions and exposes inequalities between the genders, while Holtby's work is based on subverting the rural idyll, illustrating gender inequality, and questioning relationships between women and men. Holtby also focused on unmarried women, proposing that spinsterhood can be an alternative to marriage. The novels of Young and Delafield belong to the tradition of domestic writing, which they use to question accepted social structures and modes of power, using humour and irony whilst focusing on domestic and private lives "to disturb readers' assumptions about the domestic, the everyday and the home" (Briganti and Mezei *Domestic* 34). The domestic novel and the diary focus on events that are frequently ignored as part of women's private, hidden lives. They offer a means of avoiding the trivialisation of "the everyday experience of women and men" (Mezei and Briganti *She Must* 320). The four writers I discuss reflect post-1918 feminist campaigns, highlighting the inequality that affected women in employment as well as women with children. The inequalities represented in fictional forms resonated with second-wave feminists, who continued to campaign for an end to gender inequality in the home and the workplace, and for financial independence.

The VMCs were instantly recognisable, and for Elaine Showalter they "have become valuable collectibles" (in *Virago is 40* 114). Owning a shelf of dark green Modern Classics was a sign of feminist credentials during the 1970s and 1980s. A collection of VMCs easily and quickly united women who held non-radical feminist views and who responded to Virago's presentation of the VMCs

as open to feminist reading and interpretation. A reviewer of Goodings' book on Virago details her own familiarity with "the dark green spines of Virago Modern Classics" through her mother's bookshelves and those of her mother's friends. She explains the VMCs indicated that their owners "were the kind of women I wanted to be when I grew up: learned, eloquent [...] women who did not suffer fools" (Thomas-Corr).

Through their curation of the VMCs, the Virago team made deliberate choices on books to include and how to present them. The writers I have discussed present very different writing styles, but Virago curated them all in ways that emphasised their relevance to the WLM readers, attracting a large, but specific, readership. In this way, Virago was able to develop a market for the republished books. The VMCs did not attract radical feminists, but they offered books that appealed to many moderate feminists by promoting a range of women's writing and women's voices. The voices republished were critical of social norms and used cultural production to change ideas on publishing and on women's writing. Virago's project of re-presenting novels recognised the importance of rereading and active reading, practiced by both the publishers and their readers. The curation of the VMCs focused on developing a community of women linked through commonalities, and in this way the publishing house was an instrumental part of the WLM's promotion of sisterhood as a means of empowering women to challenge social and literary practices.

Conclusion

The Virago Modern Classics need to look “vibrant and grabbable”, according to Donna Coonan, the recent Editorial Director of the VMCs (*Revival* 00:18:15-18). Like the original range, the books are still placed among contemporary novels in bookshops to avoid marginalisation and to compete with the non-feminist book market. Visibility and brand recognition are thus of great importance. Although the famous green spines disappeared for a while, they returned in 2018, in acknowledgment of the importance of the brand. Their return was announced in a Tweet from Virago Press: “We are delighted to announce the return of our #GreenSpines! As part of our 40th anniversary celebrations we will be re-introducing green spines across our entire Virago Modern Classics list. Turns out, it is easy being green” (*Twitter* 26/01/2018). Continuing Virago’s policy of presenting attractive, recognisable, and collectible books, Coonan had also “launched the covetable hardback designer classics collection” for the 30th anniversary of the list (Lauren Brown). Development of the VMC brand is one of Callil’s innovations that is still in use more than forty years after the range started. Coonan shows awareness of the many changes to the ways in which Virago operates, to its readerships, and to the society in which it exists. Nevertheless, she draws attention to several practices that have continued successfully since 1978, with necessary modifications in response to social changes and changes to the publishing company itself.

Virago Press today is a very different company from the one that started in 1973, operating in a greatly changed society. It is no longer a fully independent

company, having become “a wholly owned subsidiary of the Chatto, Virago, Bodley Head and Cape Group in 1982” (Virago website). A management buy-out followed in 1987, and in 1995 Virago was purchased by Little, Brown, which was sold to the Hachette Book Group in 2006. The changes in ownership are discussed fully by Riley in *The Virago Story*, 2018. The VMC imprint began in 1978 as Callil’s personal response to her reading of Antonia White’s 1933 *Frost in May*, which became the first reprint in the range. Callil sometimes had the final say on any choice of book for inclusion in the VMC range. Reflecting the more democratic, corporate format of Virago in the twenty-first century, Coonan explains that “all books go through our editorial and acquisitions meetings – it’s not a dictatorship” (*Revival* 00:14:09-14). Coonan’s own taste is a contributing factor in the process of finding books to republish and she chose Barbara Pym partly because she enjoys her humour (*Rescue* 00:15:47-50). Coonan describes another of her choices, Gloria Naylor, as a “writer of great calibre”, whose books are page turners” (*Rescue* 00:08:04-00:09:19). While it is Coonan who carries out the research for potential titles, the books are then discussed for agreement.

Feminism has changed greatly since the late 1970s’ bias towards white, middle-class values. The different forms of feminism now encompass the concept of intersectionality in order to address issues associated with racism, homophobia, ageism, classism, and gender identity. Coonan’s research looks for books that speak to the more diverse feminisms that concern today’s women. In Virago’s 2015 publication, *I Call Myself a Feminist*, presenting the views of young feminists, writer and activist June Eric-Udorie’s essay centres on feminism’s

historical exclusivity: “I was reminded that this ‘feminism’ that had corrupted me was not part of my culture, it was incompatible with my religion and it was un-African” (Eric-Udorie, in Pepe et al 86). Activist Tania Shew’s essay in the same publication is also critical of the narrowness of second-wave feminism. She explains that she was familiar with her mother’s feminist values, gained from ideas discussed in the 1970s and 80s. But she realised that “feminism could encompass so much more than legal rights and formal equality” (96). She also learnt that many women have “experiences of sexism that intersect with other forms of prejudice or hatred, such as racism, homophobia, classism or trans-misogyny” (99).

Both Eric-Udorie, an active feminist campaigner of Nigerian descent, and Shew are critical of feminist arguments that are based on a culture that ignores women from non-white backgrounds. Their arguments are similar to those made by Audre Lorde in 1984 (discussed above), who also recognised the dominance of white societal attitudes in feminist arguments. Eric-Udorie further explains that, in her associations with white feminists, she initially “internalised their discriminatory views”, but her perspective changed when she became familiar with Black feminists (*Can We All Be Feminists?* ix). Reading the work of bell hooks, Eric-Udorie strongly agreed that “the purpose of feminism is not to benefit any one group of women while leaving the others behind (xi). An inclusive feminism, based on intersectionality, made her feel that feminism based on “the experiences of women who were white, wealthy or middle-class, heterosexual and able-bodied” was discriminatory, or, to use her word, corrupting (x).

In spite of their fundamental social and cultural differences, and distinct management styles, Callil and Coonan both approach republishing for the VMC imprint in similar ways and Coonan upholds several of Callil's innovative methods. Both publishers recognise the importance of commissioning new introductions. Coonan explains that she carries out careful research in order to find a writer keen about the reprint, as an introduction by an enthusiastic well-known author acts as a recommendation. Lauren Brown writes that Coonan "has commissioned introductions by a range of high-profile writers – Hilary Mantel, Zadie Smith, Maggie O'Farrell, George Saunders, Tayari Jones, [...] among others" (*The Bookseller* 2023). Reflecting the diversity of feminism, Coonan has approached writers of different ethnicities and nationalities for introductions. Coonan is aware of the importance of the branding and presentation of a book and the repurposing of a book for a new readership. She has also continued some of Callil's ideas on the image of the VMCs. In a 1983 memo from Callil to Owen and Goodings, Callil writes that "there is a great gap between public perception of what the VMCs are and what people in Virago see it to be. It's not a mausoleum: it's a presentation of a tradition and live authors will continue in it as long as I'm responsible for the list" (Add MS 89178/1/71). Coonan continues Callil's ethos, republishing books by many living authors, enabling Virago to present republished books that still have relevance to their readers.

The new introductions during the early years of the VMCs accentuated themes that were meaningful to the generation of second-wave feminist readers. The

major developments in feminism have led to different audiences for the VMC range, and Coonan chooses the current VMCs and writers to introduce them in more varied ways. The republished books today need to appeal to a wider readership, not just white, middle-class feminists. But the range of books is still promoted as writing by women, for women. Coonan critically comments on the women who had been, and still are, allowed to go out of print. Reprinting forgotten women enables her to add to the VMC list every year (*Rescue* 00:03:10-20). Writer and columnist Lucy Scholes, in conversation with Coonan, comments that her shelf of green spines covers “the big names of [women’s] twentieth century literary history” (*Rescue* 00:03:23-38).

Coonan looks for books that had not previously been published in the UK, such as Gloria Naylor’s novels from the 1980s. She also reissues Modern Classics from the original range, repurposing older VMCs for new readers and reassessing their legacy. She has recently republished the novels of Elizabeth Taylor, published as VMCs during the 1980s. Taylor is one of her own favourites and a favourite of other writers, but “I didn’t feel the covers were doing her justice and I didn’t feel she had the champions she really needed” (*Rescue* 00:12:20-23). She commissioned new introductions from a “broad array of writers who feel she is the bee’s knees” (*Rescue* 00:12:47-52). Coonan emphasises Taylor’s ability to empathise with non-middle-class characters, such as shop workers, in contrast to the snobbery she sees in other 1940s’ novels (*Rescue* 00:12:59-00:13:26).

Coonan is also currently looking to the 1960s for new reprints and making them applicable to new readers, in the same ways that Callil made the reprints relevant to second-wave feminists. The republication of Mary McCarthy's *The Group* (1963) as a VMC in 2009 has an introduction by contemporary American novelist Candace Bushnell, author of *Sex and the City*. Referring to its current relevance, Bushnell writes, "although every generation of women likes to claim ownership of a 'new' set of problems that come with being a contemporary woman, *The Group* reminds us that not much has really changed" (vii). Like the early VMCs, the front and back covers of *The Group* contain comments by contemporary writers, including Sarah Waters and Hilary Mantel, alluding to the book's modern significance. The inclusion of a cover comment by *The Independent* states that "without *The Group* there would certainly be no *Sex and the City*", designed to attract a new young audience familiar with the 1997 book or the very popular television programmes (author unknown). *The Group* has been repurposed for the daughters and granddaughters of its original readers, appealing to the generation of women familiar with the cultural mores of *Sex and the City*, first screened in 1998. Bushnell's introduction draws attention to McCarthy's historical relevance and to the continuing importance of the book's themes.

In support of Callil's project of giving women their literary history, Coonan has recently reissued several books from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, including Muriel Spark and Barbara Pym. The decision to republish the books of Barbara Pym for the VMC range was also based on Coonan's recognition that recent lockdowns have made readers look for books that offer comfort and humour

(*Rescue* 00:15:12-26). Coonan addresses other current issues in society through books chosen as VMCs, basing editorial decisions on social movements and changes. The decision to republish books by the African-American writers Gloria Naylor and Ann Petry as VMCs has “reverberations with what’s going on now”, and Petry’s work “offers insights in Black Lives Matter and media manipulation” (*Rescue* 00:17:23-32). Petry’s *The Street* (1946, VMC 2020) had been released previously as a VMC; the new VMC publication includes an introduction by African-American novelist Tayari Jones, winner of the 2019 Women’s Prize for Fiction for *An American Marriage*, and a cover comment by Coretta Scott King, author and civil rights campaigner. King’s comment describes *The Street*’s focus on “the devastating impact of racial injustice”. Jones’ introduction draws attention to Lutie, the heroine in the book, whose traditional marriage was unable to cope with “pernicious racism” (viii). Jones describes Lutie as “an American. However, she is a black American and these terms do not always mesh” (viii). Highlighting the difficult position of African-Americans and the insidious racism in society clearly reverberates with current events in the USA and the UK. The reissue of books by Black writers attracts readers aware of contemporary inequalities, and from more diverse backgrounds than the original VMC audience. Coonan’s VMC choices reflect awareness of wider issues affecting forms of feminism in the twenty-first century.

It is an indication of Virago’s success in promoting women’s writing that Coonan can now respond to other forms of inequality and changes in feminism. But it could be said that publishing books in response to the pandemic and Black

Lives Matter exploits social and political changes. Similarly, in its early days, Virago was criticised for its combination of ideology and profit and the determination to remain financially viable by making money out of sexism. The early VMCs clearly fulfilled a need and were instrumental in giving women a voice. But deciding where ideology ends and exploitation begins is probably impossible. Virago's project spoke to their target audience by combining innovation with the use of capitalist procedures. Virago's success, ideologically and economically, involved making feminist publishing part of the establishment, but as I argue in Chapter 3, Virago, although successful, was not part of the mass market, as its readership comprised a specific sector of society.

Their longevity suggests that their methods were right in many ways. Callil and her team clearly developed a publishing house that could evolve, largely because it was part of the establishment. Journalist Richard Lea, writing about Callil on her death, refers to a comment she had made to *The Guardian*: she explained the ethos behind Virago, saying it was an attempt to “apply mass-marketing techniques to minority ideas – to publicise feminist ideas. There was a commercial aspect to it” (Lea). Virago managed to make feminism acceptable and profitable, creating a model that could evolve and develop in response to a changing society. Coonan has adapted aspects of Virago's established – and establishment – model of publishing whilst maintaining many of Callil's innovations. Choosing books to republish as VMCs continues to respond to trends in society and their impact on women.

The success of the VMCs was largely due to Virago's innovative approach to feminist publishing. Callil's emphasis on running a profitable business led to the development of a market for the books. By using marketing and branding to promote non-radical feminism, Virago created a market that had only existed in embryonic form. Feminist publishing's challenge to male-dominated literary culture helped to empower women to challenge social norms. Coonan's choice of books continues Callil's project of challenging the canon and targeting specific audiences. But, also following Callil, her decisions can be seen as exploiting social and cultural mores for the purpose of making a profit. Virago was frequently criticised by more radical feminist groups for combining profit and ideology, and for using capitalist, male-dominated methods of advertising and promotion. Women's writing is more prominent and readily available than it was during the second-wave feminist movement. Sexism clearly still exists, but its association with other factors is recognised and explains Coonan's inclusion of books that focus on intersectionality. Perhaps Coonan and Callil are right to recognise the importance of financial stability and to promote the combination of innovation and establishment in publishing. Virago has always been unique in its combination of profit and ideology, innovation, and establishment, making it the only survivor from the 1980s proliferation of feminist publishers.

Following Callil's recent death in 2022, the last word should go to the Chair of Virago, Lennie Goodings. Remembering Callil, Goodings writes, "Carmen, with Virago, changed publishing. To have women at the helm, women taking the decisions, women choosing the books and women understanding their audiences was, at the time, revolutionary" ("Virago founder").

Appendix**Virago Modern Classics 1978-1990**

TITLE and VMC number	AUTHOR	NATIONALITY	RACE	GENDER	SEXUALITY - where known. (ht: heterosexual; hm: homosexual)
1. <i>Frost in May</i>	Antonia White	English	White	F	ht
2. <i>Mr. Fortune's Maggot</i>	Sylvia Townsend Warner	English	White	F	hm
3. <i>The True Heart</i>	Sylvia Townsend Warner	English	White	F	hm
4. <i>Letty Fox: Her Luck</i>	Christina Stead	Australian	White	F	
5. <i>For Love Alone</i>	Christina Stead	Australian	White	F	
6. <i>Precious Bane</i>	Mary Webb	English	White	F	ht
7. <i>The Holiday</i>	Stevie Smith	English	White	F	
8. <i>Surfacing</i>	Margaret Atwood	Canadian	White	F	ht
9. <i>Enormous Changes at the Last Minute</i>	Grace Paley	American	White	F	ht
10. <i>Two Serious Ladies</i>	Jane Bowles	American	White	F	ht
11. <i>A Pin to See the Peepshow</i>	F. Tennyson Jesse	English	White	F	ht
12. <i>The Lacquer Lady</i>	F. Tennyson Jesse	English	White	F	ht
13. <i>The Lost Traveller</i>	Antonia White	English	White	F	ht
14. <i>The Sugar House</i>	Antonia White	English	White	F	ht
15. <i>Beyond the Glass</i>	Antonia White	English	White	F	ht
16. <i>The Semi-attached Couple and the Semi-detached House</i>	Emily Eden	English	White	F	
17. <i>Gone to Earth</i>	Mary Webb	English	White	F	ht
18. <i>Pilgrimage, I, II, III, IV</i>	Dorothy Richardson	English	White	F	ht
19. <i>Over the Frontier</i>	Stevie Smith	English	White	F	
20. <i>The Beth Book</i>	Sarah Grand	Irish/English	White	F	ht
21. <i>A Lost Lady</i>	Willa Cather	American	White	F	hm

22. <i>My Antonia</i>	Willa Cather	American	White	F	hm
23. <i>The Edible Woman</i>	Margaret Atwood	Canadian	White	F	ht
24. <i>The Little Disturbances of Man</i>	Grace Paley	American	White	F	ht
25. <i>Mary Olivier: A Life</i>	May Sinclair	English	White	F	
26. <i>The Life and Death of Harriett Frean</i>	May Sinclair	English	White	F	
27. <i>Novel on Yellow Paper</i>	Stevie Smith	English	White	F	
28. <i>An Unsocial Socialist</i>	G. Bernard Shaw	Irish	White	M	ht
29. <i>Ann Veronica</i>	H. G. Wells	English	White	M	ht
30. <i>Diana of the Crossways</i>	George Meredith	English	White	M	ht
31. <i>The Odd Women</i>	George Gissing	English	White	M	ht
32. <i>The Return of the Soldier</i>	Rebecca West	English	White	F	ht
33. <i>The Judge</i>	Rebecca West	English	White	F	ht
34. <i>Harriet Hume</i>	Rebecca West	English	White	F	ht
35. <i>My Brilliant Career</i>	Miles Franklin	Australian	White	F	ht
36. <i>The Third Miss Symons</i>	F. M. Mayor	English	White	F	ht
37. <i>Cotters' England</i>	Christina Stead	Australian	White	F	
38. <i>Tell Me a Riddle</i>	Tillie Olsen	American	White	F	ht
39. <i>Yonnondio</i>	Tillie Olsen	American	White	F	ht
40. <i>Spinster</i>	Sylvia Ashton-Warner	New Zealand	White	F	ht
41. <i>Sleepless Nights</i>	Elizabeth Hardwick	American	White	F	ht
42. <i>The Unlit Lamp</i>	Radclyffe Hall	English	White	F	hm
43. <i>The Vet's Daughter</i>	Barbara Comyns	English	White	F	ht
44. <i>Strangers</i>	Antonia White	English	White	F	ht
45. <i>The Shutter of Snow</i>	Emily Holmes Coleman	American	White	F	ht
46. <i>The Love Child</i>	Edith Oliver	English	White	F	
47. <i>Plagued by the Nightingale</i>	Kay Boyle	American	White	F	ht
48. <i>The Getting of Wisdom</i>	Henry Handel Richardson	Australian	White	F	ht
49. <i>Maurice Guest</i>	Henry Handel Richardson	Australian	White	F	ht

50. <i>The Yellow Wallpaper</i>	Charlotte Perkins Gilman	American	White	F	ht
51. <i>The House in Dormer Forest</i>	Mary Webb	English	White	F	ht
52. <i>My Career Goes Bung</i>	Miles Franklin	Australian	White	F	ht
53. <i>Invitation to the Waltz</i>	Rosamond Lehmann	English	White	F	ht
54. <i>The Weather in the Streets</i>	Rosamond Lehmann	English	White	F	ht
55. <i>Moonraker</i>	F. Tennyson Jesse	English	White	F	ht
56. <i>The Magic Toyshop</i>	Angela Carter	English	White	F	ht
57. <i>The Professor's House</i>	Willa Cather	American	White	F	hm
58. <i>Death Comes for the Archbishop</i>	Willa Cather	American	White	F	hm
59. <i>A Little Tea, a Little Chat</i>	Christina Stead	Australian	White	F	
60. <i>The People with the Dogs</i>	Christina Stead	Australian	White	F	
61. <i>The Sheltered Life</i>	Ellen Glasgow	American	White	F	
62. <i>Virginia</i>	Ellen Glasgow	American	White	F	
63. <i>The Ladies of Lyndon</i>	Margaret Kennedy	English	White	F	ht
64. <i>Together and Apart</i>	Margaret Kennedy	English	White	F	ht
65. <i>Anderby Wold</i>	Winifred Holtby	English	White	F	
66. <i>The Crowded Street</i>	Winifred Holtby	English	White	F	
67. <i>Cassandra at the Wedding</i>	Dorothy Baker	American	White	F	ht
68. <i>Life Before Man</i>	Margaret Atwood	Canadian	White	F	ht
69. <i>The Gypsy's Baby</i>	Rosamond Lehmann	English	White	F	ht
70. <i>A Note in Music</i>	Rosamond Lehmann	English	White	F	ht
71. <i>The Harsh Voice</i>	Rebecca West	English	White	F	ht
72. <i>Daughter of Earth</i>	Agnes Smedley	American	White	F	ht
73. <i>The Orchid House</i>	Phyllis Shand Alfrey	West Indian	White	F	ht
74. <i>The Three Sisters</i>	May Sinclair	English	White	F	
75. <i>The Quest for Christa T.</i>	Christa Wolf	German	White	F	ht
76. <i>The Well of Loneliness</i>	Radclyffe Hall	English	White	F	hm
77. <i>My Mortal Enemy</i>	Willa Cather	American	White	F	hm

78. <i>The Song of the Lark</i>	Willa Cather	American	White	F	hm
79. <i>Delta Wedding</i>	Eudora Welty	American	White	F	
80. <i>The Robber Bridegroom</i>	Eudora Welty	American	White	F	
81. <i>Lady Oracle</i>	Margaret Atwood	Canadian	White	F	ht
82. <i>The Sleeping Beauty</i>	Elizabeth Taylor	English	White	F	ht
83. <i>Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont</i>	Elizabeth Taylor	English	White	F	ht
84. <i>Four Frightened People</i>	E. Arnot Robertson	English	White	F	ht
85. <i>Ordinary Families</i>	E. Arnot Robertson	English	White	F	ht
86. <i>The Beauties and the Furies</i>	Christina Stead	Australian	White	F	
87. <i>Brown Girl, Brownstones</i>	Paule Marshall	American	Black	F	
88. <i>Mandoa, Mandoa!</i>	Winifred Holtby	English	White	F	
89. <i>A Woman</i>	Sibilla Aleramo	Italian	White	F	
90. <i>Company Parade</i>	Storm Jameson	English	White	F	ht
91. <i>Women Against Men</i>	Storm Jameson	English	White	F	ht
92. <i>From Man to Man</i>	Olive Schreiner	South African	White	F	ht
93. <i>Seven for a Secret</i>	Mary Webb	English	White	F	ht
94. <i>The Ballad and the Source</i>	Rosamond Lehmann	English	White	F	ht
95. <i>A Sea-grape Tree</i>	Rosamond Lehmann	English	White	F	ht
96. <i>The Passion of New Eve</i>	Angela Carter	English	White	F	ht
97. <i>Miss Herbert</i>	Christina Stead	Australian	White	F	
98. <i>The Little Ottleys</i>	Ada Levenson	English	White	F	ht
99. <i>That's How It Was</i>	Maureen Duffy	English	White	F	hm
100. <i>The Tortoise and the Hare</i>	Elizabeth Jenkins	English	White	F	ht
101. <i>Fraulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther</i>	Elizabeth von Arnim	English	White	F	ht
102. <i>Vera</i>	Elizabeth von Arnim	English	White	F	ht
103. <i>Keynotes and Discords</i>	George Egerton	Australian born/Irish	White	F	ht
104. <i>The World My Wilderness</i>	Rose Macauley	English	White	F	ht
105. <i>Told by an Idiot</i>	Rose Macaulay	English	White	F	ht

106. <i>A Model Childhood</i>	Christa Wolf	German	White	F	ht
107. <i>Deerbrook</i>	Harriet Martineau	English	White	F	ht
108. <i>Deborah</i>	Esther Kreitman	Polish (Yiddish language writer)	White	F	ht
109. <i>Our Spoons Came from Woolworths</i>	Barbara Comyns	English	White	F	ht
110. <i>All Passion Spent</i>	Vita Sackville-West	English	White	F	ht/hm
111. <i>The Edwardians</i>	Vita Sackville-West	English	White	F	ht/hm
112. <i>In a Summer Season</i>	Elizabeth Taylor	English	White	F	ht
113. <i>The Soul of Kindness</i>	Elizabeth Taylor	English	White	F	ht
114. <i>The Land of Green Ginger</i>	Winifred Holtby	English	White	F	
115. <i>Joanna Godden</i>	Sheila Kaye-Smith	English	White	F	ht
116. <i>Susan Spray</i>	Sheila Kaye-Smith	English	White	F	ht
117. <i>The Reef</i>	Edith Wharton	American	White	F	ht
118. <i>Roman Fever</i>	Edith Wharton	American	White	F	ht
119. <i>The Devastating Boys (also #163)</i>	Elizabeth Taylor	English	White	F	ht
119. ³ <i>Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow</i>	M. Barnard Eldershaw ⁴	Australian	White	F	
120. <i>The Roaring Nineties</i>	Katharine Susannah Prichard	Australian	White	F	ht
121. <i>The Constant Nymph</i>	Margaret Kennedy	English	White	F	ht
122. <i>Hunt the Slipper</i>	Violet Trefusis	English	White	F	ht/hm
123. <i>The Corn King and the Spring Queen</i>	Naomi Mitchison	Scottish	White	F	ht
124. <i>I'm Not Complaining</i>	Ruth Adam	English	White	F	ht
125. <i>Bodily Harm</i>	Margaret Atwood	Canadian	White	F	ht
126. <i>The Ponder Heart</i>	Eudora Welty	American	White	F	
127. <i>O Pioneers!</i>	Willa Cather	American	White	F	hm
128. <i>The Lying Days</i>	Nadine Gordimer	South African	White	F	ht
129. <i>Occasion for Loving</i>	Nadine Gordimer	South African	White	F	ht

³ The list from the VMC website has #119 twice, so it is reproduced here without changes.

⁴ Pseudonym used by Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw.

130. <i>The Golden Arrow</i>	Mary Webb	English	White	F	ht
131. <i>Love in Winter</i>	Storm Jameson	English	White	F	ht
132. <i>None Turn Back</i>	Storm Jameson	English	White	F	ht
133. <i>A Compass Error</i>	Sybille Bedford	German-born English	White	F	
134. <i>A Favourite of the Gods</i>	Sybille Bedford	German-born English	White	F	
135. <i>Angel</i>	Elizabeth Taylor	English	White	F	ht
136. <i>Dancing Girls</i>	Margaret Atwood	Canadian	White	F	ht
137. <i>The Rising Tide</i>	Molly Keane	Irish	White	F	ht
138. <i>Devoted Ladies</i>	Molly Keane	Irish	White	F	ht
139. <i>Mary Lavelle</i>	Kate O'Brien	Irish	White	F	ht
140. <i>Miss Mole</i>	E. H. Young	English	White	F	ht
141. <i>The Misses Mallett</i>	E. H. Young	English	White	F	ht
142. <i>I Will Not Serve</i>	Eveline Mahyère ⁵	French		F	
143. <i>The Fountain Overflows</i>	Rebecca West	English	White	F	ht
144. <i>The Thinking Reed</i>	Rebecca West	English	White	F	ht
145. <i>The Fruit of the Tree</i>	Edith Wharton	American	White	F	ht
146. <i>Madame de Treymes</i>	Edith Wharton	American	White	F	ht
147. <i>The Friendly Young Ladies</i>	Mary Renault	English	White	F	hm
148. <i>The Play Room</i>	Olivia Manning	English	White	F	ht
149. <i>The Doves of Venus</i>	Olivia Manning	English	White	F	ht
150. <i>Golden Miles</i>	Katharine Susannah Prichard	Australian	White	F	ht
151. <i>Winged Seeds</i>	Katharine Susannah Prichard	Australian	White	F	ht
152. <i>Hester</i>	Mrs. Oliphant	Scottish	White	F	ht
153. <i>Aurora Floyd</i>	Mary E. Braddon	English	White	F	ht
154. <i>Belinda</i>	Rhoda Broughton	Welsh	White	F	

⁵ This was her only novel and she took her own life at the age of 32. No other biographical information is available.

155. <i>Marcella</i>	Mrs. Humphrey Ward	English	White	F	ht
156. <i>Luminous Isle</i>	Eliot Bliss	Jamaican-born English	White	F	hm
157. <i>Her</i>	H. D. (Hilda Doolittle)	American	White	F	ht
158. <i>Bid Me to Live</i>	H. D.	American	White	F	ht
159. <i>The Optimist's Daughter</i>	Eudora Welty	American	White	F	
160. <i>Shadows on the Rock</i>	Willa Cather	American	White	F	hm
161. <i>The Puzzleheaded Girl</i>	Christina Stead	Australian	White	F	
162. <i>Diary of a Provincial Lady</i>	E. M. Delafield	English	White	F	ht
163. <i>The Devastating Boys</i>	Elizabeth Taylor	English	White	F	ht
164. <i>Sisters by a River</i>	Barbara Comyns	English	White	F	ht
165. <i>The Ha-Ha</i>	Jennifer Dawson	English	White	F	
166. <i>Blood on the Dining Room Floor</i>	Gertrude Stein	American	White	F	hm
167. <i>Smoke and other Early Stories</i>	Djuna Barnes	American	White	F	ht/hm
168. <i>That Lady</i>	Kate O'Brien	Irish	White	F	ht
169. <i>Never No More</i>	Maura Laverty	Irish	White	F	ht
170. <i>Women in the Wall</i>	Julia O'Faolain	English-born Irish	White	F	ht
171. <i>Trooper to the Southern Cross</i>	Angela Thirkell	English/Australian	White	F	ht
172. <i>Bobbin Up</i>	Dorothy Hewitt	Australian	White	F	ht
173. <i>Elizabeth and Her German Garden</i>	Elizabeth von Arnim	English	White	F	ht
174. <i>The Aloe</i>	Katherine Mansfield	New Zealand	White	F	ht
175. <i>No Signposts in the Sea</i>	Vita Sackville-West	English	White	F	ht/hm
176. <i>Travel Light</i>	Naomi Mitchison	Scottish	White	F	ht
177. <i>Jenny Wren</i>	E. H. Young	English	White	F	ht
178. <i>The Curate's Wife</i>	E. H. Young	English	White	F	ht
179. <i>Old New York</i>	Edith Wharton	American	White	F	ht
180. <i>The Children</i>	Edith Wharton	American	White	F	ht
181. <i>The Collected Stories</i>	Katherine Anne Porter	American	White	F	ht
182. <i>Lucy Gayheart</i>	Willa Cather	American	White	F	hm

183. <i>The Wedding Group</i>	Elizabeth Taylor	English	White	F	ht
184. <i>Palladian</i>	Elizabeth Taylor	English	White	F	ht
185. <i>Troy Chimneys</i>	Margaret Kennedy	English	White	F	ht
186. <i>Lady Audley's Secret</i>	Mary E. Braddon	English	White	F	ht
187. <i>Red Pottage</i>	Mary Cholmondeley	English	White	F	
188. <i>The Clever Woman of the Family</i>	Charlotte Yonge	English	White	F	
189. <i>The Lifted Veil</i>	George Eliot	English	White	F	ht
190. <i>The Persimmon Tree</i>	Marjorie Barnard	Australian	White	F	ht
191. <i>The Little Company</i>	Eleanor Dark	Australian	White	F	ht
192. <i>Poor Caroline</i>	Winifred Holtby	English	White	F	
193. <i>Two Days in Aragon</i>	Molly Keane	Irish	White	F	ht
194. <i>Mad Puppetstown</i>	Molly Keane	Irish	White	F	ht
195. <i>One Fine Day</i>	Mollie Panter-Downes	English	White	F	
196. <i>The Gentlewomen</i>	Laura Talbot	English	White	F	ht
197. <i>On the Side of the Angels</i>	Betty Miller	Irish	White	F	ht
198. <i>Adam's Breed</i>	Radclyffe Hall	English	White	F	hm
199. <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>	Zora Neale Hurston	American	Black	F	ht
200. <i>The Street</i>	Ann Petry	American	Black	F	ht
201. <i>Open the Door!</i>	Catherine Carswell	Scottish	White	F	ht
202. <i>Marriage</i>	Susan Ferrier	Scottish	White	F	
203. <i>Crossriggs</i>	Jane and Mary Findlater	Scottish	White	F	
204. <i>Rhapsody</i>	Dorothy Edwards	Welsh	White	F	
205. <i>Winter Sonata</i>	Dorothy Edwards	Welsh	White	F	
206. <i>A Stricken Field</i>	Martha Gellhorn	American	White	F	ht
207. <i>A Fine of Two Hundred Francs</i>	Elsa Triolet	Russian-French	White	F	ht
208. <i>Losing Battles</i>	Eudora Welty	American	White	F	
209. <i>Mary O'Grady</i>	Mary Lavin	Irish	White	F	ht
210. <i>No More Than Human</i>	Maura Laverty	Irish	White	F	ht

211. <i>Some Everyday Folk and Dawn</i>	Miles Franklin	Australian	White	F	ht
212. <i>Lantana Lane</i>	Eleanor Dark	Australian	White	F	ht
213. <i>Cecilia</i>	Fanny Burney	English	White	F	ht
214. <i>Millenium Hall</i>	Sarah Scott	English	White	F	ht
215. <i>A Game of Hide and Seek</i>	Elizabeth Taylor	English	White	F	ht
216. <i>The Ghostly Lover</i>	Elizabeth Hardwick	American	White	F	ht
217. <i>The Mother's Recompense</i>	Edith Wharton	American	White	F	ht
218. <i>Hudson River Bracketed</i>	Edith Wharton	American	White	F	ht
219. <i>Barren Ground</i>	Ellen Glasgow	American	White	F	
220. <i>Her Son's Wife</i>	Dorothy Canfield	American	White	F	ht
221. <i>Omnibus</i>	N/A				
222. <i>The Enchanted April</i>	Elizabeth von Arnim	English	White	F	ht
223. <i>Saraband</i>	Eliot Bliss	Jamaican-born English	White	F	hm
224. <i>The Skin Chairs</i>	Barbara Comyns	English	White	F	ht
225. <i>the Year Before Last</i>	Kay Boyle	American	White	F	ht
226. <i>My Next Bride</i>	Kay Boyle	American	White	F	ht
227. <i>The Rector and the Doctor's Family</i>	Mrs. Oliphant	Scottish	White	F	ht
228. <i>Salem Chapel</i>	Mrs. Oliphant	Scottish	White	F	ht
229. <i>The Salzburg Tales</i>	Christina Stead	Australian	White	F	
230. <i>Cindie</i>	Jean Devanny	New Zealand	White	F	ht
231. <i>Painted Clay</i>	Capel Boake	Australian	White	F	
232. <i>Full House</i>	Molly Keane	Irish	White	F	ht
233. <i>Without My Cloak</i>	Kate O'Brien	Irish	White	F	ht
234. <i>Family History</i>	Vita Sackville-West	English	White	F	ht/hm
235. <i>The Birds Fall Down</i>	Rebecca West	English	White	F	ht
236. <i>The Blush</i>	Elizabeth Taylor	English	White	F	ht
237. <i>Sapphira and the Slave Girl</i>	Will Cather	American	White	F	hm
238. <i>Who Was Changed and Who was Dead</i>	Barbara Comyns	English	White	F	ht

239. <i>One Way of Love</i>	Gamel Woolsey	American	White	F	ht
240. <i>Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister</i>	Aphra Benn	English	White	F	ht
241. <i>The Living Is Easy</i>	Dorothy West	American	Black	F	ht
242. <i>Chatterton Square</i>	E. H. Young	English	White	F	ht
243. <i>The Perpetual Curate</i>	Mrs. Oliphant	Scottish	White	F	ht
244. <i>The Three Miss Kings</i>	Ada Cambridge	English-born Australian	White	F	ht
245. <i>A View of the Harbour</i>	Elizabeth Taylor	English	White	F	ht
246. <i>The Squire</i>	Enid Bagnold	English	White	F	ht
247. <i>The Happy Foreigner</i>	Enid Bagnold	English	White	F	ht
248. <i>Liana</i>	Martha Gellhorn	American	White	F	ht
249. <i>The Matriarch</i>	G. B. Stern	English	White	F	ht
250. <i>Hungry Hearts and Other Stories</i>	Anzia Yezierska	Polish-born American	White	F	ht
251. <i>The Stone Angel</i>	Margaret Laurence	Canadian	White	F	ht
252. <i>A Jest of God</i>	Margaret Laurence	Canadian	White	F	ht
253. <i>The Gods Arrive</i>	Edith Wharton	American	White	F	ht
254. <i>The Brimming Cup</i>	Dorothy Canfield	American	White	F	ht
255. <i>Taking Chances</i>	Molly Keane	Irish	White	F	ht
256. <i>Rumour of Heaven</i>	Beatrix Lehmann	English	White	F	hm
257. <i>Summer Will Show</i>	Sylvia Townsend Warner	English	White	F	hm
258. <i>The Pastor's Wife</i>	Elizabeth von Arnim	English	White	F	ht
259. <i>The Rector's Daughter</i>	F. M. Mayor	English	White	F	ht
260. <i>The Squire's Daughter</i>	F. M. Mayor	English	White	F	ht
261. <i>The Camomile</i>	Catherine Carswell	Scottish	White	F	ht
262. <i>The Simple Truth</i>	Elizabeth Hardwick	American	White	F	ht
263. <i>The New House</i>	Lettice Cooper	English	White	F	
264. <i>Fenny</i>	Lettice Cooper	English	White	F	
265. <i>The Fly on the Wheel</i>	Katherine Thurston	Irish	White	F	ht
266. <i>The House in Clewe Street</i>	Mary Lavin	Irish	White	F	ht

267. <i>A Saturday Life</i>	Radclyffe Hall	English	White	F	hm
268. <i>Olivia</i>	Dorothy Strachey	English	White	F	ht
269. <i>Seducers in Ecuador and the Heir</i>	Vita Sackville-West	English	White	F	ht/hm
270. <i>This Real Night</i>	Rebecca West	English	White	F	ht
271. <i>The Overlanders</i>	Dora Birtles	Australian	White	F	ht
272. <i>A Wreath for the Enemy (also #294)</i>	Pamela Frankau	English	White	F	ht
272. <i>One of Ours</i> ⁶	Willa Cather	American	White	F	hm
273. <i>South Riding</i>	Winifred Holtby	English	White	F	
274. <i>The Armour Wherein He Trusted</i>	Mary Webb	English	White	F	ht
275. <i>Tea at Four O'clock</i>	Janet McNeill	Irish	White	F	ht
276. <i>Jonah's Gourd Vine</i>	Zora Neale Hurston	American	Black	F	ht
277. <i>She Knew She Was Right</i>	Ivy Litvinov	English	White	F	ht
278. <i>At Mrs. Lippincote's</i>	Elizabeth Taylor	English	White	F	ht
279. <i>The Brontës Went to Woolworths</i>	Rachel Ferguson	English	White	F	
280. <i>At the Still Point</i>	Mary Benson	South African	White	F	
281. <i>The Loved and Envied</i>	Enid Bagnold	English	White	F	ht
282. <i>The Daisy Chain</i>	Charlotte Yonge	English	White	F	
283. <i>Poor Cow</i>	Nell Dunn	English	White	F	ht
284. <i>Up the Junction</i>	Nell Dunn	English	White	F	ht
285. <i>The Wild Geese</i>	Bridget Boland	Irish	White	F	
286. <i>Loving Without Tears</i>	Molly Keane	Irish	White	F	ht
287. <i>The Land of Spices</i>	Kate O'Brien	Irish	White	F	ht
288. <i>Aleta Day</i>	Francis Marion Beynon	Canadian	White	F	
289. <i>Fireworks</i>	Angela Carter	English	White	F	ht
290. <i>The Way Things Are</i>	E. M. Delafield	English	White	F	ht
291. <i>Thank Heaven Fasting</i>	E. M. Delafield	English	White	F	ht

⁶ The list from the VMC website has #272 twice, so it is reproduced here without changes.

292. <i>William</i>	E. H. Young	English	White	F	ht
293. <i>The Willow Cabin</i>	Pamela Frankau	English	White	F	ht
294. <i>A Wreath for the Enemy</i>	Pamela Frankau	English	White	F	ht
295. <i>Sunlight on a Broken Column</i>	Attia Hosain	British-Indian	Indian	F	ht
296. <i>Phoenix Flew</i>	Attia Hosain	British-Indian	Indian	F	ht
297. <i>Love</i>	Elizabeth von Arnim	English	White	F	ht
298. <i>The Age of Innocence</i>	Edith Wharton	American	White	F	ht
299. <i>The Corner that Held Them</i>	Sylvia Townsend Warner	English	White	F	hm
300. <i>Miss Marjoribanks</i>	Mrs. Oliphant	Scottish	White	F	ht
301. <i>A Deputy Was King</i>	G. B. Stern	English	White	F	ht
302. <i>The Wind Changes</i>	Olivia Manning	English	White	F	ht
303. <i>Cousin Rosamund</i>	Rebecca West	English	White	F	ht
304. <i>The Fire-Dwellers</i>	Margaret Laurence	Canadian	White	F	ht
305. <i>Not So Quiet</i>	Helen Zenna Smith	Australian-British	White	F	ht
306. <i>We That Were Young</i>	Irene Rathbone	English	White	F	ht
307. <i>The Story of an African Farm</i>	Olive Schreiner	South African	White	F	ht
308. <i>A Touch of Mistletoe</i>	Barbara Comyns	English	White	F	ht
309. <i>Blue Skies & Jack and Jill</i>	Helen Hodgman	Australian	White	F	
310. <i>Phoebe Junior</i>	Mrs. Oliphant	Scottish	White	F	ht
311. <i>The Winged Horse</i>	Pamela Frankau	English	White	F	ht
312. <i>Brother Jacob</i>	George Eliot	English	White	F	ht
313. <i>Clash</i>	Ellen Wilkinson	English	White	F	
314. <i>The Caravaners</i>	Elizabeth von Arnin	English	White	F	ht
315. <i>Cassandra</i>	Christa Wolf	German	White	F	ht
316. <i>Tortoise by Candlelight</i>	Nina Bawden	English	White	F	ht
317. <i>What's It Like Out?</i>	Penelope Gilliatt	English	White	F	ht
318. <i>Music Upstairs</i>	Shena Mackay	Scottish	White	F	ht
319. <i>My Friend Says It's Bullet-proof</i>	Penelope Mortimer	Welsh-born English	White	F	ht

320. <i>The Microcosm</i>	Maureen Duffy	English	White	F	
321. <i>Journey to Paradise</i>	Dorothy Richardson	English	White	F	ht
322. <i>Cullum</i>	E. Arnot Robertson	English	White	F	ht
323. <i>The Diviners</i>	Margaret Laurence	Canadian	White	F	ht
324. <i>Young Entry</i>	Molly Keane	Irish	White	F	ht
325. <i>The Ante-Room</i>	Kate O'Brien	Irish	White	F	ht
326. <i>Seventh Horse & Other Tales</i>	Leonara Carrington	English	White	F	ht
327. <i>After the Death of Don Juan</i>	Sylvia Townsend Warner	English	White	F	hm
328. <i>Everything Is Nice (Collected Stories)</i>	Jane Bowles	American	White	F	ht
329. <i>Mrs. Miniver</i>	Jan Struther	English	White	F	ht
330. <i>Peking Picnic</i>	Ann Bridge	English	White	F	ht
331. <i>The House of Mirth</i>	Edith Wharton	American	White	F	ht
332. <i>Celia</i>	E. H. Young	English	White	F	ht
333. <i>A Little Love, a Little Learning</i>	Nina Bawden	English	White	F	ht
334. <i>Nobody's Business</i>	Penelope Gilliatt	English	White	F	ht
335. <i>Borderline</i>	Janette Turner Hospital	Australian	White	F	
336. <i>Dust Falls on Eugene Schlumberger & Toddler on the Run</i>	Shena Mackay	Scottish	White	F	ht
337. <i>Eight Cousins</i>	Louisa May Alcott	American	White	F	
338. <i>A Rose in Bloom</i>	Louisa May Alcott	American	White	F	
339. <i>Alexander's Bridge</i>	Willa Cather	American	White	F	hm
340. <i>Good Daughters</i>	Mary Hocking	English	White	F	
341. <i>Zoe</i>	Geraldine Jewsbury	English	White	F	
342. <i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	Jane Austen	English	White	F	
342. <i>Welcome Strangers</i> ⁷	Mary Hocking	English	White	F	
343. <i>Sense and Sensibility</i>	Jane Austen	English	White	F	
344. <i>Persuasion</i>	Jane Austen	English	White	F	

⁷ The list from the VMC website has #342 twice, so it is reproduced here without changes.

345. <i>Mansfield Park</i>	Jane Austen	English	White	F	
346. <i>Northanger Abbey</i>	Jane Austen	English	White	F	
347. <i>Selected Stories</i>	Sylvia Townsend Warner	English	White	F	hm
348. <i>Illyrian Soring</i>	Ann Bridge	English	White	F	ht
349. <i>The Last of Summer</i>	Kate O'Brien	Irish	White	F	ht
350. <i>Hester Lilly and Other Stories</i>	Elizabeth Taylor	English	White	F	ht
351. <i>The Rock Cried Out</i>	Ellen Douglas	American	White	F	ht
352. <i>A Particular Place</i>	Mary Hocking	English	White	F	
353. <i>The King of a Rainy Country</i>	Brigid Brophy	English	White	F	ht
354. <i>Two Worlds and Their Ways</i>	Ivy Compton-Burnett	English	White	F	hm
355. <i>The Mighty and Their Fall</i>	Ivy Compton-Burnett	English	White	F	hm
356. <i>Treasure Hunt</i>	Molly Keane	Irish	White	F	ht
357. <i>Villette</i>	Charlotte Brontë	English	White	F	ht
358. <i>Wuthering Heights</i>	Emily Brontë	English	White	F	
359. <i>Agnes Grey</i>	Anne Brontë	English	White	F	
360. <i>The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rugen</i>	Elizabeth von Arnim	English	White	F	ht
361. <i>Try Anything Twice</i>	Jan Struther	English	White	F	ht
362. <i>Sunflower</i>	Rebecca West	English	White	F	ht
363. <i>Tell Me a Riddle & Yonnondio (also #'s 38/39)</i>	Tillie Olsen	American	White	F	ht

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Add MS 88904/1/247 – Rosamond Lehmann.

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Add MS 88904/1/40 – Jan Struther

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Fifth Anniversary

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Publicity:

Add MS 88904/2/13 – Virago Relaunch.

Add MS 88904/5/3 – Publicity Materials, Printed Promotional Materials.

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Add MS 88904/3/2 – Greater Access to Publishing

Minutes:

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Add MS 98178/1/2 – Uncatalogued folder containing memos referring to the beginning of Virago Press (Access granted by arrangement with British Library archivist, Eleanor Dickens).

Add MS 89178/1/45 – Uncatalogued folder containing memos referring to Sales and Publicity Meetings 1980-1982 (Access granted by arrangement with British Library archivist, Eleanor Dickens).