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Thesis

**“It went down into the very form and fabric of myself”:
Women’s Mountaineering Life-Writing 1808-1960**

Submitted by Karen Stockham to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of
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Abstract

In 1808, a French maid-servant, Marie (or Maria) Paradis, became the first woman to ascend Mont Blanc, thereby establishing her place in women's mountaineering history. Paradis' success was followed by that of a wealthy French countess, Henriette D'Angeville, who successfully summited Mont Blanc in 1838. In her French narrative of the ascent, Mon Excursion Au Mont Blanc en 1838 (translated into English in 1992 by Jennifer Barnes as My Ascent of Mont Blanc), D'Angeville urged women mountaineers to write narratives of their mountaineering, arguing that it was important that they write the "feminine stamp" (xxiv) or feminine experience of mountaineering.

Histories of women's mountaineering, for example, Shirley Angell's history of the women-only Pinnacle Club, Pinnacle Club: A History of Women Climbing, Bill Birkett and Bill Peascod's 1989 book, Women Climbing: 200 Years of Achievement bring into the public domain a largely hidden history of women's mountaineering but provide only tantalising glimpses of the feminine mountaineering experience. Drawing on life-writing scholarship, this thesis explores women's mountaineering from the early nineteenth century to 1960, reading a range of published and non-published life-writings of women mountaineers including autobiographies, letters and diaries to explore the myriad and complex nuances in women's mountaineering beyond descriptive history. The thesis also draws on wider women's mountaineering literature in the form of articles published by women mountaineers in the Year Books published by the Ladies' Alpine Club, the journal of the women-only Pinnacle Club and occasional articles published within other mountaineering publications such as the Alpine Journal.

Taking Paradis' achievement as the historical starting point, my thesis reads women's mountaineering narratives through a critical lens which explores the feminine experience of mountaineering using discourses of gender and domesticity. I specifically examine how women mountaineers challenged the culturally constructed values informing their role and identity as women and how they variously narrate their experience to write the "feminine stamp" in mountaineering literature. Whilst the term "feminine stamp" might suggest a universality of experience both in women's mountaineering and in their narratives – and could therefore claim to be representing a form of essentialism – my thesis will follow the work of Alison Stone in suggesting that whilst the women in this thesis have a common gender, their experience of and relationship to mountaineering is individual. As Stone writes, women need to be

“reconceived as a specifically non-unified type of social group” (2) in order that their individuality may be represented. However, Stone also points out there are specific historical instances – women’s suffrage for example – which show that “women can still exist as a determinate group, susceptible to collective mobilisation” (25). For that reason, the focus of my thesis ranges from case studies of individual women mountaineers – for example, Paradis, D’Angeville, Gertrude Bell, Dorothy Pilley and others – to an evaluation of the role played by collective initiatives such as *les cordées féminines* (women-only ropes in mountaineering), mobilised as a result of membership of a community of women mountaineers. My thesis will examine the role of the Ladies’ Alpine Club and Pinnacle Club in enabling and progressing collective developments in women’s mountaineering and fills a gap in existing research studies of women’s mountaineering literature by reading and considering the previously un-researched diaries of Dorothy Pilley alongside collective achievements. These narratives are placed within wider life-writing discourse and specific cultural and historical contexts such as the *fin de siècle* in order to offer insights into how women transcended their gendered role in order to become mountaineers. The primary focus of this thesis, for reasons of space and focus is on the life-writings of UK and European women mountaineers.

This thesis notes the inter-disciplinary and international nature of research into women’s mountaineering in the fields of leisure and sports studies, geography, feminist and women’s studies, sociology, history and literary studies and, where appropriate, draws on this wider literature for comparative purposes.

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Citation of sources in the text

Quotations from unpublished letters and diaries are referenced throughout in parentheses as follows: (Pilley Diary, 10 Sept. 1916). Further information is in the list of Works Cited and Consulted.

Abbreviations

LAC:	Ladies' Alpine Club.
LSCC:	Ladies' Scottish Climbing Club.
FRCC:	Fell & Rock Climbing Club

Definitions

Mountaineering:	Climbing and adventurous walking on ice, rock and snow.
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Introduction

In his 1871 essay “The Regrets of a Mountaineer” (The Playground of Europe 215-243), Leslie Stephen, eminent Victorian mountaineer, biographer, man of essays and editor of the Dictionary of National Biography from 1885-1891 set out his critique of what he called “narratives of mountain adventure” (218), arguing that they fell into one of two types of writing. The first he called:

fine writing [...] sentences which swell to paragraphs [...] ecstasies about infinite abysses and over-powering splendours, [which] compares mountains to archangels lying down in eternal winding-sheets of snow, and converts them into allegories about man’s [sic] highest destinies and aspirations. (218)

The second type – and one which Stephen suggested defined the majority of mountain writings – was what he called “the sporting view”, a way of writing about mountains which was characterised by “something like cynicism” (219). The writers who adopted this approach, Stephen wrote, mixed “descriptions of scenery with allusions to flea or to bitter beer; [...] they humbly try to amuse us because they can’t strike us with awe” (219). When Wilfred Noyce wrote of Stephen that he shifted the “spotlight” in mountain writing away from “ecstatic” writing on mountains to “the person, as he [sic] lives and moves and is changed by mountains” (10), Noyce was making explicit the main purpose of mountaineering literature in the late nineteenth century – that it was to write the relationship between men and mountains, a fact which S.O.A Ullman emphasised in the title to his edited collection of Stephen’s writings, Men, Books and Mountains. Mountaineering, Ullman wrote, was an activity Stephen defined as “a pleasant day’s perpendicular jaunt up an alp in the company of a friend and two or three congenial guides” (10). Ladies in the vicinity of the mountains should, as Stephen wrote in his essay “Round Mont Blanc”, confine themselves to “taking a mule to the Glacier des Bossons” (189) for the purposes of – according to Ann Colley – paying “homage to the sublime [...] and ‘Greatness of Dimension’” (Colley 19). However, what Stephen appears to have been unaware of is the “astonishing number of women climbers” (103) who were not only joining mountaineering expeditions but were reaching “a significant summit” (102). These women also wrote about their experiences, further moving the *raison d’être* for mountaineering literature as writing which described “the motives and emotions of the climber” (15).

By drawing on an existing tradition of women's memoir, journal and letter writing – as theorised by Helen Wilcox, Helen Buss, Felicity Nussbaum and others – women mountaineers such as Henriette D'Angeville, Isabella Bird and Gertrude Bell inscribed the “feminine stamp” into mountaineering literature throughout the nineteenth century, enabling Dorothy Pilley and other twentieth-century women mountaineers to write a successive and still-developing women's mountaineering literature. This thesis will discuss, through specific case study examples of women mountaineers' life-writing, the nature of the “feminine stamp” in mountaineering, showing how from D'Angeville's memoir onwards, women inscribed the relationship between women and mountains. In choosing to focus on women's life-writing, my thesis does not include a detailed analysis of women's mountain fiction, poetry and art. However, some of the life-writings such as Dorothy Pilley's diaries, include art in the form of cartoons and sketches, further individualising the experience of the “feminine stamp”.

Post-modern scholars in life-writing, for example, Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, Timothy Dow Adams and Maria Tamboukou infer that the term *life-writing* can increasingly be viewed as pejorative, as art and photography are theorised as life-writing alongside traditional written narratives. I come back to this in Chapter One when I consider how Dow Adams' work on photography and Maria Tamboukou's scholarship on Dora Carrington's diaries enables me to read Dorothy Pilley's mountaineering persona and her illustrated diaries. I also discuss in Chapter Three how my readings of Dorothy Pilley's diaries further illuminate her relationship with mountains and mountaineering. This thesis' contribution to life-writing scholarship is shown in its positioning of post-modern life-writing theory alongside readings and analyses of previously unpublished women's mountaineering life-writing, as I go on to argue in Chapter One. The thesis will show that women's mountaineering experiences, whilst written within a discourse which seeks to write the relationship between gender and mountaineering is individual – sometimes fragmented, partial and opaque or at other times clear, resonant, unambiguous but at all times individual, calling to mind Leigh Gilmore's “autobiographics”, which I come back to in Chapter One.

For the purposes of this thesis, the evolution of the “feminine stamp” commences in 1838 with the publication of Henriette D'Angeville's memoir of her ascent of Mont Blanc in that same year. I have chosen D'Angeville as a starting point because her voice provides a rare insight into the world of early nineteenth-century women's mountaineering and offers a point of contrast for subsequent narratives. Her narrative also largely disdains the sublime, focusing on her personal experience of the

ascent. Similarly, the staid, more lady-like discourses of the women adventurers of the middle Victorian era who succeeded her, such as Isabella Bird, Mrs Freshfield and Mrs Cole offer voices which challenge what Ann Colley has called the “ascendancy” of the sublime (15), as does the prose of the *fin de siècle* women mountaineers Gertrude Bell and Elizabeth Le Blond. I suggest in Chapters One and Two that the life-writing of the women mountaineers who are case studies in this thesis, challenges the male-construed sublime, providing us with alternative narratives on the mountain environment which focus on the relationship between women and mountaineering. Against the window of the *fin de siècle*, Bell and Le Blond position women’s mountaineering in a context where modernism competes with the values of the old world, a struggle which is continued throughout the twentieth century and illustrated in the diary writings of Dorothy Pilley, the achievements of women at the centre of *les cordées féminines*, the expedition accounts from women’s mountaineering expeditions of the 1950s and the autobiographies of Gwen Moffat.

In her article “Social Climbing on Annapurna: Gender in High-Altitude Mountaineering Narratives”, Julie Rak discusses the importance of contextualising readings of Maurice Herzog’s Annapurna: The First Conquest of an 8,000 Metre Peak (published in English in 1952) and Arlene Blum’s Annapurna: A Woman’s Place within an understanding of “gendered struggles” (111). Rak argues that whilst these accounts “have much to tell us [...] about the ways in which mountaineering is narrated” (111) and specifically about how these accounts inform the experiences of women mountaineers, a problematisation of the political and cultural contexts within which mountaineering occurs is crucial to understanding the *raison d’être* for women’s mountaineering and our readings of mountaineering literature. As the rock-climber Jill Lawrence has written in her article “Women and Climbing Writing” in Orogenic Zones: “the presentation of women by themselves [...] does not occur in isolation, it stems from views held generally about women in our society” (28), a point which establishes that climbing and mountaineering operate within social and economic contexts which need to be examined in order to understand “their very real impact on the sport of climbing” (27). Julie Rak’s identification of the importance of gender is thus crucial in informing the key questions which lie at the heart of this thesis: why did women from the early nineteenth century onwards, leave hearth and home to walk and climb the mountain ranges of the UK, Europe and the world? How do they inscribe their mountaineering experiences? How is their mountaineering informed by socio-cultural contexts? This thesis aims to consider these questions by discussing the women, their

mountaineering achievements and life-writings within specific social and cultural eras, in the process offering – as PearlAnn Reichwein and Karen Fox have argued in their book on the diaries of the Canadian woman mountaineer Margaret Fleming – a fuller understanding of their motivations for engaging in mountaineering and thus a greater appreciation of women’s mountaineering. Reichwein and Fox show that women’s life-writing explicitly writes and distils the specific essence of the feminine experience and its varied nature.

In Mon Excursion Au Mont Blanc en 1838, Henriette D’Angeville emphasised the importance of her written account. It would help the public, she wrote, to understand why she, a well-off woman with a comfortable life-style, suddenly felt compelled to leave home and family and undertake a journey not without hazard and risk to her self. Her narrative, she wrote, would be of “general interest” (xxiii) and would be “truthful, my remarks simple and natural” (xxiii), bearing “the feminine stamp” (xxiv). The key concern of my thesis is to understand the nature and variety of the impetus which inspired D’Angeville and other women mountaineers. I do this through a consideration of the ways in which the women inscribe their experiences, particularly through exploring previously un-researched and un-published life-writings. My thesis also includes a range of women’s mountaineering literature from the period 1808 – 1960, including articles from the journals and year books of the Pinnacle Club and Ladies’ Alpine Club. My readings of the women’s life-writings and their wider mountaineering writing will show how women mountaineers challenged the highly gendered culture of the wider social and political landscapes they inhabited. The thesis additionally draws on a myriad of secondary literature which is inter-disciplinary in nature, drawing on life-writing scholarship, feminist discourse, mountaineering literature, literary criticism, critiques of travel, gender studies, *fin de siècle* cultural politics and modernism in order to position the life-writing of women mountaineers within wider scholarship. Other articles published in specialist journals such as the Alpine Journal and club-based mountaineering journals are included where relevant.

My thesis builds on the biographical approach of PearlAnn Reichwein, Karen Fox and Jan Levi. Their respective scholarship on the diaries and mountain writing of Margaret Fleming and Mabel Barker provided new and explicit insights into the values and motivations underpinning Fleming’s and Barker’s mountaineering which are only gleaned implicitly from descriptive mountaineering histories. Similarly, my research into and readings of the unpublished diaries of Dorothy Pilley, bring new insights to women’s mountaineering in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Women's mountaineering literature – the evolution of the “feminine stamp”

This section positions my thesis in the published history of women's mountaineering. Claire Eliane Engel's histories of European alpine mountaineering published in 1950 and 1952 marked a watershed in mountaineering history in that she drew attention to the achievements of the Victorian mountaineer Lucy Walker. Previous to Engel, many histories and narratives of nineteenth-century European mountaineering tended to exclude women, such as Edward Whymper's Scrambles Amongst the Alps¹. There are, however, rare exceptions, such as Alfred Mummery's My Climbs in the Alps and Caucasus which includes a chapter in which he salutes the skill and aptitude of the American mountaineer Lily Bristow, who joined Mummery and his party on an ascent of the Grépon in the French Alps in 1893, becoming the first lady to ascend the Grépon and the probable inspiration for what is now Mummery's famous assertion that “all mountains appear doomed to pass through the three stages: An inaccessible peak – the most difficult ascent in the Alps – an easy day for a lady” (Mummery 113). Bristow, along with her fellow American mountaineer, Annie Smith Peck, is not included in this thesis which for reasons of space and focus excludes American women, but Peck's 1911 account of her mountaineering A Search for the Apex of America is important for its insights into American women's mountaineering in the early twentieth century.

In 1986 Jill Neate revealed the full and relatively unknown extent – at that time – of women's active participation in mountaineering in her widely-respected bibliography of mountaineering literature which listed a wide range of mountain writing by women mountaineers and alpine travellers, comprising autobiography, fiction, poetry, biography, travel-writing, letters and diaries. Although the works by women writers listed by Neate showed that women writers counted for around 8% of published mountaineering literature she revealed the extent of women's participation in mountaineering and a highly varied tradition of women's mountaineering literature. Given that even by the 1980s, women's mountaineering was still informed by a highly gendered view of a woman's place – Arlene Blum draws attention to this in her introduction to Annapurna: A Woman's Place, eloquently pointing out that women are construed as “a liability in the high mountains” (1) – Neate's bibliography points to a

¹ Although Whymper extensively discusses his climbs with Lucy Walker's brother, Horace, he does not mention the achievements of Lucy Walker.

remarkable contribution being made by women to the shaping of women's mountaineering as early as the 1830s.

Cicely Williams' 1973 history of women's mountaineering, Women on the Rope: The Feminine Share of Mountain Adventure, was, she claimed, not more "than a casual history written rather for enjoyment and personal interest" (16). However, its importance as a history of women's mountaineering belies Williams' insistence that it was a "light-hearted, sometime personal and always essentially feminine book" (16). By considering women mountaineers against the "sociological aspects of the time" (16), Williams demonstrated an implicit awareness of the importance of gender in shaping women's mountaineering. In 1988, Shirley Angell's history of the women-only Pinnacle Club, The Pinnacle Club: A History of Women Climbing, highlighted the importance of communities of women mountaineers in developing women's mountaineering and their writing. Bill Birkett and Bill Peascod's 1989 book, Women Climbers: 200 Hundred Years of Achievement, publicised a wider but little known history of women's climbing from the early nineteenth century onwards. Subsequent research into women's mountaineering owes much to Women Climbers, the publication of which coincided with a focus in feminist scholarship on women's histories and narratives written from personal experience as opposed to histories written by others. Specifically, the scholarship of Elaine Showalter, Carolyn Heilbrun and Liz Stanley called for women to write their own histories.

Cyndi Smith's and Janet Robertson's histories of women mountaineers in Colorado and Western Canada in 1989 and 1990, Off The Beaten Track and The Magnificent Mountain Women, researched the existence and achievements of an international community of women mountaineers, positioning histories of women's mountaineering beyond the gaze of the European Alps. In 1990, Mikel Vause edited a collection of essays by women climbers, producing the first anthology of women's mountain writing, followed in 1992 by Rachel da Silva's collection of writing from over 25 women mountaineers and climbers which represented a rich history and international community of women mountaineers from the 1880s to 1990s. Vause and da Silva's anthologies made a significant contribution to the history of women's mountaineering in that they brought together eclectic collections of women's own voices in mountaineering, revealing the international and diverse nature of the "feminine stamp". Vause and da Silva, along with David Mazel's 1994 publication of an edited collection of extracts from women's mountaineering writings entitled Mountaineering Women: Stories by Early Climbers, not only highlighted the role of pioneering women

mountaineers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but foregrounded the personal narrative. Rebecca A. Brown's mini biographies of nineteenth-century women mountaineers, Women on High: Pioneers of Mountaineering, attempts to combine imagined reflections from the women with biography, bringing the private and public together in a sometimes problematic but innovative alliance. Margaret Clennett's 2009 edited collection of women mountaineer's articles from the Pinnacle Club Journal places in the public domain a collection of mountain writing by women only previously available to subscribers of the Pinnacle Club Journal. Helen Steven's 2010 history of the Ladies' Scottish Climbing Club re-emphasises the importance of the role of women's climbing associations and communities in promoting and developing women's mountaineering and women's mountain writings. Pearl Reichwein and Karen Fox's 2004 publication of an edited collection of the previously un-published diaries of Margaret Fleming, The Alpine Adventures of Margaret Fleming, broke new ground in the use of unpublished life-writings as a lens through which to examine women's experiences of mountaineering as does Jan Levi's biography of the Cumbrian mountaineer Mabel Barker, And Nobody Woke up Dead, which draws on Barker's unpublished letters in addition to her published mountaineering articles to explore Barker's relationship to mountaineering. In the twenty-first century, ecological theoretical perspectives have raised new questions about the place of gender in writing on the sublime, with writers such as Terry Gifford and Patrick Murphy suggesting the need for more feminist critique, a clarion call recently taken up by Ann Colley and Julie Rak.

My thesis has a particular focus on considering unpublished life-writing, such as the letters and diaries of Dorothy Pilley Richards, (referred to as Pilley throughout) and the 1959 expedition diary of Eileen Healey. These writings are central to exploring the nature of the hidden and private nature of the relationship between women and mountaineering. The drawing on life-writings held in private archives is a strength of this thesis, particularly in its discussion in Chapter Three which draws closely from Pilley's diaries – readings from which enable additional insights into the motivations of the woman who did so much to advance not just the “feminine stamp” of mountaineering but the development of communities of women's mountaineering in the early decades of the twentieth century. The thesis uncovers some of the richly diverse renditions of the feminine experience in mountaineering and the different articulations of what mountaineering means to them, again challenging any claims to essentialism in the term “feminine stamp”. This thesis particularly builds on the work of Reichwein,

Fox and Levi in choosing to focus on unpublished life-writings to reveal “authentic voices not published” in official histories (Reichwein and Fox xxii). I situate the private and unpublished voices alongside published life-writings to consider the motivations and values of women mountaineers and the differences between public and private renditions of personal experience.

The thesis positions the private writing of Pilley and Healey alongside Gertrude Bell’s letters and diaries, Elizabeth Le Blond’s autobiographical narrative Day In Day Out, Dorothy Pilley’s climbing memoirs Climbing Days, Janet Adam Smith’s memoirs Mountain Holidays and Miriam Underhill’s memoirs Give Me the Hills. I also include Gwen Moffat’s two volumes of autobiography Space Below My Feet, On My Home Ground and Nea Morin’s autobiography A Woman’s Reach. Although On My Home Ground and A Woman’s Reach were published after the end-point of the thesis (1960), they are included because of their substantive discussions of women’s mountaineering in the 1940s and 1950s. As a body of work, these autobiographical narratives – as Reichwein and Fox write of Margaret Fleming’s diaries – “articulate different and alternative notions of adventure, discovery, and physical culture in the mountains”, additionally offering a “rare longitudinal perspective of ongoing transformations in [women’s] mountain social culture” xxiii). Additionally, the thesis makes a contribution to life-writing theory by building on the claims of post-modern theorists such as Timothy Dow Adams and feminist theorists such as Leigh Gilmore who show that life-writing is increasingly dynamic in terms of its analysis of form, representation and in the way it lifts meaning from life-writing by positioning art, photography and – increasingly, the internet, blogs and other electronic forms of representation – alongside the written word.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1 is written in two halves which allow me to consider how my thesis has been informed by life-writing discourse and mountaineering literature. In the first half of the chapter I show, through selected examples from life-writing scholarship, how life-writing theory developed from the late Victorian era to the twenty-first century, starting with Leslie Stephen’s writings on biography and concluding with post-modern and contemporary writing on the use of memoir and diary, in particular the work of Timothy Dow Adams, Leigh Gilmore and Philippe Léjeune. On the way, I consider and necessarily select feminist discourse on women’s biography such as Teresa Iles’ edited

collection of writing All Sides of the Subject and Carolyn Heilbrun's Writing a Woman's Life. I consider how feminist life-writing theory has evolved since Iles and Heilbrun and discuss how it continues to be shaped and informed by debates on new forms of life-writing such as photography, film and the internet.

The second half of the first chapter shows how Edmund Burke's iteration of the sublime in the mid-eighteenth century informed conceptions of beauty and scenery. I explore the relationship of the sublime to the development of an alternative feminine mountain aesthetic as illustrated by the journals of Dorothy Wordsworth and in selected women's fiction. Articles and texts from John Ruskin, Leslie Stephen and Edward Whymper are discussed in relationship to the contribution they make to an emergent mountaineering literature in the late nineteenth century. I also draw in this chapter on Peter L Bayers' study of the relationships between mountaineering and the growth of the British Empire and consider his premise that the formation of the Alpine Club in 1857 and the subsequent development of mountaineering in the nineteenth century can be conceptualised largely as a metaphor for promoting nationalistic and imperialist ideology and for pushing Britain's interests abroad. I additionally consider Julie Rak's assertion that mountaineering in the period was necessarily pursued by "middle-class and upper-class white men associated with imperial and colonial regimes" (112).

Chapter Two explores the developing culture and writing of women's mountaineering in the nineteenth century, commencing with the achievements of Marie Paradis and Henriette D'Angeville on Mont Blanc. Starting with D'Angeville's narrative, I examine how she narrates her ascent of Mont Blanc from a feminine perspective and emphasises the importance of writing "the feminine stamp" into nineteenth-century mountaineering. I also refer to Ben Griffin's recent work on gender politics and Michael McKeon's work on the relationship of the private sphere to the public sphere, specifically on the concepts of inside vs. outside, relating these cultural debates to how women mountaineers positioned themselves in relation to domesticity. I draw on mountain writings and life-writings by Mrs Henry Cole, Mrs Henry Freshfield, Isabella Bird, Elizabeth Le Blond and Gertrude Bell to consider how these women travellers and mountaineers inscribe themselves in relation to models of gender that pertained during the nineteenth century. The chapter concludes by discussing New Woman discourse against the wider cultural backdrop of the *fin de siècle* and considers the extent to which women mountaineers such as Le Blond and Bell personify the characteristics of the New Woman in mountaineering, drawing on examples of the writing of Sarah Grand. I additionally position my discussion of the New Woman

alongside scholarship on the *fin de siècle*, for example, the work of Sally Ledger and Bernard Bergonzi among others. For reasons of focus I make only brief mention of American women mountaineers of the nineteenth century such as Meta Brevoort, Lily Bristow and Annie Peck as they are deserving of a thesis in their own right.

Chapter Three draws on the mountaineering memoirs and unpublished diaries and letters of Dorothy Pilley in order to explore the background and values of women mountaineers in the early twentieth century. As a significant case study in women's mountaineering, Dorothy Pilley is considered against the culture and politics of the first two decades of the twentieth century. I draw on the writing of Winifred Holtby, Sandra Stanley Holton and Julia Bush in order to consider the impact of suffrage, anti-suffrage movements and the First World War as defining moments which lead to a new political consensus to progress the role of women beyond the home in public and leisure contexts. This leads me to a discussion of the significance of the establishment of the Ladies' Alpine Club and Pinnacle Club for women's mountaineering. I draw upon the Year Books and Journals of these clubs to explore the extent to which these publications provided vehicles for women to inscribe and publish their experiences of mountaineering. This chapter also locates women's mountaineering literature in the wider literary culture of the early twentieth century, particularly within discourse on magazines and periodicals and considers the extent to which women's mountaineering literature challenges the gendered construction of women within the literature of the period.

Chapter Four seeks to draw specific links between modernism and movements in women's mountaineering such as *les cordées féminines* (manless climbing) which were developed in partnerships between British, French and American women mountaineers in the 1930s. The chapter will draw on the autobiographies of women mountaineers who were key to these developments such as Miram Underhill's Give Me the Hills and Nea Morin's A Woman's Reach, in addition to extracts from Dorothy Pilley's diaries. Women's mountaineering achievements are discussed against the backdrop of the Modernist movement of the twentieth century, drawing on Shari Benstock's, Juliet Gardiner's, Bonnie Kime Scott's, Jane Goldman's and other writings to illuminate and inform the relationships between modernism and the changing nature of the "feminine stamp" in women's mountaineering throughout the 1930s.

The final chapter, Chapter Five, will discuss the significance of the Second World War in creating opportunities for women mountaineers in the 1940s and 1950s. I will examine the tensions caused by a reactive, political, post-Second World War

consensus against the new economic and social freedoms accorded to women throughout the war and subsequent efforts to re-domesticise the role of women in the post-war years. I draw on Gwen Moffat's first and second volumes of autobiography Space Below My Feet and On My Home Ground, in order to explore these tensions and discuss how they informed women's mountaineering at the end of the Second World War. Within this chapter I also explore developments in women's mountaineering in the 1950s and show how the first women-only international mountaineering expeditions crossed an important watershed for women's mountaineering. I use the international women's expedition to the 8,000-metre Nepalese Himalayan mountain Cho Oyu in 1959 as a particular case study and show how it acted as a catalyst for redefining women's mountaineering and the wider socio-cultural role of women. The journalist Stephen Harper's account of that expedition, A Fatal Obsession: The Women of Cho Oyu, A Reporting Saga, is central to this discussion, as is the film made by Eileen Healey of that expedition and Healey's 1959 expedition diary. I also include narratives of pioneering international women's mountaineering expeditions such as Tents in the Clouds, Mountains and Mem-Sahibs and No Purdah in Padam, which are important accounts of women's mountaineering expeditions within the wider cultural context of post-war Britain. These expedition narratives show how, in an era when wider political policy sought to return women to domesticity, women could both confound and confront a heavily politicised gender agenda, organising and undertaking mountaineering expeditions into remote international regions. In the final part of this chapter I discuss my correspondence with the octogenarian mountaineer Gwen Moffat throughout February and March 2011, as we explored together the major changes to women's mountaineering in recent decades. I also compare the conclusions I draw from Moffat's letters to extracts from Pilley's chapter entitled "Retrospection", written for the second edition of Climbing Days in 1965.

My conclusions summarise the evolution of women's mountaineering life-writing in the period 1808-1960. I focus on how the various inscriptions of women's experience of – and relationship to – mountaineering, enhances our understanding of the connections between women, mountaineering and gender, particularly with respect to how the women narrate the culturally constructed sphere of domesticity.

Chapter 1

“All Sides of the Subject”: Some theoretical and literary considerations

The first part of this, the opening chapter, discusses selected life-writing scholarship which has informed my reading of the life-writings which appear as case study material in my thesis. The second part contextualises the development of women’s mountaineering life-writing within cultural and literary histories of mountaineering. By the end of the chapter I will have laid the foundations for the central premise in this thesis – that it was both necessary and important for women mountaineers to inscribe – in paraphrasing Elaine Showalter – a “mountaineering literature of their own”.

Part 1: Towards a Feminist Biography

Leslie Stephen and the “second-rate” women

As the editor of the Dictionary of National Biography in the late nineteenth century and one of the pre-eminent mountaineers and writers on mountaineering in the same period, the writings of Leslie Stephen connect mountaineering and biography. In his 1898 essay “National Biography”, Stephen argued that

the first office of the biographer is to facilitate what I may call the proper reaction between biography and history; to make each study throw all possible light on the other; and so to give fresh vitality to two different lines of study. (15)

A relationship between history and biography, Stephen argued, would secure “a proper correlation” that would “make some further inquiry probable” of every life “who is sufficiently noted in the ordinary histories” (15). There was, however, a specific problem with Stephen’s assertion in that female subjects tended to be largely excluded from histories – an omission noted by Carolyn Heilbrun and Teresa Iles in 1988 and 1992. Stephen himself noted a flaw in his argument. What about, he asked, all those:

second-rate people – the people whose lives have to be reconstructed from obituary notices, or from references in memoirs and collections of letters [...] who really become generally accessible through the dictionary alone – that provide the really useful reading. There are numbers of such people whom one first discovers to be really interesting

when the scattered materials are for the first time pieced together. (21-22)

The biographer should, he wrote, impart “the smallest number of words” about the lives of these “second-rate” people in order to give the “essence of a man’s [sic] character and of his claims upon the memory of posterity” (27). Whilst, however, pointing out what he perceived as a flaw of omission, Stephen did not note another one – that his emphasis on a “man’s character” clearly invisibilised the lives of women, with one or two exceptions which suggested that women whose lives had been famous, tragic or comic could be included. For example, during the late 1890s, the Dictionary included brief summaries of the lives of the three Catherinees who had been wedded to Henry VIII and a Margaret Catchpole who was transported to Australia for stealing a horse (32). What of the lives of ordinary, “second-rate” women?

According to Stephen, the point of biography was to commemorate a life and to write it in such a way that it would tell “a good story, condense without squeezing out the real interest [...] so as to bring out the humorous side [...] The aim should be to give whatever would be really interesting to the most cultivated reader” (24), who would be, Stephen assumed, scholarly and male. The biographer, Stephen continued, would give the:

significant facts [...] and indicate the way in which it has since been judged by competent writers and what is the view now taken by experts [...] Lives written under these conditions may, I hold, really satisfy the commemorative instinct. (26)

He further saw the lives found within the pages of the Dictionary as “vivid images of the lesser luminaries, which will have the same effect upon [the reader’s] conceptions of history as a really good set of illustrations upon a narrative of travels” (36).

How does Stephen’s definition of biography inform this thesis? His argument that biography had to fulfil a “commemorative instinct” suggests that the subjects of biography had to be what Elizabeth Podnieks (1) refers to as “heroic”. This offers a narrow view of the purpose of biography but has its resonances in histories of women’s mountaineering where nineteenth-century women mountaineers have tended to be cast as heroines in the pioneering mould. For example, inscribing women mountaineers as “petticoat pioneers” who took to the mountains in voluminous skirts against the prevailing view of “a woman’s place”, as Cicely Williams has done in her history, presents the reader of women’s mountaineering history with a one-sided view of women mountaineers. If the biographer turns to the un-published and private narratives of

women mountaineers, depictions of women mountaineers are revealed which show what Iles refers to as “all sides of the subject”.

In her research on the dichotomy between the public (The Dictionary of National Biography) and private (The Mausoleum Book) iterations of Stephen’s preoccupations of biography, Trev Broughton writes that the public has been in the ascendance, building and maintaining Stephen’s weighty role in a brotherhood of “literary kinship” (11). Broughton’s concern is that Stephen’s private, more reflective use of biography which is revealed in The Mausoleum Book, a set of reminiscences on his life written and addressed to “his darling Julia’s children” (3) has tended to be ignored by Stephen scholars. Bringing this aspect of Stephen’s biography to the fore, Broughton suggests that in writing and publishing The Mausoleum Book, Stephen was condoning the memoir tradition of life-writing which he had not acknowledged in “National Biography”, a form within which there was already an existing tradition of women writing and a media later employed by women mountaineers such as Henriette D’Angeville, Elizabeth Le Blond, Helen Hamilton, and Dorothy Pilley, whose life-writings are considered within this thesis. Stephen’s public legacy as a Victorian literary luminary wedded to the traditions of Victorian literature, has arguably precluded him from being associated with the development of a reflective tradition in biography.

In 1927 Stephen’s daughter, Virginia Woolf, severed biography’s link with its Stephen-esque, literary past by making a declaration in her essay “The New Biography” that “the days of Victorian biography are over” (478), paving the way for new approaches to the study and use of biography. Woolf not only echoed the principles of Modernism in separating biography from the past – which I articulate more fully in Chapter 4 – but paved the way for a reconstitution of the purpose of biography and the medium through which it is represented. In doing so she created a space for a more “enlarged” scope for biography, as in her following assertion that:

in an age when a thousand cameras are pointed, by newspapers, letters, and diaries, at every character from every angle, [...] Biography will enlarge its scope by hanging up looking glasses at odd corners. And yet from all this diversity it will bring out, not a riot of confusion, but a richer unity. (195)

Woolf’s certainty that the future of biography lay in developing a rich and diverse canon of approaches to the writing of lives, arguably presages twentieth-century feminist and post-modern critiques of biography which foregrounded the importance of analyses of gender.

“All Sides of the Subject”: a feminist biography

Scholars in the field of women’s leisure in the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as Eileen Green *et al*, Rosemary Deem and Sheila Scraton have argued that as a social and political construct, gender appeared to limit women’s engagement in leisure. Their influential gender-focused studies on women, leisure and sport – for example, Rosemary Deem’s research on young women and leisure, All Work and No Play? The Sociology of Women and Leisure and Sheila Scraton’s research on girls and PE, Shaping up to Womanhood: Gender and Girls’ Physical Education – discussed the importance of locating studies of women, leisure and recreation within discourses on domesticity, power, gender and culture. They highlighted the importance of placing analyses of gender at the centre of research on women and leisure, debates which have translated into the contemporary scholarship of women such as Dianne Chisholm and Julie Rak.

In her Introduction to All Sides of the Subject, Teresa Iles problematises the position of biography. In explaining the problem she considers the definition of biography in the 1989 edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, an explanation which is distinctly Stephen-esque. Biography is defined as:

The history of the lives of individual men, as a branch of history. A written record of the life of an individual. The life course of a man or other living being: the life history of an animal or plant. (qtd. in Iles 3)

Iles goes on to show the problem of this definition from a feminist perspective, arguing that this definition invisibilises and ignores the lives of women, reinforcing the importance of formulating a feminist approach to the writing and reading of biography which places analyses of gender at its heart. Her answer to the question “what could the knowledge accumulated in recent years within the feminist movement bring to bear on women’s biography” (1) is that it reinforces the importance of gender.

Inter-disciplinary feminist scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s emphasises the importance of gender as a critical tool with which to read women’s histories. The writings of feminist scholars such as Teresa Iles, Carolyn Heilbrun, Nancy K. Miller, Sue Middleton, Liz Stanley and Margaret Forster do two things: first, they urge a reading of women’s histories from a standpoint of patriarchy; second, they show new ways of reading women’s histories and constituting women’s experiences in order to – for the purpose of this thesis – evaluate the role and nature of the feminine experience in mountaineering history. For example, the difficulties incurred as a result of heavy and

impractical clothing of the nature described by Henriette D'Angeville (31-33), are re-conceptualised in this thesis within a discourse which places gender at its centre, enabling women's clothing to be read against a wider cultural discourse which sought to limit their physical movement as Tracey Collins and Mary Morris have argued, a point to which I return in Chapter 2. Women, it appears, were taking to the mountains in the nineteenth century against what seem to have been insuperable odds, but the recent scholarship of Ann C. Colley warns against writing these women as heroines or, variously, abnormal women. To position them as such, negates their position as ordinary women who attained the remarkable not because of heroic action on their part but because of careful and canny management of the cultural values which constituted their lives and actions. To ignore this, as Carolyn Heilbrun has argued, results in problems in terms of how the life of a woman is construed or even leads to women's lives being altogether ignored:

When biographers come to write the life of a woman [...] there has been a tendency to see them as somewhat abnormal, monstrous. It is no wonder that biographers have largely ignored women as subjects, and that critics of biography have written as though men were the only possible subjects. (21)

Iles, Heilbrun and Broughton then, make compelling arguments for a feminist approach to biography which positions gender at the centre of analyses of the writing and reading of women's lives, arguments which Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have more recently condoned, emphasising the importance of readings of biography which take account of the cultural context of texts, which in turn informs the purpose of the text and the identity of the reader and writer of biography.

Liz Stanley's research in the middle of the 1980s on the diaries of Arthur Munby and his servant Hannah Cullwick is an important key-note in the evolution of feminist biography discourse. Not only does Hannah Cullwick normalise herself as a woman through her diary writings but Stanley realised the importance of women's diaries in the writing of little-known and/or under-represented lives. Stanley not only recognised the value of diaries to feminist scholarship but focused attention on the often problematic nature of diaries and journals in terms of how they inscribed a life:

The [...] diaries brought home to me [...] in a very immediate way that the diary form, although apparently descriptive and written in the immediacy of the moment is, in fact, as selective and as highly glossed a

theoretical formulation of a ‘life’ as any autobiography, biography or piece of formal theorising. (111)

Stanley confronted concerns about authenticity, truth and identity by suggesting that underneath the noise created by “the voices and position within this field of claim and counter-claim [...] there is a small kernel, the thing itself, the ‘moment’ being invoked, described, re-described, analysed, explained which makes the study of life-writing so rewarding” (qtd. in Donnell & Polkey 6). In On Diary, Philippe Léjeune invokes Stanley’s striving to get to the “kernel, the thing itself” in his arguing of the importance of an approach to reading diaries which he calls “textual genetics”, defined by him as the process of understanding “why and how someone created something” (162). He defines the process of understanding as a “study of the history of a composition [...] finding all of the traces [...] describing them in painstaking detail” (162). The searching for a “kernel” or “moment”, informs my reading of Dorothy Pilley’s diaries and the expedition diary of Eileen Healey. These life-writings reveal the private concerns of women mountaineers which do not often appear in the public domain before the 1960s, such as home, domesticity, family, love, conflict, despair, doubt. Collectively, their writing brings what Woolf calls “moments of being” into women’s mountaineering history and offers new insights into specific motivations and values which underpin and inform women’s mountaineering.

In Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women’s Self-Representation, Leigh Gilmore develops thinking on self-representation, offering the term “autobiographics” to “describe those elements of self-representation which are not [...] content with the literary history of autobiography” (42). Autobiographics, she writes, “is concerned with interruptions and eruptions, with resistance and contradiction as strategies of self-representation” (42). Gilmore’s iteration of “autobiographics” informs readings of Dorothy Pilley’s diaries in Chapter 3 and the various narratives which inscribe the Cho Oyu expedition in Chapter 5. The private, episodic, often interrupted form of the diary reflects and represents changing views of themselves in longitudinal and different cultural contexts. In her research on Dora Carrington’s diaries, Maria Tamboukou draws on Gilmore’s conceptualisation of “autobiographics”, reinforcing the importance of reading women’s epistolary narratives in terms of the insight they afford into women’s self-representation (3-6). A variation of Gilmore’s “autobiographics” is offered by Léjeune in his essay entitled “Genetic Studies of Life Writing”, in which he writes how he dreams “of a musical study on the rhythm of diaries” (169). Grasping the rhythm in diary-writing, he argues, is important, as it nuances the episodic, visual,

interrupted nature of the writing, emphasising the rawer, more spontaneous elements. I return to this point in Chapter 3, when I consider the differences between Pilley's private and public renditions of her experience.

“Light Writing”: Post-modern practices

Post-modern and post-structuralist approaches to life-writing from the late 1990s onwards theorise the transformation of biography into “life-writing”, a perception of biographical practices which offers new thinking about the writing and reading of lives, most notably in the role and use of visual forms of representation such as paintings, letters, video, film and photography. In his book Light Writing and Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography, Timothy Dow Adams writes of the “collapse” (xiii) of autobiography and its segueing into “life-writing” as do Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in their extensive post-modern scholarship on the evolution of life-writing in which they recognise the role that other media such as art and photography and electronic forms of communication play in representing a life, thus expanding the category ‘life-writing’. Dow Adams observes the importance for a lack of specificity in the term “life-writing”, arguing that it is essential “to make clear that [...] many scholars now use the term life writing when they refer to personal narratives in general” (xi). However, Dow Adams also suggests that for many scholars of life-writing, in particular autobiography, the “presumption” of truth in autobiography and a will in scholars “to believe” in an inherent truth in autobiography makes it “impervious to deconstruction” (242-243) and therefore less likely to be critiqued. However, as feminist scholarship shows – in, for example, Sarah Hartley's endeavours to pin down the “truth” about Phyllis Pearsall's life and the biographer Margaret Forster's attempt to establish the truth about her maternal grandmother's life – a process of continual deconstruction is an inevitable process in autobiographical scholarship as readings of the lives of women mountaineers in this thesis will show.

The post-modern iteration of “life-writing” as a myriad of ways to write and represent a life (including visual media), is important for this thesis as it allows me to consider and validate the use of sketches, cartoons and films in women's mountaineering narratives, a point reinforced by Julie Rak in her review of Christl Verduyn's book on Edna Staebler's diaries Must Write: Edna Staebler's Diaries. Rak points out that:

life writing is not necessarily found in a formal autobiography or biography but in unpublished, or unlikely places – letters, diaries [...] genres that have historically been where women have written about their own experiences. (240)

Dow Adams' and Rak's conceptualisations of "life-writing" offer biographers new ways to represent a life. They arguably de-formalise biography, opening up new ways to represent a life, through, for example, the juxtaposition of text with photographs, approaches which remind us of Virginia Woolf's futurising of biography as a medium which would view a "character from every angle". This use of triangulation to illuminate readings of a life from a myriad of perspectives is helpful when I consider the photograph of Pilley in Figure 1 alongside readings of her diaries, enabling me to see a new significance to the headscarf she is wearing. Brightly coloured headscarves were used by Pilley throughout her life to symbolise a gypsy persona which to her was synonymous with independence. This is a similar device to one used by Storm Jameson in her novel The Journal of Mary Hervey Russell, where the heroine's mother uses a luxurious Maltese silk scarf to enable her to fantasise about life away from her position as a ship's captain's wife.

In a letter written in 1984 by Janet Carleton (née Janet Adam Smith), a close friend of Pilley, to their joint friend Richard Lockett at a time contemporary with the photograph which appears in Figure 2, Carleton makes it clear how determined Pilley was in old age to retain this metaphor, noting that "Dorothea has such a sense of herself as the intrepid mountaineer and traveller who will not be daunted by any challenge" (Carleton Letter, 1 May 1984). I argue here, using the two photographs of Pilley, that text and image need to be read, contextualised and understood alongside each other to get a full understanding of the woman. Although Dow Adams' asserts that "reference is not secure" in text and image, warning that "both media are located on the border between fact and fiction they undercut just as easily as they reinforce each other" (xxi), Maria Tamboukou argues in her research on Dora Carrington's letters, drawings and sketches that text and image play an important role in the "constitution of the self" (6) as they do in the case of Dorothy Pilley.



Fig.1. Pilley, unknown photographer. Canada 1925. © Magdalene College, University of Cambridge. Box 51.

My readings of the photographs of Pilley also invoke Paul John Eakin's work on the "fiction-making" process in autobiography, when he writes that "the fiction making process is a central constituent of the truth of any life as it is lived" (1985 xi). Dow Adams also argues that photographs are an important constituent element of this "fiction-making" process, suggesting that photography operates as an alternative "visual supplement" to the text (xxi). This is a point previously argued by Roland Barthes in his essay "The Face of Garbo", in which he suggested that Garbo's face was a carefully made up mask which gave her a name, "the Divine", enabling her to mythologise herself as "a lyricism of Woman" (57). Both Garbo and Pilley lyricise themselves, but differently – Pilley as gypsy and Garbo as, according to Barthes, "an Idea."

The legacy left by Eakin and Barthes is seen in contemporary, inter-disciplinary research, which seeks to create dynamic, interpretative contexts to understand "all sides of the subject", as for example, in Avril Maddrell's research into women's geographers, Complex Locations: Women's Geographical Work in the UK 1850-1970, where she brings together geography and spatial contexts alongside biographical, feminist, oral history, sociological and literary perspectives in order to triangulate understandings of the relationship between physical space and gender. I use inter-disciplinary practice in this chapter and throughout the thesis to refer to a wide range of scholarship for the purposes of informing and enhancing my readings and discussions of women's mountaineering life-writings.



Fig.2. Pilley, unknown photographer. Rockport, Maine 1984. © Magdalene College, University of Cambridge. Box 51.

Observations on the diary practice of Dorothy Pilley

Dorothy Pilley and her three younger siblings were exhorted by their father to keep a daily diary throughout their childhood and adolescence. Portrayed by Pilley in her diaries as a stern, deeply moral man, her father appears to have viewed diary-writing as an activity which would instil a sense of discipline in his children.² That this use of diary writing was to become subverted by practitioners using the diaries for more private, reflective practice is widely acknowledged in feminist scholarship, for example in the work of Liz Stanley and Elizabeth Bohls.

Pilley maintained her diary practice, with periodic lapses, right up to her death in 1986, the diaries becoming an important lens through which she viewed the world and her relationship to it. In addition to her father's early influence on her childhood diary practice, another man, Pilley's husband, Ivor Armstrong Richards – a direct descendant of the literary tradition in mountaineering personified by Leslie Stephen – played an important role in informing her life-writing both indirectly and directly. Indirectly, Richards furthered his wife's knowledge and awareness of linguistics and language, contributing to the evolution of her diary and wider writing craftsmanship. His direct contributions were more subtle and outrageous. Although openly antipathetic to biography and contemptuous of his wife's tendency to hoard personal papers and letters, Richards made several direct incursions into Pilley's diaries, contributing several entries in his own hand-writing which raised interesting questions for me as a reader of Pilley's diaries. Where they as private as her inscriptions on the inside of the front cover

² He also established the importance of regular daily exercise, taking his children every day on a walk to the bottom of the Pilley's long garden and back.

implied?³ Was she aware of these interventions? Was this a linguistic experiment on Richards' part or an attempt to thumb his nose at biography? I return to these questions in Chapter 3.

There is evidence throughout her diaries that Pilley viewed the necessity of diary writing as a tiresome liability. On 3 February 1919 she chastised herself:

Preposterously absurd my methods with the diary – for nights I write conscientiously then it just slides and its [sic] hopeless to try and catch up the missed time – and I'm just bored and indifferent. (Pilley Diary, 3 February 1919)

I see Pilley's father's insistence on daily diary writing as comparable to the Catholic Church's instillation of moral and spiritual discipline in young girls in nineteenth century France through diary writing practice (On Diary 135-140). Léjeune also notes, however, what he refers to as the growing "subversion" (140) of the "moral diary" (140) from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, as more young women saw the potential of the diary as a media through which they could engage with forbidden feminist ideology. He refers to this type of engagement as "secret activity" (136) and notes the evidence of some young women's spirited defiance. In writing about the diary of a young woman called Marie-Edmée he notes "the ambiguity of Marie-Edmée's discourse [...] also in a shy way, *feminist* [sic] she is eighteen, and has decided, despite her relatives' advice, to become an artist" (137-138).

Pilley's use of her diary to explore her emotions, feelings, growing frustration with the confines of her home life and emerging passion for mountaineering can be compared to the diary practices of Virginia Woolf and Marie Bashkirtseff, both of whom regularly recorded the minutiae of daily life, capturing their quicksilver moods and the everyday occurrences around them. Up until 1914 Pilley's diaries are full of similar observations and it was not until she started mountaineering that Pilley spotted a new function and purpose for her diaries, using them, as I discuss in Chapter 3, to start to "scrawl" thoughts and impressions which she later transformed into her descriptive mountaineering memoir, Climbing Days. Pilley noted the importance of impressionistic notes in capturing moods and memories that might otherwise be lost, observing to herself the importance of making timely and frequent recordings in her diary. Pilley was also aware of nuances which might affect her diary writing, such as being tired, which would then affect the detail of the recollection. The crafting and writing of Climbing

³ Inside the front cover of each of Pilley's diaries from 1912 onwards there is an inscription to the effect that these diaries are private.

Days enabled her to bring to fruition the learned tools of her writer's trade, in the process drawing on her diaries to reflect anew on her developing mountaineering philosophy. I discuss more extensively in Chapter 3 how she uses her diaries as a form of writing apprenticeship to teach herself a writer's craft, developing the often raw and impassioned narrative in her diary into mature reflection and description.

In On Diary, Léjeune considers his readings and analysis of Anne Frank's diaries, discussing the excitement he feels when he reads diary entries which have been written in what he perceives to be a "natural voice" (131). He later qualifies this, suggesting that a view of the diary as an entirely natural act – what he calls "writing on the first try" (224) – is naïve. He suggests that "no matter how rapid and invisible it is, all writing is the product of an elaboration of some kind" (224). Léjeune quotes the diary practice of Virginia Woolf, noting that she constantly reflected upon and reviewed both the act of writing and the subsequent product. From her early 20s, Pilley's diary practice resonates with this aspect of Woolf's, using her diary as the means through which she transmits reflection on and impressions of diverse subjects including feminism, mountaineering, friendship and marriage, at the same time using her diary to hone her writing craft.

Many entries in Dorothy Pilley's diaries are written in the form of letters, as shown in the following example, where I quote an extract from a much longer diary entry dated Friday 26 July 1918. The entry is recorded in the form of a letter to a close friend of hers, Lewin, who exasperated Pilley with his uncompromising views on women's suffrage. In the extract, Pilley gives her response to one of his published pamphlets. Pilley's letter bears the hallmarks of a carefully crafted response:

To Lewin on his unbalanced attack on the suffragettes.

And now, as to the book. *I wrote a criticism in my first wrath, which is now destroyed, so I am faced by a more mature opinion, [my emphasis]* but I am so mentally tired that I am afraid I can achieve nothing logically. First I think you loose [sic] all force by being so sweepingly annihilating. To make out your opponent entirely in the wrong is to weaken your case, however good. Secondly, not only have you confused cause and effect, in the matter of the demand for the vote, but you have entirely misconceived what the vote represents to the thoughtful educated woman. I can only surmise that you place her intellect on a lower plane than ever I imagined. (Pilley Diary, 26 July 1918)

Léjeune writes in On Diary that diaries are formed from what he calls an act of:

genesis. Working on paper, we erase words, change terms, add something forgotten [...] or perhaps two minutes or an hour later one returns to what one has written, but now with a reader's eye [...] diaries are written at two different times – initial, rapid notes made in some kind of medium, and then a clear copy or newer development on the (final?) medium. (225)

There is evidence in Pilley's letter to Lewin that this letter has gone through a period of careful genesis and that the version we see in the diaries is not a "natural" one but highly polished, having been initially and carefully drafted. This brings me to the point of legacy.

Although Pilley destroyed some private papers after Richards' death, she retained an extensive collection of personal material having been, as Richard Luckett observes, in his introduction to Selected Letters of I.A. Richards, "intensely retentive, a compulsive hoarder" (10). She left instructions that on her death, her diaries and Richards' papers were to be retained in an archive, leaving a substantial bequest to Magdalene College for its maintenance, thereby creating a repository for future biographers and inviting a future readership. Pilley's directive suggests that she may have written her diaries carefully and deliberately for the benefit of an intended readership, perhaps from the late 1920s onwards, a period which coincides with her marriage to Richards and his probable growing influence on her private and public writing from that point onwards. This poses questions about the extent of self-censorship she perhaps imposed from this period onwards on her diary writing. During conversations I held with Richard Luckett in the summer of 2008, he made no secret of his belief that Pilley had hoped that scholars would be interested in the archive, not so much for her contributions to women's mountaineering but because of the legacy she hoped that her husband would leave to the world of literary criticism, which, according to Luckett, mattered more to her than the considerable inheritance she had bequeathed to women's mountaineering.

"The Inventor": I A Richards

In his article about the work and legacy of Ivor Armstrong Richards titled "Inventor", Richard Luckett writes about Richards' "polythematic" work, noting that his work encompassed "linguistic, aesthetic and critical theory" (10). Given his development of a form of literary appreciation simplified here as close reading, an approach which posits

that any biographic knowledge of writers should not interfere with a close, interpretative reading of a text, it appears highly unlikely that Richards would have any critical or personal interest in his wife's diary writing. Lockett writes of Richards' anger when his personal friend, associate and biographer, John Paul Russo, published an essay on Richards' mountaineering which, Richards felt, contained an "excessively personal element" (10). In an interview with Richards conducted by Bruce Ambler Boucher and John Paul Russo in 1968 towards the end of Richards' tenure at Harvard, Richards declared himself a "linguistic engineer" (Boucher 259), "looking for new and better ways of making many more capable and useful people" (263) by instilling in them a heightened awareness of the importance of language and effective communication.

I noted earlier that there are several instances where Dorothy Pilley's diaries demonstrate practice of the craft of writing, evidencing linguistic awareness, literary style and technique. From 1923 onwards there exists (albeit infrequently) another voice and presence in her diaries – that of Richards – in the form of entries made in his spidery, distinctive handwriting. Given Richards' eschewing of biography as a tool of literary criticism, this is startling, until one reads "Inventor," which places Richards in his scholarly context as a polymath "fascinated by the history of words" and linguistics (10). Is this intervention in his future wife's diaries then, a great linguistic experiment on his part with the medium of the diary? I suggest here that one can, perhaps, see a link in theoretical terms between Richards' concept of "linguistic engineering" and Léjeune's development of a "genetic" approach to understanding the genesis of a diary – both see the importance of the role that language plays in construing meaning but where they diverge is on the point of history. Léjeune argues for the necessity of placing diaries within their specific historical and cultural context – as in his studies of the diaries of young girls in nineteenth century France – but Richards, as he acknowledged himself in his interview to Boucher, "couldn't bear history" (256).

I would like to be able to declare that Richards' involvement in his wife's diaries was, in fact, a grand linguistic experiment, but I do not know this for sure. The following diary entries are from Pilley's 1943 diary when the Richards' were living in Massachusetts and were written during a period when she was ill. They are in Richards' hand-writing. He writes on Sunday 7 March 1943:

(Boston). D stayed in bed off and on most of the day – sunny and bright. Kept hoping we'd get seats for Mme Chiary at Wellesley but no good. Did a lot of letter writing, Interesting ms from William Jones on childhood memories, witty views on education from the Master, finished

‘Wuthering Heights’ and afraid it was a waste of time. Mechanical doings throughout. Neither well conceived nor executed. Hard to guess how it achieved its fame?

Monday 8 March.

D picking up but faint and further stayed in bed.

(Pilley Diary, 7 and 8 March 1943)

These entries depict Richards’ voice as well as his hand. The comment on the “mechanical doings” of Wuthering Heights authenticates Richards’ identity, evidencing his critical eye. When I discussed these entries in a conversation with Richard Lockett in 2008 he suggested that “Richards probably wrote what Dorothea told him to”, leading me to conclude that the ingrained discipline of diary writing from childhood led her to ask a third party to make these entries on her behalf whilst she was ill. The evidence of his presence in Pilley’s diaries is also a declaration that her claims for their privacy were elastic – further proof, perhaps that she was planning and writing her diaries as a form of legacy. The evidence of a literary partnership in Pilley’s diaries is additionally supports the methodology of this thesis, the viewing of the Richards’ papers enabling light to be shown on not just a close mountaineering partnership but upon an alliance which illustrates some of the challenges in verifying the identity of the life-writer.

“Where life and literature meet”

I conclude the first half of this chapter by considering Léjeune’s statement in On Diary that “the diary is the point where life and literature meet” (2). For Dorothy Pilley this was resoundingly true. In marrying Richards she connected her life-writing practice to one of the foremost literary critics of the middle of the twentieth century. It is supremely ironic that for Richards, diaries or any other form of biography were seen as unnecessary material which had the potential to sully a reader’s response to a work of literature. However, despite his deep anathema towards biography there is one point of common ground between him and Léjeune – in intervening in his wife’s life-writing practice he had, unwittingly or wittingly, made himself a practitioner of life-writing. In Pilley’s diary entry for 23 February 1924, there is a suggestion that they might think about working on a diary together, a “diary for reminiscences”, but there is no further reference to this in her 1924 diary, or any evidence that they did embark on such a project together. If this suggestion was true, it does not suggest a portrait of someone

who robustly repudiated biography. If Richards' presence in his wife's diaries is evidence that Richards may have moderated his views on biography, there is also evidence to the contrary which suggests that Richards vigorously sustained an active antipathy to the genre.⁴ In 1974, the Richards' moved from Cambridge in Massachusetts back to Cambridge in England and Richards gave a series of lectures there later that year. In one of these lectures, according to Russo, Richards dismissed biography and biographers as engaging in nothing better than "gossiping" about authors and reinforced his anti-biographist stance by saying that if he found "half of Shakespeare's correspondence" (667) he would burn it.

During their lives the Richards' had travelled and sojourned extensively in China, Japan, Europe and America, gathering papers and objects and packing these each time they moved. The Richards' move back to Cambridge in England necessitated the removal of substantial boxes of personal correspondence that could not have gone unnoticed by Richards and so it is difficult to believe that he by this time was unaware of his wife's tendency to hoard personal papers such as letters, diaries, photographs which as a whole constituted a considerable resource for a biographer. Moreover, by the mid 1970s, Russo had started researching his biography on Richards with his blessing – additional evidence that Richards was moderating his views on biography. Richards hoped, Luckett writes in "Inventor", that Russo's work would, in Luckett's words, be an "intellectual biography" of his thought (10), an enterprise, as Luckett suggests, which "is only tolerable or indeed practicable as autobiography" (10).

The second half of this chapter moves from a consideration of chosen life-writing scholarship to a discussion of selected literature on the aesthetic, showing how the progression of what I term the alpine aesthetic came to be represented by a figure that was to become gradually more present on the hills and mountains of Europe from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards – the woman mountaineer.

Part 2: Developments in nineteenth-century mountain aesthetics

The body of literature pertaining to mountains and mountaineering is vast and I am necessarily selective in the choice of material. I commence with a brief discussion of the fiction of Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley and the travel writing of Mary Wollstonecraft and show how their writings can be located to an alternative feminine aesthetic. I move on to discuss Dorothy Wordsworth's journal writings of the hills and

⁴ Richards could not have been oblivious to the fact that Russo would use the personal reminiscences in his biography.

mountains of the Lake District which, I suggest, anticipate late twentieth-century feminist eco-feminist writings. I locate Dorothy Wordsworth's journals briefly alongside the novels of Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley, showing how they appropriated aspects of the sublime to inform their own development of a feminine alpine aesthetic, aiming to show the development of an alternative mode of representation in selected women's fiction and non-fiction writing during the nineteenth century. I briefly discuss the role of key writers who significantly contributed to the discourses on mountaineering and mountains in the nineteenth century such as John Ruskin, Leslie Stephen and Edward Whymper, showing how by the late nineteenth century their mountain writings had moved the "spotlight more directly on the person, as he [sic] lives and moves and is changed by mountains" (Noyce 10), signposting a new approach to the writing of mountains which foregrounded the experience of the individual. I will argue that in inscribing the personal into mountaineering literature they helped open doors to women writers who, through an already established tradition of memoir, journal and letter writing – as theorised by Helen Wilcox, Helen Buss and Felicity Nussbaum – were well placed to position "the feminine stamp" in mountaineering literature. I will also refer towards the end of this chapter to Peter Bayers' and Julie Rak's critiques of mountaineering, masculinity and Empire in order to situate Stephen's, Whymper's and Ruskin's work within the larger cultural context in which Victorian mountaineering is located. By the end of this chapter I will have set the context for Chapter 2 which will discuss how the alternative feminine aesthetic shapes and informs the "feminine stamp" in nineteenth-century women's mountaineering.

Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft: The sublime as an influence on women's literary and travel writings

The growth of alpine tourism and mountaineering as the nineteenth century progressed was stimulated by a fascination with alpine vistas which capitalised on the emotive power of landscape – in particular raw, untamed nature – and people's belief in a supernatural and/or Divine intervention. Edmund Burke's formulation of the sublime in his 1759 text A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, is particularly important to this thesis as there is evidence in women's mountaineering literature that his narrative on the sublime does influence and inform

their descriptions of mountain landscapes. In Part 3 Section XXVII Burke set out his views on beauty, contrasting it to a quality which he called the sublime, or the ability of objects and landscapes to inspire awe, fear and terror in people, paving the way for women mountaineers to appropriate his discourse for their own use. He suggested that:

Sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth and polished; the great, rugged and negligent [...] beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive. They are indeed ideas of a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure. (237-238)

Burke further argued that exposure to the sublime was necessary and healthy, suggesting in Part 4, Section VII, sub-titled “Exercise Necessary for the finer organs”, that it cleared “the parts [...] of a dangerous and troublesome incumbrance [sic] capable of producing delight, not pleasure, a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquillity tinged with terror; which as it belongs to self-preservation is one of the strongest of all the passions” (257).⁵ Alpine landscapes, for Burke, exemplified the qualities of the sublime. He had previously declared in Part 2, Section VII, subtitled “Vastness”, that “greatness” was necessary for the creation of sublime emotions, arguing that greatness “is either in length, height, or depth. Of these the length strikes least; an hundred yards of even ground will never work such an effect as a tower an hundred yards high, or a rock or mountain of that altitude” (127). In her 1922 memoir, *Mountain Madness*, Helen Hamilton appropriates elements of Burke’s narrative on the sublime as follows:

On I went – straight to the foot of that monstrous mass of ice. A stream of slate-coloured water was gushing out of a hole. Was that the entrance to some mysterious ice-cavern haunted by malignant spirits, who hurl disaster, sudden and final, on those sacrilegious ones who penetrate their fastnesses? (4-5)

In the opening page of *Climbing Days*, Dorothy Pilley writes that her memories of reading a novel as a schoolgirl left impressions of: “abodes of ice-princesses from which ordinary mortals are dragged back by the hair” (1). Copied inside the front page of her 1937 diary is a stanza from Byron’s early nineteenth-century autobiographical narrative poem *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, which evidences the impact on her of

⁵ The mountaineers Elizabeth Le Blond and Helen Hamilton initially travelled to the Alps for health reasons.

Byron's homily on the relationship between men, landscape and nature inspired by his own travels in the Alps. The stanza contains many references to the sublime:

Above me are the Alps/The palaces of nature, whose vast walls/Have
pinnacles in clouds their snowy scalps/And throned Eternity in ice
halls/Of cold sublimity, where focus and falls/The avalanche – the
Thunderbolt of snow!/All that expands the spirit yet appals/Gather
around these summits, as to show/How Earth may pierce to Heaven
yet/Leave vain man below. (Pilley Diary, 1937)

The Gothic novel took Burke's exposition of the sublime into literary form, exploring a fascination with fantastical, supernatural phenomena. Women novelists became significant appropriators of the sublime in their Gothic fiction. I refer briefly here to their work in order to identify specific examples of the emergence of an alternative feminine aesthetic. In Women Travel Writers and The Language of Aesthetics 1716-1818, Elizabeth A Bohls examines the Gothic fiction of Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley, exploring their fascination with the supernatural and the significance of their reclamation of the sublime in order "to frame a meditation on gender, knowledge and power" (2) as opposed to a discourse which brutalises nature. Bohls writes that at a point when the philosophical discourse of the sublime was being harnessed to explain the relationship between "beauty, landscape, Nature and art" (3), women writers saw opportunities to challenge the predominance of the sublime as a model for landscape aesthetics. Bohls writes that Radcliffe, Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft:

certainly aspired to share in aesthetics' authority and prestige, but they also challenged its most basic assumptions [...] in those genres more accessible to women; travel writing and the novel in a period when writing and publishing posed particular difficulties for women. (3)

Ann Colley also argues in recent scholarship that women frequently subverted the sublime, using humour, satire and/or common sense to "sink" the sublime (32-38) as I will later argue in my discussion of Dorothy Wordsworth's journals. What Colley refers to as the "sinking" of the sublime is also theorised differently by Patrick D. Murphy in scholarship which argues that writing by feminist ecologists such as Vandana Shiva, Mary Heather MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre re-define the sublime.

The perceived accessibility of fiction and travel-writing, Bohls argues, "particularly attracted women writers" as they were genres which were thought to occupy a safe but "gray area between the high and the middlebrow" (5). Anne K.

Mellor also considers the appropriation of the sublime by Radcliffe and Shelley, suggesting that unlike William Wordsworth who claimed to “understand and therefore speak for” the natural world (187), women writers saw “Mother Nature as a friend and co-worker, one with needs of her own, a potentially powerful ally with whom we must co-operate.” (187)

Mellor argues that women Gothic novelists chose to locate their terrors “not in nature but rather indoors” (188). Because, she argues, “indoors” – buildings such as castles and monasteries – represents “the evil that violent, predatory men do to vulnerable women [...] Radcliffe leaves open the possibility that her persecuted heroines can find solace in nature – and so they do” (188). In Frankenstein, Mellor suggests that Mary Shelley provides another example of the woman novelist portraying Nature as a “friend and co-worker” (187) by showing that when the monster is in natural surroundings it has a desire for knowledge and humanity, demonstrating that Nature and mountains are seen to have considerable restorative powers. When Frankenstein is recovering from his illness after his monster has fled he experiences the “delightful sensations” (67) of nature and mountains. “Dear mountains! My own beautiful lake! How do you welcome your wanderer? Your summits are clear; the sky and lake are blue and placid” (72). This view of a Nature which has restorative, healing properties acted as an initial stimulus for the mountaineering of Helen Hamilton and Elizabeth Le Blond, both of whom, as I have previously noted, travelled to the mountains initially for health reasons.

In her research into Mary Wollstonecraft’s travel writing, in particular, Wollstonecraft’s published letters on her short stay in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, Karen Lawrence argues that Wollstonecraft appropriates the sublime in a different way to Radcliffe and Shelley by intellectualising it. In Wollstonecraft’s Letters, Lawrence argues that “one can see an attempt both to ‘toughen’ the notions of beauty purveyed by Burke and to recoup for a female writer the province of the sublime” (93). Wollstonecraft does this, Lawrence suggests, by representing the travelling woman (herself) as having her “capacities expanded and enlarged” through the dual transforming acts of travel and observation of “the beautiful” (93). Wollstonecraft’s concept of a woman having her mental and physical horizons developed by nature resonates throughout women’s mountaineering life-writings and provides an important *raison d’être* for women’s mountaineering. For example, as Elizabeth Le Blond remarks in Day In Day Out, to which I return later in this chapter, mountaineering shocks her out of a life bound by convention. Dorothy Pilley also writes about the

capacity of mountaineering to surprise and stretch the individual in the opening pages of Climbing Days, in a description for which she appropriates elements of the sublime. In describing her first visit to the mountains of North Wales she captures the hard, “awful” quality of the mountains:

The Aberglaslyn Pass seemed the limiting possibility of awful grandeur. Sheer rock walls were edged with sentinel trees in dark silhouette against the sky [...] I was distraught by the feelings that arose [...] nothing in the world seemed to matter except my desperate attempts to discover what its significance could be. (2)

Pilley also writes how her physical “capacities” are stretched by “a stupendous ascent of Snowdon” (2). It was an earlier Dorothy, however, who showed the extent to which mountainous landscapes could stretch a woman’s capacities.

Dorothy Wordsworth’s journals and the feminine mountain aesthetic

Felicity Nussbaum writes that women have been using forms of life-writing such as “diaries and journals to offer a private space for experimentation, revision and resistance to the prevailing [gendered] notions of identity” (xxi) since the sixteenth century, drawing on an existing women’s literary tradition of memoir, meditative prose and poetry, to re-write their lives in ways which, according to Olga Kenyon “not just order time differently but offer new ways of holding and representing ‘I’” (18).

Through her journal and letter writings, Dorothy Wordsworth differently inscribes the mountain landscape of the Lake District, providing an early example of the “feminine stamp” in mountaineering literature. She also illustrates Karen Lawrence’s notion of a woman who has her faculties expanded by the landscape around her.

During his years of residence in Grasmere and Rydal Water and almost on a daily basis, William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy, often accompanied by the tireless Coleridge, walked the hills, mountains and valleys for travel, work and pleasure. More frequently represented as a manager and keeper of the cult of domesticity in the Wordsworths’ various households as, for example, in Kurt Heinzelman’s research (52-76), I focus here on how Dorothy’s journal-writing inscribes her relationship to the mountains of the English Lakes and represents her as a mountain woman. Through the pages of her journals and letters, Dorothy emerges as a woman with tremendous physical energies and a love for sustained mountain walking on the highest and steepest landscapes of the Lakes. Her journals and letters are important in this thesis for two

main reasons: first, she offers an alternative aesthetic rendering of mountain landscapes by wresting mountain landscapes away from subliminal evocations. She portrays the mountains of the Lakes as a harsh, unforgiving backdrop to the lives of ordinary, working people who strive to eke out a subsistence living in which deprivation, illness and death are regular, everyday occurrences. Instead of her brother's ruddy, hale characters such as the peasant Michael and the more obscure Lucy, Dorothy's people are vagrants, beggars, starving children and exhausted women. Second, her journals elevate her from her identity as Wordsworth's sister to a strong, indefatigable mountaineer who was comfortable in the mountains in all conditions, understood the unforgiving nature of the landscapes in which she lived and possessed considerable ability to recall them in picturesque prose. Dorothy's letters and journals are rich with evocative descriptions of the Lakeland landscape as can be illustrated here by one quotation from a journal entry dating 10 October, 1800: "There was a most lovely combination at the head of the vale of the yellow autumnal hills wrapped in sunshine, and overhung with partial mists, the green and yellow trees, and the distant snow-topped mountains" (Trickett 57).

At a time when walking was a fundamental and necessary means of travel between communities, Dorothy Wordsworth thought nothing of walking across high mountain ranges. In a letter written to Mrs John Marshall between 10-12 September 1800, reproduced in Alan Hill's collection of her letters she writes: "We are going there [Ullswater] next Wednesday and shall probably stay till the Sunday after. We intend walking over the mountains" (Hill, *The Letters* 46). In addition to pointing out the beneficial effects of the landscape, her writing reveals the harsh realities of mountain life for women as she writes in her journal on 14 May 1800: "A young woman begged at the door – she had come from Manchester on Sunday morn, with two shillings and a slip of paper which she supposed a Bank note – it was a cheat" (Trickett 19). On Sunday, 18 May 1800 she observes: "A little girl from Coniston came to beg. She had lain out all night – her step-mother had turned her out of doors" (Trickett 21). On 10 October 1800 she notes that: "The Cockermouth traveller came with thread, hardware, mustard, etc. She is very healthy; has travelled over the mountains these thirty years. She does not mind the storms if she can keep her goods dry" (Trickett 57).

Hill's edition of Dorothy's letters includes a letter written to Mrs John Marshall on 19 September 1807 describing a tour to Scotland in 1803 in which Dorothy shows her relish of elevated scenes shown from a mountain top. Her language in this letter

borrowed from the sublime whilst at the same time containing implicit references to the way in which walking and viewing the landscape can expand one's faculties:

We did not ascend Ben Lomond; but I should have liked to have done it very much; for though it is not particularly a pleasure to me to see those places with which I am familiar below me reduced as in a map, I think there is no sensation more elevating to the heart and the imagination than what we take in, in viewing distant mountains, plains, hills, vallies [sic] towns and seas from some superior eminence (Hill, The Letters 85).

In the first stanza of an 1816 poem entitled "To ----- on her First Ascent to the Summit Helvellyn", perceived by Elizabeth A. Fay as a poem which sees the "coming together of Nature's Power and her human communicant" (76), and which could conceivably have been written for his sister, William Wordsworth imagines the sensations of a girl as she stands on the summit:

Inmate of a mountain dwelling,
Thou hast clomb aloft, and gazed
From the watch-towers of Helvellyn;
Awed, delighted, and amazed! (qtd. in Fay, 76)

In the poet's later urging to the girl: "Maiden! Now take flight; inherit/Alps or Andes – they are thine!" (76) Wordsworth appears to borrow from the Gothic novelists of the era in suggesting the transformative relationship between Nature and women, bringing this poem closer to Dorothy's own experience of the "elevating sensation" she feels on top of mountains which she refers to in her previously quoted letter to Mrs Marshall on 19 September.

On 2 October 1818, Dorothy writes in a letter to William Johnson of a long walk she has undertaken with a friend, demonstrating her stamina and hardiness: "I must tell you of a feat that she [Miss Barker] and I performed on Weds. 7th of this month [...] Miss Barker proposed that [...] she and I should go to Seathwaite". The women do not travel alone for they take a shepherd as guide and a "man to carry our provisions", walking and climbing in relative comfort. She ends the letter in hope that this description "will awaken in you a desire to spend a long holiday among the mountains and explore their recesses" (Hill, The Letters 155-156).

In 1825, aged 54, Dorothy was still climbing and walking the mountains with comparative ease. Hill's edition of letters includes the following letter in which she celebrates her ability to not just walk the mountains comfortably but moreover, to act as a guide:

To Robert Jones (from Rydal Mount) 7 October 1825.

Will you trust yourself again to my guidance to the top of one of our mountains? Or did I give you too much of it the last time? For myself – and I am thankful for the blessing – I can walk as well as when but 20 years old, and can climb the hills better than in those days. The pure air of high places seems to restore all my youthful feelings (Hill, The Letters 169).

In the same letter, Dorothy assures Robert Jones that her “brother has promised me [...] that he will take me the round of Snowdon next summer”. The “round of Snowdon” (now known as the Snowdon Horseshoe) which Dorothy blithely refers to here is a strenuous, technical mountain walk, necessitating a very good head for heights in places and some skill in moving and ascending steep rock. This accomplishment particularly demonstrates her physical prowess and skill in the mountains, showing that she possessed a considerable aptitude for mountaineering. For this reason I place Dorothy Wordsworth in this thesis as a woman who helped to write and shape the the “feminine stamp” in mountaineering at a time when few women were active in the mountains as walkers and mountaineers.

The mountaineering writing of John Tyndall, Leslie Stephen, John Ruskin and Edward Whymper

I do not intend in this section to offer a detailed cultural history of the transformation of the Alps, which has been substantively written by cultural mountain historians such as Jim Ring, Fergus Fleming, Andrew Beattie, Francis Keenlyside, Simon Thompson and others and also researched in detail in recent unpublished doctoral research by Darren Bevin. I will, however, outline some of the key points in these narratives in order to highlight some of the major transformations which occurred in the Alps from the middle of the nineteenth century, in particular the metamorphosis of the Alps into what Leslie Stephen calls – in the title of his book – the Playground of Europe. Ring *et al* write extensively of the development of the Alps from landscapes which Stephen writes as places where those in need of “gentle and soothing influence” (“A Bye-Day” 107) could quietly wander, into centres of activity for mountaineering and winter sports inhabited

by what Stephen referred to as growing numbers of “Cook’s tourists”, intent on “doing Europe against time” (“Baths of Catalina” 128).

Andrew Beattie suggests that by 1785 “there were three inns in Chamonix catering for the fifteen hundred tourists who arrived annually; souvenirs on offer [...] included jars of locally produced honey, and crystals” (11). This proliferation of inns in a previously small, poor and obscure alpine village was a precursor to similar tourist-related growth in other alpine villages such as Zermatt. James Buzard writes that the “institutionalisation” (28) of mountain communities by roads, railway lines, inns and hotels in the Zermatt region in turn contributed to the “growing number of Alpine enthusiasts in the nineteenth century” (33-34). William Wordsworth, who translated his personal experience of alpine tours into poems such as “Descriptive Sketches” (a poem about his Swiss tour of 1791), was quick, according to James Buzard, to set himself at a distance from the ingress of these signs of modernism into his beloved alpine regions, preferring to promote “an ideal of sincere, independent travel against the degraded tourism [...] The memory of his own youthful rambles in the Alps provided him with a positive image to contrast with the tourists” (29). Buzard suggests that Wordsworth makes a distinction between “‘true’ travelling” (34) and tourism. The latter placed a greater value on “true” travellers who “travel every step of the way – that is why walking and climbing are particularly imbued with the travelling spirit – so that everything they pass is fully a ‘place to them’, for they are alive to the stimuli offered to their finely-tuned sensibilities in every location” (34). Mountaineering, suggests Buzard, was greatly suited to this distinction because “it necessitated the slowest pace and attention to detail” (34). This positioning of the Alps as a landscape which provides stimulus to one’s physical and mental capacities is reminiscent of Karen Lawrence’s discussion of Mary Wollstonecraft’s view of the purpose of travel. This is also a theme in the alpine travel writing of Mrs Freshfield and Mrs Cole, to which I return in the next chapter.

Judith Flanders has written that by the middle of the nineteenth century, domestic and international tourism received a considerable boost from visitors who had visited the Great Exhibition of 1851. The Exhibition, she writes, brought the technological wonders of the world to an audience thirsty for adventure, innovation, travel and personal consumption. Exhibits such as James Wyld’s “Great Globe of the World” gave curious Victorians an opportunity to enter a giant plaster-of-paris model of the world, which contained maps and other travel ephemera, designed to whet their appetite for travel (3-41). This curiosity and hunger for knowledge about the wider

world was later to be tapped into with considerable commercial success by the Victorian mountaineer and showman, Albert Smith. Flanders also writes that increasing numbers of leisured and curious travellers, artists, writers, Grand Tourers and Leslie Stephen's despised "Cook's tourists" swelled the numbers of visitors to the Alps from the middle of the nineteenth century, creating a growth in alpine tourism and a development of facilities to meet their needs (419-465). Brian Dolan suggests that many men who embarked on the Grand Tour were initially "preoccupied with conquest, connoisseurship and domestication of the wild" and proposes that the Grand Tour was one of the important seeds which helped to establish the sport of mountaineering (11). Ann Colley also argues that the increase of tourism connected with the Grand Tour and the growing vogue for travel among the middle classes helped popularise mountaineering and erode the mystique and grandeur of the sublime (16-22). The European Alps thus – as Dolan, Hibbert, Buzard, Keenlyside, Clark, Beattie, Fleming, Macfarlane and Colley have written – became a fashionable stopping off point for young men eager to cut their teeth on the mountains and peaks and to acquire a piece of alpine cultural capital. Historians are also in accord that from about 1750 onwards there were three imperatives which informed exploration of the Alps – scientific study, the conquering of summits and mountaineering for pleasure. From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, women increasingly took the hills to walk and mountaineer, thus challenging, as Ann Colley writes, the "assumption that women climbers were routinely excluded" (102) from what many commentators have assumed was a "male-centred sport based upon power and privilege" (103).

In discussing the development of the "Golden Age" of mountaineering in the middle of the nineteenth century in their article for the centenary edition of the Alpine Journal, Dangar and Blakeney write that personal enjoyment and science came together to further progress in mountaineering (16-17). In their discussion of the writing of John Tyndall and Leslie Stephen, they argue that Tyndall's and Stephen's writing represented a new way of writing about mountains through the personal narrative as opposed to the scientific or theological treatise. For example, John Tyndall's book The Glacier of the Alps and Mountaineering in 1861, is a lively and descriptive personal account of his glacier exploration and mountain climbing. In a chapter entitled "Ascent of the Weisshorn", he writes of his feelings when attaining the summit. In the following passage we see an acknowledgement of the Glory of Nature, perhaps unusual for a fervent agnostic. "The delight and exultation experienced were not those of Reason or Knowledge but of BEING: I was part of it and it of me, and in the transcendent glory of

nature I entirely forgot myself as man” (239-240). Whilst Tyndall’s narrative evokes the sublime, it also centres his experience.

Leslie Stephen was a significant figure in Victorian mountaineering, writ large in the landscape of mountaineering literature in the period. A pen-picture of him by his daughter Virginia Woolf in her autobiographical fragment “Reminiscences”, a memoir of her childhood in the mixed Duckworth/Stephen household, describes him as a still formidable figure physically but past his mountaineering prime. He had, she writes, “much of the stuff of a Hebrew prophet; something of the amazing vigour of his youth remained to him, but he no longer spent his strength in climbing mountains” (40).⁶ As an enthusiastic mountaineer, Stephen had an uncompromising view of the Alps, viewing mountains as landscapes which were to be explored and treated with reverence and respect. Along with John Ruskin, Stephen deplored the depredating effects of tourism on alpine landscapes with the exception of railways, the engineering of which he admired, writing in “A Bye-Day in the Alps” that “I do not quite share Mr Ruskin’s hatred for the railways which have disturbed many mountain solitudes” (110). Michael Ward has positioned Stephen as the senior mountaineering aesthete of the Victorian period, placing him as a writer and mountaineer who, “against the background of intellectual enquiry which characterised the early Alpine writers”, played a key role in moving mountaineering literature away from subliminal or scientific writing to the personal, experiential narrative (Ward 17).

Whilst personal accounts had, as Nussbaum has argued, long been appropriated by women writers, Sue E. Coffman has suggested that men only turned to this form because of changes in “human perspective” from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards which in turn influenced developments “in philosophy, theology and science” (11). Such a shift, I suggest, arguably legitimised men’s use of the personal narrative, taking it out of the private domain of the diary or journal and putting it into the public sphere. When one examines mountaineering literature in the last twenty years it is possible to see many more instances of the personal narrative from male writers – from Joe Simpson’s acclaimed Touching the Void to Jim Curran’s half humorous, half painful autobiographical narrative The Middle-Aged Mountaineer.

In Praeterita, his autobiographical collection of writing published initially in a set of papers or articles between 1885 and 1889, John Ruskin found that in writing about mountains, he had hit on a way not only to keep in abeyance a tendency towards

⁶ “Reminiscences” borrows in style from Woolf’s father’s The Mausoleum Book in that it is a set of recollections about her childhood, in particular her sister Vanessa, and addressed to her nephew Julian, Vanessa Bell’s son.

depression – which at times threatened to tip him into a form of insanity and from which he was increasingly suffering by the 1880s – but on a form of writing which enabled him to develop the personal narrative alongside his philosophy of the aesthetic. Darren Bevin has written extensively in an unpublished thesis of John Ruskin’s role in developing a compelling rhetoric of alpine appreciation. I do not seek to replicate Bevin’s research here but simply to reinforce the importance of Ruskin in developing ways of writing about – and appreciating – mountains. In a chapter in *Praeterita* called “Schaffhausen and Milan”, Ruskin wrote of his memories of a journey undertaken to Switzerland with his parents in 1824 when he was five years old. Their comparative wealth enabled them to travel in comfort in a commissioned carriage with horses and in this chapter, the adult Ruskin recalls his first impressions of the mountains from the windows of the carriage:

Suddenly – behold – beyond! There was no thought in any of us for a moment of their being clouds. They were clear as crystal, sharp on the pure horizon sky [...] Infinitely beyond all that we had ever thought or dreamed - the seen walls of lost Eden could not have been more beautiful to us; not more awful, round heaven, the walls of sacred Death [...] for me, the Alps and their people were alike beautiful in their snow, and their humanity; and I wanted, neither for them nor myself, sight of any thrones in heaven but the rocks, or of any spirits in heaven but the clouds. (103-104)

Ruskin did not just reserve his praise for mountains. In a chapter called “Simplon”, Ruskin wrote of his enthusiasm for the Simplon Pass, a high-level mountain road across the Alps, built by Napoleon as a bridge from France into Italy. For an essay titled “L’Hotel du Mont Blanc”, Ruskin drew from his diaries, bringing together many separate observations of the Chamouni [sic] area, undertaken from the safety of the valley floor or from walks taken on the alpine outliers – the icy, remote and lofty peaks were not for him. In a later essay called “The Grande Chartreuse”, a reflective essay about a visit to Chamonix in 1845, he tried to theorise the greater role of mountains in “purifying” the hearts of men:

Whatever might be my common faults or weaknesses, they were rebuked among the hills; and the only days I can look back to as, according to the powers given me, rightly or wisely in entirety spent, have been in sight of Mont Blanc, Monte Rosa or the Jungfrau. When I was most strongly under this influence, I tried to trace [...] the power of mountains in

solemnizing the thoughts and purifying the hearts of the greatest nations of antiquity and the greatest teachers of Christian faith. (440)

Ruskin's writings initially drew the admiration of Leslie Stephen, with whom he shared an appreciation of not just alpine scenery but fine engineering – for example, the construction of the Simplon mountain pass which Stephen describes in “A Bye-Day in the Alps” (110). The two men diverged, however, when Stephen discovered he preferred mountaineering to reading Ruskin's “ecstasies” about them. As Stephen wrote in his 1902 essay entitled “In Praise of Walking”:

I hoped to share Ruskin's ecstasies in a reverent worship of Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn. The influence of any cult, however, depends on the character of the worshipper, and I fear that in this case the charm operated rather perversely. It stimulated a passion for climbing which absorbed my energies and distracted me from the prophet's loftier teachings. (269)

In this essay, Leslie Stephen writes of finding a peace in mountain walking. “It is primitive and simple; it brings us into contact with mother earth and unsophisticated nature; it requires no extraneous excitement. It is fit even for poets and philosophers” (254-255). For Stephen, the real purpose in mountaineering, as he explained in “A Bye-Day in the Alps”, lay in its ability to help keep “the intellectual valves properly screwed down” (109) through the physical activity of the “regular monotonous rise and fall of a pair of feet in hob-nailed boots forcing me upwards through a perpendicular height of about 1,500 feet in an hour” (109). The actual physical experience of mountaineering, in Stephen's view far exceeded Ruskin's “poetical associations, in language which, to a severe taste, is perhaps a trifle too fine” (“The Regrets of a Mountaineer” 219).

Dorothy Pilley was later to explore in detail through the medium of her diaries what mountaineering meant to her, illustrating a significant development in mountaineering philosophy from that held by Stephen's. If mountaineering for Stephen was a way of keeping the intellect engaged, for Pilley, her forebears and contemporaries it came to signify something much more fundamental, a theme to which I return throughout the thesis.

What Stephen and Ruskin retained in common, however, was a shared misgiving about the growing commercialisation of the Alps from the middle of the nineteenth century. Both reacted with horror to the efforts of a contemporary of theirs, Albert Smith, to popularise the Alps. Smith, a writer, publisher, enthusiastic self-publicist and one of the inaugural members of the Alpine Club, successfully summited

Mont Blanc in 1851 with a considerable entourage of porters, guides, victuals and baggage. Seven months after his return to London, Smith opened a show in Piccadilly called “The Ascent of Mont Blanc”, a suitably dramatic and lavishly illustrated account of his summit which met with high popular acclaim despite the widespread disdain shown by other members of the mountaineering fraternity at this blatant popularising of the Alps. Darren Bevin has suggested that by the time Smith closed his show in 1858, a total of two thousand performances had netted him over £30,000, another example – following that of Marie Paradis – of successful commercial enterprise with a mountaineering theme.

The Alpine Club

The establishment of the Alpine Club in 1857 represents, for the purpose of this thesis, the essence of patriarchal discourse in nineteenth-century mountaineering. The club symbolises many of the characteristics of the pursuit of mountaineering which women mountaineers were to challenge in developing (to borrow again from Elaine Showalter’s well known term), a “mountaineering of their own”. The establishment of the Alpine Club occurred at the zenith of Britain’s expansionist ambitions. The discourse of Empire, with its associated narratives of acquisition and conquest, along with expeditions aspiring to conquer the world’s highest summits, arguably superimposed Western patriarchy on mountaineering. Peter Hansen has proposed that the “Golden Age” of mountaineering (the 1850s and 1860s), reflected a period in Britain’s history when there was widespread activity in exploration, aimed at extending Britain’s interests overseas. The Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club widely supported exploration for the purposes of furthering Britain’s interests abroad and there is a strong discourse of conquest in polar, geographical and mountaineering expedition literature of the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

In his study of the relationships between mountaineering and the growth of the Victorian Empire, Peter L. Bayers suggests that mountaineering in the nineteenth century can be conceptualised largely as a metaphor for promoting nationalistic and imperialist ideology in order to develop Britain’s interests abroad. Bayers quotes as one significant example, the fashion for the replacing of native names of mountains with ones which symbolised Britain’s conquest of places. Were significant mountaineers of the “Golden Age” of mountaineering, such as Leslie Stephen, Albert Smith, John Tyndall and Edward Whymper motivated by a culture of colonial conquest? I have

already argued that Stephen was not and of the others I suggest it is important to differentiate between the motivations of the individual and wider political interests. It is likely, given his character, that Albert Smith was too consumed by his own self-interest to pay much attention to the concerns of Empire. Tyndall also, as a scientist and glaciologist first and mountaineer second, was probably more absorbed by his fascination with glacier study. Leslie Stephen's "cathedral" like conception of the Alps is also at odds with the conquering aims of Empire. However, in his article celebrating one hundred years of alpinism from 1871-1971, Arnold Lunn suggests that Stephen may have been almost unique among Alpine Club members in terms of putting the interests of Empire second to his own enjoyment. Lunn suggests that mountaineering necessarily became an adjunct to extending Britain's interests abroad:

It is surprising that any mountaineer could believe that members of the Alpine Club differed from other varieties of *homo sapiens* in their desire for recognition. Most men welcome praise which they have fairly earned, and most of the pioneers were ambitious to contribute to mountaineering history, and by no means indifferent to such prestige as important first ascents conferred on them. Stephen was exceptional in belittling his personal contribution to his first ascents. (175)

Lunn has a point. The major objective for Edward Whymper in 1865 was to be a member of the first British party to reach the summit of the Matterhorn and in this he was successful, despite the disaster on the descent in which four men were killed.

In her article "Social Climbing on Annapurna", Julie Rak draws on Bayers' work to argue that mountaineering at the end of nineteenth century reflects and reproduces a "culture of masculinity", helping "to make mountaineering such a popular activity for men of leisure in the aftermath of industrialisation" (112). Rak argues that the "classic texts of mountaineering feature the intense symbolism of a militarised push to the empire's vertical limits [...] summiting the highest peaks in the Himalaya became a way to prove to the British public that Britain was still a powerful country in a symbolic sense" (114). In writing about colonialist socialisation of landscapes, countries and communities in South America in the nineteenth century by what she refers to as "capitalist vanguards" (150), Mary Louise Pratt inscribes the perpetrators as writing themselves into "a wholly male, heroic world" (155). Pratt further argues that women writers – as I have previously argued of Mary Wollstonecraft and Dorothy Wordsworth – sought to position themselves in opposition to the "genderedness of this construction" (155). Pratt argues that women writers, particularly when they write

autobiography, actively seek to engage with discourses which are undermined by a gendered and imperial “assimilation”, putting narratives of “identity, community, selfhood and otherness” (102) within their own travel narratives. This is evidenced later in the thesis when I consider the writing of women mountaineers in the journals of the Ladies’ Alpine Club and Pinnacle Club. Pratt’s arguments can be aligned with Bayers’, Rak’s and Hansen’s concerns that mountaineering in the nineteenth century took place on a stage which was concerned with reproducing an Empire-centred discourse of conquest and conqueror. These views of mountaineering do not, of course, recognise the role of mountaineering as a more private and contemplative activity.

The history of the Alpine Club was extensively written by George Band in 2006 but I briefly summarise here some of the founding principles of the Alpine Club in order to provide a perspective for the establishment of the Ladies’ Alpine Club fifty years later in 1907, which I return to in Chapter 3. In 1857 William Mathews, a wealthy land agent and keen mountaineer hosted the first meeting of the Alpine Club (not, as Ronald Clark has noted, the Alpine Club of London or the British Alpine Club, but *the* Alpine Club) at a dinner in a hotel in Covent Garden. Twenty-eight members were initially approved, having met the membership stipulation that “he [sic] shall have ascended to the top of a mountain 13,000 feet in height” (Band 14). The founding members were an august community; a mixture of distinguished theologians, novelists, painters, critics, men of science and letters as well as stockbrokers, merchants and landed gentry. The assessment of potential members’ technical qualifications was left to the discretion of the club’s founding committee, making it easy for the club to self-select the wider membership. As a club of its time, the Alpine Club, in common with other notable Victorian clubs of science and exploration, such as the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), excluded women. Not until 1892 was Isabella Bird approved for membership of the RGS along with 15 other women and the RGS formally lifted its ban on women members in 1913.⁷ In an article published in the Geographical Journal in 1996 entitled “The Admission of Women to the RGS 1892-1914”, Morag Bell and Cheryl Ewan suggest that the impetus to lift the ban on women joining the RGS arose from Bird’s refusal of an invitation to speak at a function of the RGS as it did not admit women to membership. When she spoke instead at the Scottish Geographical Society, the Council of the RGS, noting the competition, voted to relax its rules (296-297).

⁷ The Alpine Club dragged its feet for longer, not formally admitting women until the Ladies’ Alpine Club merged with the Alpine Club in 1974-1975.

In sub-titling the Alpine Club's publication the Alpine Journal, as "a record of mountain adventure and scientific observation", the club established itself as a community of alpinists with a primary interest in furthering knowledge in mountain environments through alpine expeditions and serious, scientific study of alpine landscapes. The Alpine Journal was also seen as an important vehicle for publishing the wider aspects of mountaineering, including:

equipment, not only in terms of ropes and the development of the ice-axe from the old alpenstock, but problems of camping out (tents, sleeping bags, cooking apparatus, and so on), at a time when huts or cattle sheds might be few and far between, also received attention. The 'Notes', 'Queries' and 'Summaries of new expeditions' filled in many minor gaps in climbing history. (167)

In summary, the function of the Alpine Journal was to faithfully represent the three aims of the Alpine Club: scientific exploration, the climbing of peaks and the reporting of these findings.

T. S. Blakeney, in the first part of his three-part history of mountaineering for the Alpine Journal, suggests that many members of the Alpine Club, whilst being very aware of the seriousness of the endeavour they had set themselves in terms of alpine exploration, saw scientific discovery as of pre-eminent importance to that of conquering peaks for the British Empire (166-173). Simon Thompson writes that competitions for first ascents came to symbolise organised expedition mountaineering in the late nineteenth and twentieth century, writing that "the focus of competition was inspired by nationalism. Both were to become major features of the sport in later years" (45). Blakeney does write that one of the pre-eminent functions of the Alpine Journal was to publish new ascents, but emphasises that the purpose was one of "exploration as distinct from climbing" (167). The extent to which women mountaineers subscribed to ambitions for first ascents is a point I will return to in Chapter 5.

Edward Whymper arguably straddles these competing mountaineering discourses. In 1860, Whymper, then a twenty-year old engraver from London was sent by his employers to the European Alps to take engravings of alpine scenery and travelled for the first time to the Alps. He found himself in thrall to the mountains, taking immediately to mountaineering and becoming prominent in European alpine exploration in the late nineteenth century. In 1871 he published his book on mountaineering in the Alps, Scrambles Amongst the Alps. As an account of mountaineering during a significant period of alpine exploration, Whymper's Scrambles

offers a vivid commentary on mountaineering in the period, describing the harshness, discomfort and dangers of the many undertakings he made. As readers we feel a sense of excitement and danger as Whymper accounts some of his most daring expeditions, including his numerous attempts to reach the summit of the Matterhorn. There is also much humour as he describes endeavours undertaken with various companions and long-suffering but loyal alpine guides in often appalling conditions. Whymper epitomises the spirit of mountain exploration via mountaineering of the time – he was young, impecunious, brave, daring, unknown and deeply felt the honour of being associated with senior figures such as Leslie Stephen and Tyndall. He described Stephen in *Scrambles* as the “fleetest of foot of the whole Alpine brotherhood” (234) and Tyndall as “the great Professor” (93). H. Tyndale, the editor of the 6th edition of *Scrambles* and himself a pre-eminent mountaineer of the 1930s and 1940s, sums up the spirit of Whymper’s text when he writes in his editorial preface that “it breathes that spirit of the pioneers” (vi). In his author’s preface, retained for the 6th edition, Whymper writes deprecatingly of his scrambles as “holiday excursions” (x) when in reality they were anything but. As an account of mountaineering in the 1860s, Whymper’s *Scrambles* is important for this thesis because of the insights it offers into mountaineering during the Golden Age of mountaineering. Whymper informs the reader of new ascents and scientific discoveries (such as the properties of snow); he examines all aspects of mountaineering including travelling, eating and camping; he provides, thanks to his own skills as an engraver, detailed maps and pictures of little known alpine regions and the great European peaks.

In his essay “The Lure of High Mountaineering”, Ivor Armstrong Richards places the individual’s motivation and passion for mountaineering firmly outside the discourse of conquest. Richards writes that mountaineering “is a powerful passion, enthralling many until long past their sixtieth year” (235). He goes on to talk about the wider motivations for climbing mountains – a boredom with comfort, the delight in acquiring a set of highly technical skills, a pleasure in high and remote places, many of which are reflected in women’s motivation for mountaineering as this thesis will discuss. In this sense, Leslie Stephen and Richards occupy similar ground and both locate their own reasons for mountaineering firmly outside narratives intent on describing the conquering of mountain summits for the benefit of the British Empire.

Despite the heavily patriarchal discourses which informed both the growth and culture of mountaineering throughout the nineteenth century, women were not absent from the hills, high peaks and passes of the Alps and the mountains of Britain. Over a

period of almost one hundred years from 1808 to 1907 and the formation of the Ladies' Alpine Club in England, women's physical and written presence in mountaineering increased significantly, contesting the hegemony of men's mountaineering culture and narratives. Located outside narrations of conquest, women's mountaineering in the nineteenth century developed in parallel to that of men, even at some time echoing aspects of it such as the competitive side of mountaineering as can be seen in the competition to set an altitude record for women mountaineers between the two American mountaineers Annie Peck and Fanny Bullock Workman at the end of nineteenth century (Brown 187). Peck's and Bullock Workman's altitude race was different from Empire-informed conquest discourse in that it focused on a battle between two women to reach a specific height and claim a predominant position among women at the heart of American women's suffrage as opposed to a desire by countries to be the first to summit peaks.

I have shown in this chapter how women writers such as Dorothy Wordsworth, Mary Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft and Ann Radcliffe differently inscribe a feminine aesthetic. Drawing on an existing tradition of women's writing they show the imagination, courage, energy and fortitude of women in the outdoors, paving the way for women mountaineers to further evolve and write women's mountaineering experiences. The following chapter explores the achievements and narratives of women mountaineers from the nineteenth century, offering further exemplification of the "feminine stamp" in women's mountaineering.

Chapter 2

“It is necessary that this narration bear the feminine stamp”: Women’s Mountaineering from 1808 to the *fin de siècle*

This chapter discusses women’s mountaineering from the start of the nineteenth century to the period of the *fin de siècle* and will show various characteristics of the “feminine stamp” in the period. Due to limitations of space and for reasons of focus, the chapter confines itself to discussing British and European women mountaineers but will make brief mention of American women for comparative purposes. The now widely researched history of women’s travel by writers such as Dorothy Middleton, Mary Russell, Victoria Allen, Mary Louise Pratt, Mary Robinson and others has shown that women travellers from the Middle Ages onwards confounded the expectations of their gender by undertaking rigorous, sustained and sometimes dangerous travel across the globe, showing that they possessed considerable capacity to transcend the culturally gendered expectations for their sex. If literate they frequently wrote about their experiences and in so doing, offered myriad insights into the rationale for women’s travel and adventure.

Scholars of women’s travel have increasingly argued that women’s travel was an expression of “the increasingly vigorous movement for women’s political and social emancipation” (Middleton 3). Moving scholarship on women’s travel away from recognised rationales which focus on duty (as wives, concubines, missionaries, servants, companions), hardship (a new life in the colonies), deportation and leisure, feminist research has increasingly turned its attention to women travelling in order to realise greater emancipation from the home. In their research on women travellers such as Johanna Schopenhauer and Ida Pfeiffer, the scholars Mary Louise Pratt and Helga Schutte Watt argue that these and other women increasingly undertook travel for profound reasons outside of duty, liberating themselves from a house-bound existence. Harnessing the tradition of women’s epistolary writing such as fiction, letter-writing and diaries they increasingly visibilised their presence and identity as women but most notably as women travel writers. Schutte Watt suggests in her research on Ida Pfeiffer that in writing about their travels, women who did not have the benefit of money and leisure were taking even larger “steps towards the process of female emancipation” (339).

This chapter seeks to explore the extent to which, according to Dorothy Middleton, women’s mountaineering in the nineteenth century was the “individual

gesture of the house-bound, man-dominated Victorian woman” (4). I take a roughly chronological approach to women’s mountaineering in the nineteenth century, commencing with a discussion of Marie (or Maria) Paradis, the first woman to ascend Mont Blanc in 1808, moving on to discuss the ascent of Mont Blanc by the countess Henriette D’Angeville in 1838. I then consider women mountaineers of the middle of the nineteenth century, specifically discussing the achievements of Lucy Walker who drew the admiration of the male mountaineering community as she made her mark on the mountain ranges of Europe in the third quarter of the period, adroitly managing the expectations of the drawing rooms of England whilst challenging them. In taking her femininity into the mountains, Walker achieved a fine balance between the conservatism of a highly gendered Victorian England and her own mountaineering aspirations. Finally, I discuss Gertrude Bell’s and Elizabeth Le Blond’s mountaineering, drawing from examples of their life-writing to show how they built on Lucy Walker’s achievements to become, as I will propose, exemplars of the New Woman in mountain landscapes.

The chapter draws from scholarship on domesticity to explore the extent to which women mountaineers managed and challenged the expectation that they should “apply themselves better to being housekeepers, wives and mothers” (Whitmarsh 26). By the Victorian period, as Martha Vicinus has argued in Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age, this expectation had become bolstered by a gendered model of “perfect femininity”, a model which Virginia Woolf in her essay “Professions for Women” defined as the culture of “the Angel in the House” (285). The domestic “angel”, Woolf wrote, “excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily [...] she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own [...] In those days of Queen Victoria every house had its Angel” (285). Woolf also observed in “Professions for Women” that women writers such as herself had to “kill” the Angel of the House in order to develop a mind of their own, to write, as she argued, “the truth about human relations, morality, sex” (286).

An entrepreneurial undertaking: Marie Paradis

In 1808 one woman perceived that the act of ascending a mountain could potentially reap financial rewards. The 18-year old Marie (or Maria) Paradis, described by Birkett and Peascod as a “Chamonix maid servant” (17) or more simply by David Mazel as a “French servant”, (3) became the first recorded woman to ascend Mont Blanc,

supported by a team of local porters and alpine guides.⁸ Whereas Elizabeth Bohls has suggested that women are attracted to nature because of its nurturing characteristics, Marie Paradis' decision to ascend Mont Blanc appears to have been motivated by the promise of monetary gain, giving us an entirely new *raison d'être* for women's mountaineering in addition to an alternative typology of a woman mountaineer – a poor, working-class woman. Marie's success is remarkable within the context of early nineteenth-century women's mountaineering given that women mountaineers were in the main drawn from the leisured and/or monied middle, upper middle and aristocratic classes. Little is known about Marie apart from an account of her by Henriette D'Angeville in *My Ascent of Mont Blanc*, to which I will return later in this chapter. In undertaking this feat Marie publicised the fact that women – and in her case, an ordinary, working-class girl – possessed not just considerable capacity for coping with a high degree of physical discomfort but that they were capable of undertaking substantial mountaineering challenges. In making her ascent Marie upset many of the cultural and gender stereotypes informing the role of working-class women within alpine regions in early nineteenth-century France. Most were servants, wives of guides or farmers, occasionally keepers of inns, crystal gatherers or prostitutes.

Rebecca Brown suggests that Marie's climb demonstrated much entrepreneurial spirit because she was able to leave her employment as a servant and set up her own tea stall at the foot of Mont Blanc. Business to her tea stall expanded as visitors flocked to see the first woman to reach the summit. Brown interprets Marie's achievement as the undertaking of a thoroughly modern woman and suggests that:

Marie's motivations were entirely modern. She calculated the publicity would serve her well, and it did [...] travellers sought her out to see for themselves the first woman in recorded history who'd achieved such a remarkable feat and left her few coins for the pleasure. (4)

Paradis' practical rationale is echoed by Birkett and Peascod who suggest that Marie's reason for "tackling the climb was [motivated by] good sense and sound practicality" (13). Cicely Williams writes that Paradis "was as honest as the day; she admitted quite frankly that she had made the climb with an eye to the main chance" (20). Dorothy Pilley in *Climbing Days* suggests that Paradis was "taken to the summit of the mountain [...] because she was more or less hauled up to the top" (135). Pilley dismisses Paradis' feat as a "performance", motivated by financial gain (135), suggesting that Paradis'

⁸ Claire Elaine Engel and David Mazel state that Paradis was 18 years old when she ascended Mont Blanc. In *Mon Ascent de Mont Blanc*, Henriette D'Angeville writes that Paradis showed her evidence which showed that she was, in fact 30 years old when she made the ascent.

decision to ascend Mont Blanc for purely monetary reasons is a dubious *raison d'être* for mountaineering. The dismissal of Paradis' achievement as a "performance" and her relegation to a footnote in women's mountaineering histories neglects Paradis' achievement. As Rebecca Brown has suggested in a revisionist interpretation of Paradis' motives, her decision demonstrated considerable appreciation of the commercial benefits she would accrue. Given that Paradis' success occurs at a time when working-class women are largely rendered invisible in histories because of their class, gender and lack of literacy, Paradis was at least ninety years ahead of her time, personifying some of the attributes subsequently to be ascribed to the New Woman of the *fin de siècle*, discussed later in this chapter.

"It is necessary that this narration bear the feminine stamp": Henriette D'Angeville

A second woman ascended Mont Blanc thirty years later in 1838. The woman in question, Henriette D'Angeville, was a forty-four year old countess from an established and wealthy French family. D'Angeville's upper-class antecedents typify the sort of woman who mountaineered in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: monied, leisured, D'Angeville's wealth enabled her to purchase considerable goods and services to assure her own comfort and safety on the climb. Her memoirs, published in French as Mon Ascent de Mont Blanc en 1838, offer important insights into the woman's experience of mountaineering in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

Dorothy Pilley offers her own views of D'Angeville's achievement in Climbing Days. Henriette, she wrote, "was a genuine pioneer – for she climbed in knickerbockers" (135). D'Angeville "donned the following warm and comprehensive kit. Lots of red flannel underclothes, heavy woollen stockings over silk ones. Scotch tweed knickers linked with more flannel, a thick woollen blouse reinforced with pleats on the back and chest, fur-lined gloves and bonnet, also a straw hat [...] in reserve were a velvet mask to protect the skin of her face, and a plaid and a fur-lined pelisse" (135-136). Pilley's description of D'Angeville's attention to her warmth and comfort strikes a modern note: the fear of snow blindness, sunburn and the need for warm and layered clothing is recognised by all contemporary mountaineers and D'Angeville shows good sense in seeking to protect herself from the vagaries of weather and climate. Unlike Marie Paradis, D'Angeville developed a taste for adventurous mountaineering, climbing well into her 60s and gaining a reputation for taking risk in her stride.

The extensive accoutrements of Victorian women adventurers are viewed by Mary Morris, Mary Robinson, Mary Russell and Marni Stanley as a metaphor for women's domestic oppression. "I find it revealing that the metal bindings in women's corsets were called 'stays'" (8) Morris writes. The stays in women's corsets, she argues, cloaked women in "the guise of the aesthetics of their times and cultures", and "in the West [...] were essentially ways of restricting women's freedom of movement" (9). She writes that later Victorian women travellers such as Isabella Bird reproduced strict Victorian conventions of clothing whilst travelling, upholding the cultured and gendered concepts of the Victorian age through their dress, disdaining going native because of fears of disrespecting the social morals of the age. However, women mountaineers, I suggest, sought to "transcend" (Morris 10) or overcome the limitations placed on them through their clothing through innovative adaptations which enabled them to subtly maintain Victorian expectations of a respectable femininity whilst affording some increased freedom of movement. Isabella Bird affected her own version of mountain dress, trying to balance respectability with greater comfort and freedom. Marni Stanley writes of the dilemma of women adventurers as being "anxious to sustain the performance of femininity", suggesting that it was inconceivable that women could engage in "these practices without benefit of corsets and petticoats and ankle-length skirts" (149).

D'Angeville's narrative, translated into English in 1992 by Jennifer Barnes as *My Ascent of Mont Blanc*, is a pioneering work in women's mountaineering literature as it provides a detailed description of one woman's motivation for ascending Mont Blanc. Unlike Marie Paradis, D'Angeville was a seasoned alpine traveller, frequently travelling from her home in Geneva to walk in the Chamonix valley. Her reasons for climbing were, in her view – as she wrote in her introduction – not extraordinary for a woman who loved mountain regions: "Because that is where I find my peculiar pleasure and happiness" (xx). "I am," she wrote, "among those who prefer the grandeur of natural landscapes to the sweetest or most charming views imaginable" (xxi). She was also aware of the novelty element of her account, observing that it would be the first rendition of a woman's experience of ascending Mont Blanc. "Women," D'Angeville wrote, "sometimes see and feel things very differently from men, and when I went to Mont Blanc it had not been ascended by any woman capable of writing her impressions" (xxi). In recognising the uniqueness of her narrative, D'Angeville saw an opportunity for self-publicisation – a quality she shares with Marie Paradis.

Writing in French in her 2004 article “Quand Le Club Alpin Francais ecrit au feminine 1874-1919”, (“The French Alpine Club and Women’s Writing 1874-1919”), Cecile Ottogalli makes the point that French women climbers of the nineteenth century set out to deliberately challenge the androcentricity of French mountaineering. She further suggests that accounts such as D’Angeville’s were therefore written to show both the mountaineering French fraternity and the wider reading public that women could achieve feats in the mountains that would take them outside their gendered role. Ottogalli declares that:

Women climbers will show through their writings that it is possible for a woman to enroll in an alternative role other than that intended by the established order: a mother caring for her home and family and thus marginalized. (2)

D’Angeville herself states, in Jennifer Barnes’ translation, that her book would be written “for my family and friends, but not for the public”. This strikes me as disingenuous if Ottogalli’s assertion is true, for D’Angeville was fully aware of the public interest in her adventure and, as I have already suggested, saw it as an opportunity for self-promotion, an opportunity which Albert Smith would later exploit through his Mont Blanc show. Claire Eliane Engel suggests that D’Angeville had a “morbid passion for self-advertisement” (*A History*, 68). D’Angeville herself appears to have claimed that it was the reading public who desired her to publish her exploit, writing that “perfect strangers never tire of asserting that this enterprise, unprecedented for a woman, would not be complete without an account for the general public” (xxiii).

D’Angeville declared that her script would flow better if she set out with the intention of writing for family and friends, asserting that “the heart is lightened and the spirit soothed by writing for friends and family; the pen moves fast, [...] the conviction that your news [...] will meet with interest and indulgence imbues your writing with a kind of gay abandon that makes up in charm what it lacks in elegance or correctness” (xxiii). D’Angeville establishes for herself a protective apologia for her style, hoping that “the real public will turn a blind eye to those stylistic faults which would go uncensored in all but professional writers” (xxiii). This was ostensibly a clever move at a time when women writers hesitated to expose themselves in print to the reading public, adopting, as Carolyn Heilbrun has argued (109-111), a number of ways to protect their identity. D’Angeville also urged other women who might read her account and wish to take to the mountains to “take nobody’s advice, above all a man’s, for this tale must bear the feminine stamp” (xxiv). The “feminine stamp” should, according to

her, be informed by the following characteristic: “Write as the spirit moves you, avoiding above all any pretension, any falsity for then you will be true to yourself” (xxiv).

Claire Eliane Engel has proposed that D’Angeville’s motivations for climbing Mont Blanc were less governed by her love of climbing than by her supposed jealousy of Baroness Dudevant (George Sand) whom she may have seen in Chamonix dressed as a man. Engel writes that “Henriette climbed Mont Blanc, simultaneously displaying a virile courage [...] and a climbing costume of checkered material, complete with wide trousers, long coat, huge feathered beret and a long black boa” (*A History*, 68). I hesitate to accept Engel’s theory as D’Angeville’s Mont Blanc ascent was, arguably, a natural extension of a long-held climbing ambition. Comments in D’Angeville’s first chapter further testify to this, when she writes of her many years longing to climb the mountain she could view from her home in Geneva, each year being prevented from doing so by weather conditions. “In the brief interludes when a ray of sunshine parted the clouds I would hasten to observe the state of the mountains [...] I felt such a burning desire to climb that an allied impulsion throbbled in my feet, and the mere thought of delaying the ascent to the following year plunged me into an inexpressible physical and moral distress” (3).

In addition to eloquently describing her emotions about climbing, D’Angeville’s account is redolent with observations of the socio-cultural and highly gendered views of what was appropriate behaviour for women. On visiting her doctor to gain his assurances as to her physical condition for making the ascent she writes that “he insisted on saying a few words about the danger inherent for a woman in such an undertaking” (4). What his view of the danger is she does not say, writing that “he at once realised that it would be not only useless but impertinent to pursue the matter further” (4). Of her own Geneva society D’Angeville frankly writes that “its inhabitants are particularly prone to a general conformity of manners and behaviour, and are uncommonly surprised by any action that deviates from the ordinary pattern of life” (xix), suggesting that her character was naturally one of non-conformism. She notes that the inhabitants’ general view of her plans was that “she must be prevented from such madness” (xx) – a view later echoed by Elizabeth Le Blond’s family. Of the reaction of the inhabitants of Chamonix, many of whom held the mountain in superstitious awe, D’Angeville writes that the “natives of the valley [...] did not credit that a woman aspiring to conquer it could be in full possession of her senses” (12).

D'Angeville's preparations for the ascent of Mont Blanc were thorough. On learning of two other expeditions to ascend Mont Blanc at the same time and realising the subsequent competition to secure guides she wrote in advance to the Society of Guides to procure as a lead, one of the most experienced early alpine guides, Joseph Couttet. She refused any suggestion that the three expeditions be merged into one for reasons of safety in numbers, fearing that this would dilute her own experience and also wanting to "be alone with my own impressions during my trip" (20). She also stressed that she was "further moved by a sense of propriety which dictated that a woman travelling alone, unaccompanied by a male relation, could not, and should not, associate with strangers, even fortuitously" (21). D'Angeville's strong sense of propriety extended to not publishing personal details of herself that she did not feel were necessary. Addressing herself directly to her reader she says "I am sure you will realise that while I am happy to retail (sic) to the public a venture which has attracted some attention in the world, I cannot neglect that delicate sense of propriety which forbids a lady to draw her own portrait" (22). One of the details she does give is her age (forty-four) and on reading that the press had wrongly reported her age to be less than it was, she writes humorously that in her "capacity as the guardian of the truth, I insist on reclaiming the years they stole from me" (22).

The importance of consuming necessary carbohydrates, fluid and protein are well-known to contemporary mountaineers and even in the fledgling days of mountain expeditions such as D'Angeville's, the necessity of eating to turn food into energy was recognised. D'Angeville's list of provisions, as dictated by the expedition leader Couttet (who was also sensible of the needs of his guides and porters) was considerable, including two whole sides of veal, two legs of mutton, twenty-four roast chickens, nineteen bottles of brandy, a barrel of *vin ordinaire* and three pounds apiece of chocolates and prunes (19). One of her guides also carried a carrier pigeon in a cage which was to be released on the summit, bearing a note which would confirm her success. For her own (modest) consumption she added "A blancmange, a flagon of barley water, a flagon of lemonade, a pot of chicken bouillon", noting that "my private consumption was hardly lavish" (19). D'Angeville's clothing alone weighed over fourteen pounds, a not inconsiderable burden to add to the physical effort necessary to ascend the mountain.

D'Angeville never doubted that she would reach the summit. She takes pains to reassure the reader throughout her narrative that she possessed the necessary stamina and strength to undertake the ascent "as long as the weather remained fair and

Mademoiselle's legs remained strong" (21). During one halt she writes that the guides "lavished much praise on her" (47) paraphrasing their admiration for her, in particular for the courage she has shown. She professes modesty, writing that "the lady had always considered such admiration undeserved, since she is by nature adventurous" (47). On coming to vertical rock D'Angeville follows in her guides' footsteps "with a confidence and ease that were reminiscent of my prime" (49). Her determination was absolute. In meeting some initial opposition from the company of guides, some of whom doubted her ability to make the ascent, she writes that "I was not in the least disturbed by them, for my mind was made up!" (12) When two of her guides resigned she simply found others to take their place and then, content that she had made all her preparations she retired to her room and "reflected on all that had just been said to me, without being in the least discomfited by it" (13).

D'Angeville's guides took immense care with her during the ascent. At rest-halts they set out blankets for her and built fires so she could have hot drinks and ensured she was protected from the fierce reflection of the sun on the snow. "Tronchet sharpened my pencils, Desplan fanned me with my great fan, Couttet hung up the thermometer" (50). In his history titled The Early Alpine Guides, Ronald Clark writes of the professional care with which guides attended to all their clients' needs, regardless of gender, noting that it was bad for business if guides returned with an injured party or, worse still, without them. It is probable, I suggest, that in both D'Angeville's and, later, Isabella Bird's case, the guides' normal professional care was enhanced by a courtesy for the welfare of "ladies" and concern for their imagined frailties. D'Angeville's guides appear to have treated her with a mixture of deference and exasperation. When she moved well on crevassed ice and steep rock they "congratulated each other on how well she moved" (45). A similar description of the attention and care afforded to her by her guides is given by Isabella Bird in a Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains, who writes of the care with which her party attended to her on her ascent of Long's Peak in the Colorado Rockies in 1873.

On the final steep ascent to the summit of Mont Blanc, D'Angeville was assailed by a strong tendency to fall asleep, writing how "the muscles of my arms and legs seemed to have lost their resilience and to be plunged into a heavy lethargy, my head was swimming and a leaden sleepiness weighed on my eyes...I could not withstand it" (72). Her constant stops exasperated her guides, despite their concerns for her welfare. She writes that Joseph Couttet muttered, "'Look at her, asleep again. This is the last lady I take up Mont Blanc'" (73). D'Angeville was very aware of her own physical

condition, regularly taking her pulse on the ascent and resting frequently. If her account is true, as she regularly assures the reader that it is (I am reminded here of Philippe L  jeune’s concept of the “autobiographical pact” which he urges readers of autobiography to enter into), then the only real physical difficulty she experienced was on the final steep ice climb to the summit. Isabella Bird also experienced extreme physical exhaustion on the latter stages of her ascent of Long’s Peak. Neither experience is remarkable bearing in mind what is now known of the impact of altitude on physical performance. D’Angeville’s narrative takes a dramatic turn as she relates in detail her physical suffering. “In my particular struggle, suffering became agony [...] my arms and legs became every weaker; a raging thirst that seemed unquenchable caused yet greater misery; my pulse could not be counted; one by one my physical powers were deserting me” (73-74). Disdaining the humiliating – in her eyes – offer that she should be carried to the summit, she struggled onwards, and, galvanised, she leapt “to her feet, I ran rather than walked towards the object of my dreams!” (75).

When describing the magnificent scenery of her surroundings, D’Angeville’s writing includes descriptions which borrow from the sublime. In her tented overnight bivouacs she writes that “I felt I had been transported into a new world, that the great mystery of creation would be revealed to me on this mountainside [...] You cannot conceive the impression made by this mighty voice of nature, in the midst of solitude! It inspires fear tinged with awe” (60-61). In order to describe what she sees from the summit she again resorts to subliminal language, writing that she was “surrounded by the sublime heights that told of the presence of the Creator!” (79).

D’Angeville writes that on her return to Chamonix many people greeted her, feting her as the “Lady of Mont Blanc” (92). There is evidence in her narrative that for some women, D’Angeville’s ascent was viewed as a positive endeavour in terms of advancing the cause of “womanhood”. As she reached her hotel “a young lady embraced me warmly with the words; ‘Dear lady, what an heroic exploit! What a glorious day for womanhood!’ Such enthusiasm came from a real *esprit de corps* [original emphasis]” (93). This evidence of a feminist “*esprit de corps*” supporting women’s mountaineering as early as 1838 is interesting and lends D’Angeville’s achievement a wider political impetus in addition to endorsing her recognition of the importance of her achievement for women’s mountaineering.

Within D’Angeville’s narrative she relates a meeting between herself and Marie Paradis, which is important for women’s mountaineering history given that so little is known of Paradis. D’Angeville’s description of this meeting also infers much about

how she identified herself in relation to Paradis. D'Angeville describes Marie Paradis as a "neat little peasant woman, white-haired and small of stature" (101). This description is revelatory as D'Angeville exposes something of the class distinctions embedded in women's nineteenth-century mountaineering, emphasising the class gap between herself and Paradis. Marie expresses astonishment that "a *real lady* [original emphasis] could climb it [...] I'm a peasant-woman, and I know the country" (101). Throughout the dinner Marie expresses wonder that a lady such as D'Angeville had succeeded in the climb, thus reinforcing the view that ladies were not fitted for physical endeavour nor expected to engage in it (a feeling reinforced by D'Angeville's guides when sleep and lethargy overcame her on the summit approach).

What then, does D'Angeville's life-writing narrative of her ascent of Mont Blanc tell us about women's mountaineering in the early nineteenth century? In her discussion of the relationship between representation and "the real" (65) in Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self Representation, Leigh Gilmore discusses the ways in which the autobiographer situates him/her self into a context, time and place, arguing that representation operates as a powerful signifier for the reader, guiding the reader to make judgements about the truth and validity of the text. The autobiographical first person, she argues, carries authority, but this authority is also informed by other forms of authority, such as patriarchy. This is what makes D'Angeville's writing important as a detailed insight into women's mountaineering in the early nineteenth century as it locates her sex in a highly patriarchal culture specifically construed within a particular historical and cultural context. This context is doubly re-produced: nationally through cultural politics and locally as exhibited by the reaction of the guides and in the woman hailing her achievement as significant for women *per se*. However, Gilmore also points out a difficulty which arguably compromises the authenticity of D'Angeville's text (Gilmore 71). Because I am reading a translation, the original self of the writing has been replaced by another – that of the translator, which begs the question, whose text am I reading, D'Angeville's or Jennifer Barnes'?

This is also a question posed by Philippe Léjeune in his discussion of the "autobiographical pact", which suggests that the existence of a signature or title page where the name of the subject is clearly written guarantees the authentic voice of the author. In this instance I find Léjeune helpful to an extent. I trust Barnes' professionalism as a translator to provide me, the reader, a non-fluent reader of French, with the "real" representation of D'Angeville's experience of climbing Mont Blanc. I

have undertaken a contract with Barnes, trusting that “reality, experience, truth” are constituted in Barnes’ translation (Gilmore 76). However, I am mindful that the subjectivity which Barnes constructs may not be the one which D’Angeville writes in the French original. This was brought home to me forcibly through another translation of an extract from D’Angeville – this time my own, from an extract quoted in French by Dorothy Pilley in Climbing Days. I could find no equivalent in Barnes’ translation of this extract. Here is Pilley’s translated version of D’Angeville’s account of the final ice climb to the summit:

I am so anxious, such anxiety, such a complete insomnia, [a] nervous tension so tiring [...] when will I get there? [...] I’m all ready to complain and excuse but I have a love of this exalted nature [...] It is a mania of the heart, my passion for Mont Blanc, a mania of the imagination. What happiness that I prefer ice over a lover! The curious thing about us! (qtd. in Pilley 136)

Pilley’s translation includes information which is not there in the Barnes translation, particularly the final two sentences which suggests that D’Angeville sees herself as a woman who prefers climbing to romantic relationships and/or marriage, a suggestion which is alternatively construed, somewhat harshly by Claire Eliane Engel, in the following terms: “In spite of the fervent words she wrote about the mountain, there was nothing romantic about her; a spinster who loved Mont Blanc because she had nothing else to love” (A History 67). Given that Engel is French and her bibliography in A History includes many original texts in French from 1676 onwards – but curiously not D’Angeville’s – her description of D’Angeville as a lonely spinster is interesting but not in keeping with Barnes’ translation, which includes many romantic allusions and depicts a woman with a considerable zest for life. Pilley’s version positions D’Angeville as a woman who prefers climbing to personal relationships, locating her as a member of a sorority in which the members are different to other women – they do not conform to the gendered expectations of the day, rejecting them in favour of climbing. These different renditions emphasise the importance of the reader of life-writing being aware of the different nuances in translations which perhaps tell us more of the translator’s intentions than those of the original author, bringing Gilmore’s point about the contradictory nature of “autobiographics” to mind.

Although D’Angeville refers to Paradis as her “sister” in Mont Blanc: “I instructed Jeanette to see to it that my sister in Mont Blanc was given luncheon” (104), Paradis, a “peasant woman” whose son was a messenger in Paris, was not an equal

“sister” of D’Angeville in terms of class and in her rationale for making the ascent. Paradis was driven by money, the need to augment her meagre wages as a servant girl. D’Angeville on the other hand was motivated not just by her ego but, according to Pilley’s translation, by a desire to be seen as a woman who was different; unconventional, independent of men, challenging the status quo by eschewing the domestic hearth in favour of adventure and danger, a woman who – paraphrasing Pilley – “preferred mountaineering to lovers”. Paradis’ achievement is arguably equal to that of D’Angeville’s but her poverty and class condemns her to relative obscurity, her motivation for climbing Mont Blanc sullied by dismissals of its overtly commercial motive. D’Angeville states that Paradis’ trip:

which I had never understood, was explained by our conversation. It was nothing more than a financial venture; the idea was not her own, and the experience, the outcome, and her recollections can be summed up as follows: “*I went up; I puffed and panted; I nearly died; they dragged and carried me along; I arrived; I saw white and black; I came down again. Since then, public curiosity has come up with the small sums I was counting on when I went*”. [Original emphases] (104)

By rendering the “neat little peasant woman’s” (101) *raison d’être* in such brief and emphatic terms D’Angeville reduces Paradis’ experience and achievement to a few lines. Apart from Paradis’ so-called “puffing and panting” we know little of her experience of the ascent or her feelings and reaction on reaching the summit. Was she elated, scared, indifferent, relieved? Was she aware of the significance of her achievement for women’s mountaineering? In the description of her post-ascent dinner celebrations to which Paradis was invited, D’Angeville emphasises the language Marie uses, portraying her almost as a comic figure:

‘Were she very *lagna* [original emphasis] the lady?’ she said in her own dialect, half patois, half French [...] ‘Lordy, she’s strong, that one. Never would I have believed she could’ve gone right up to the *sonzon* [original emphasis] ‘Tell us, my duck’, she called from one end of the table to the other, ‘where was you bred up then, to be so big and strong?’ (108)

In a footnote, D’Angeville assures her readership that “I have transcribed this conversation in all its simplicity, without improving the language or romanticising the person of this dear old lady” (130). Her last and dismissive word on Marie is “I was

never to see poor Marie again [...] I am glad that I gave her one of the last pleasures she had on earth” (131).

The importance of D’Angeville’s narrative is that it highlights two distinctly different inscriptions of the feminine experience of women’s mountaineering in the nineteenth century. One is D’Angeville’s description of a third party who is working-class, poor, relatively obscure and illiterate. The second is upper class, informed by personal wealth and driven by a considerable ego which is also underpinned – if Barnes’ translation can be viewed as a more or less authentic account – by a woman who was determined to subvert and challenge the traditional gendered expectations of the nineteenth century. The next section describes how women mountaineers in the middle of the century differently evoke their experiences of mountain landscapes and mountaineering, in the process developing the feminist discourse of D’Angeville in terms which were acceptable to the reading public of the middle of the nineteenth century.

“I saucily declined the proffered help”: Ladylike discourses in mountaineering in the middle of the nineteenth century

In an article titled “Ladies’ Mountaineering Books”, Janet Adam Smith reinforces the fact that the word lady is “all-important in the mountain connection” (46) in the nineteenth century. In 1859 Mrs Henry Warwick Cole published her travel and mountaineering narrative entitled A Lady’s Tour of Monte Rosa. Mrs Cole’s book is addressed to other “ladies” who may wish to travel and climb in the Alps and she assures them that “any lady, blessed with moderate health and activity may accomplish the Tour of Monte Rose with great delight and few inconveniences” (391-392). Whilst Dorothy Middleton has asserted that such ladies “were mostly middle-aged and often in poor health” (3), lady mountaineers such as Mrs Cole showed that on the contrary, ladies were capable of considerable feats of physical rigour which required stamina and resolve. Extracts in Mrs Cole’s narrative arguably anticipate the feminist aspiration of early twentieth-century women mountaineers’ to climb independently of men:

At the top Mr F [...] who was the first to arrive there, offered his hand to assist me up the last few steps over the huge smooth blocks of stone of which the highest peak is composed, but I saucily declined the proffered

help, as, had I accepted it, I should not have been able to say that I had ascended without assistance. (29)

Mrs Douglas Freshfield, who travelled with her mountaineer husband, her son and a woman friend to the Italian and French Alps in 1859 and 1860, published her experiences of her travels in 1861 as Alpine Byways or Light Leaves Gathered in 1859 and 1860 by a Lady. Like Mrs Cole, Mrs Freshfield's narrative is aimed at the lady traveller and emphasises the increasing improvements in the services available for the aspirant lady traveller. She sternly takes publishers of travelogues to account for not doing enough to publicise the safety and increasing commodious facilities for ladies. "It is time that 'Murray' should qualify his assertion that the Gries is 'not a pass for ladies'. Acting on such authority, many may be deterred from a journey presenting no real difficulties" (40). Freshfield undertook a number of mountain walks with guides and is both amused and proud when she overhears:

part of a conversation between Couttet and the old man [...] the man was curious to know how Couttet managed with the ladies, who, from experience he seemed to think were troublesome charges!

'Ordinairement ceci va mal, et cela va mal, a fin tout va mal! [*usually, this goes wrong, that goes wrong, everything goes wrong!*]' was his opinion, to which the sententious reply given by our good friend was 'mais avec mes dames, tout va bien'. [*but with my ladies, everything is good*']. Certainly a flattering report at the end of long journey. (84)

Her writing also contains resonances of the sublime as seen in the following extract, invoking echoes of the prose of Ann Radcliffe:

When listening to the voices of the mountains speaking in the thunders of the rolling avalanche, or the rushing of the mighty winds, surrounded by the wondrous combination of grandeur and beauty, we realise something of the vastness of an Almighty power. (3)

The interest and strength of Mrs Freshfield's narrative lies in the encouragement it gives to other women wishing to travel. She makes light of the difficulties experienced by an underlying misogynistic attitude to ladies stepping outside the established boundaries for their gender. Another lady traveller, Amelia Edwards, who made a series of journeys throughout the European Alps in the late 1880s as an alpine traveller rather than a mountaineer, also puts into perspective the accepted boundaries of "ladylike" approaches to travel at the end of the nineteenth century, writing that the Alps afforded opportunities for ladies who "love sketching and botany, mountain-

climbing and mountain air, and who desire when they travel to leave London and Paris far behind them” (xi). Edwards stresses the necessity of ladies having a quantity of physical robustness and an aptitude for mule-riding, cautioning amusingly that side-saddles are of primary importance to any lady wishing to venture “in the way of peaks or passes” (98). She notes that “the passes are too long and too fatiguing for ladies on foot and shall not be attempted by any who cannot endure eight and sometimes 10 hours of mule-riding” (xi-xii). Isabella Bird was to confound this assumption.

Isabella Bird is one of Dorothy Middleton’s ladies who “were mostly middle-aged and often in poor health” (3). Drawn to travel for health reasons and usually perceived as a traveller rather than a mountaineer, Bird achieved the first ascent by an English woman of one of Colorado’s highest peaks, the 15,000 ft. high Long’s Peak, in 1873. She writes in *A Lady’s Life in the Rocky Mountains* of “the majestic solitude, and the unspeakable awfulness and fascination of the scenes” (97), revelling in the high mountain scenery of the Rockies when seen from a height of 7,000 feet and becoming quite carried away with a feeling of exultation. Bird had “never seen anything to equal the view into Estes Park [...] the mountain fever seized me, and giving my tireless horse one encouraging word he dashed at full gallop over a mile of smooth sward” (94). However, she found the reality of high mountaineering very different to the comparative safety of the valley floor and later wrote that she was “disinclined to write” (97) of the ascent, finding that the actual act of mountaineering was not to her taste. However, write of her experience she did in the form of a letter to her sister Henrietta in the autumn of 1873, which she published in *A Lady’s Life in the Rocky Mountains*. In her letter to Henrietta, Bird asserted that:

You know I have no head and no ankles, and never ought to dream of mountaineering; and had I known that the ascent was a real mountaineering feat I should not have felt the slightest ambition to perform it. As it is, I am only humiliated by my success, for ‘Jim’ dragged me up, like a bale of goods, by sheer force of muscle. (109)

The last comment resonates with Marie Paradis’ experience of being bodily hauled to the top of Mont Blanc by her guides. Bird admitted to feelings of sheer terror on seeing thousands of feet of rock towering above her and:

four thousand feet of broken rock shelved precipitously below; smooth granite ribs, with barely a foothold, stood out here and there; melted snow, refrozen several times, presented a more serious obstacle; many of the rocks were loose, and tumbled down when touched. (109)

Descriptions of difficulties with her clothing feature large in Bird's ascent. She was ill-clothed for the climb to 15,000 feet, having been advised by her guide, "Mountain Jim", to dress only in her thin mountain dress. She wore borrowed and ill-fitting boots which she later supplemented by a find of some lighter overshoes left by a former ascent party. Bird wrote of the shock of finding herself in the middle of the landscape which she had happily contemplated from the valley floor. The mountains were "broken into awful chasms deep with ice and snow, rising into pinnacles piercing the heavenly blue with their cold, barren grey" (108).

Bird tried to abort her ascent and on declaring her intention, was supported by one of her porters who said emphatically "that a woman was a dangerous encumbrance" (107) – a comment which accords with D'Angeville's guide's declaration that he would never take another lady to the summit. However, in her account Bird makes it clear that "Jim" would not be swayed. Slipping, gasping, being hauled from man to man like a sack of potatoes, sometimes crawling on her hands and knees, bruised and dehydrated "at last the peak was won" (113). In an amusing footnote to her ascent of Long's Peak in the form of a letter which she directed to the members of the Alpine Club, Bird acknowledged that although she had experienced considerable difficulties during an experience which had been "truly terrible [...] to me, to a member of the Alpine Club it would not be a feat worth performing" (113). According to her the descent was no less hair-raising or difficult than the ascent but, aided by "gentle Jim" who "sometimes pulled me up by my arms or a lariat" (115), they regained the valley floor. Bird wrote that she was lifted off the horse and "laid on the ground wrapped up in blankets, a humiliating termination of a great exploit" (116).

In discussing the increasing number of women in the nineteenth century who wrote about their travels, Mary Louise Pratt observes a change in the medium within which women wrote. Having noted in the previous chapter that Dorothy Wordsworth appropriated forms of narrative which women had historically used since the seventeenth century such as letters, diaries and journals, women writers of the middle-to-late nineteenth century turned to a form of writing legitimised, according to Pratt, during the early Victorian era as "the autobiographical narrative" (171). In Pratt's words, women writers, through constituting themselves "as the protagonist of their travels" claimed the "intentionality of direct address for all posterity" (171). Pratt also suggests that women travel writers such as Flora Tristan (and I include Bird here) exhorted other women to travel simply by writing about it. In her account of her sojourns and travels in the Rockies, Bird demonstrated that if a small, largely

insignificant woman such as herself could don “mountain dress”, learn to ride a horse and climb a peak then other women could.

Although Bird’s narrative implicitly challenges the gendered restraints of the period, she never eschewed the trappings of Victorian ladyhood, maintaining a strict dress code, meeting regular discomfort, unexpected occurrences and the regular attentions of admirers with the very best of feminine Victorian manners. She was not – as Harriet Devine and Margaret Forsyth suggest of other women writers in their article “Nineteenth Century Women Writers and Female Transgression” – a “transgressor” of “prevailing moral values and social mores” (363). Conversely, Bird went to some pains to reassure John Murray (her publisher) and her readership that she was not wearing riding breeches as had been sensationally reported. In the preface of the second edition of *A Lady’s Life in The Rocky Mountains* published in 1879 she wrote a stern and terse note to refute a statement that had been published in *The Times* which had claimed that she donned masculine clothing whilst on her travels for ease of travelling. Bird was furious that she could be accused of such impropriety and added her note to all subsequent editions of the book, making sure an illustration of her in “mountain dress” was also included. She wrote:

For the benefit of other lady travellers, I wish to explain that my ‘Hawaiian riding dress’ is the ‘American Lady’s Mountain Dress’, a half-fitting jacket, a skirt reaching to the ankles, and full Turkish trousers gathered into frills which fall over the boots – a thoroughly serviceable and feminine costume for mountaineering and other rough travelling in any part of the world. I add this explanation to the prefatory note [...] in consequence of an erroneous statement in *The Times* of November 22nd.
(vii-viii)

Bird challenged the conservative, gendered expectations of her sex by showing that women could succeed in feats requiring substantial and prolonged physical endurance which belied her so-called delicate physique. Conversely, she also took pains to reassure her readers that she was not the physical or technical equal to her male companions lest they accuse her of unfeminine attributes. In her description of her ascent of Long’s Peak we see her affirming her femininity whilst exhibiting physical toughness. Bird does not gloss over the travail, the discomfort, the thirst, the terror but she never forgets that she is a woman, gendered as needing protection and guidance which her companion “Mountain Jim” endorses through his constant care of her.

The strong sense of her femininity, lack of technical skill and relative physical frailty are the cultural ties which bind Isabella Bird to the gendered culture of the Victorian age and arguably contribute to her considerable success in print. Here was a woman who was modern yet disported herself in such a way that she retained society's respect for her sex. Bird is the apotheosis of Mary Louise Pratt's cruel stereotype of a Victorian woman traveller which Pratt styled the "Spinster Adventuress, her back to Europe, fleeing the confines of her time" (171). Bird did not "flee", she embraced the opportunities of travel, becoming on her travels through the Rockies an accomplished horsewoman, able to withstand hundreds of miles in the saddle over difficult and challenging terrain. Despite sustaining numerous falls from horses, on one occasion falling off backwards, crushing her left arm "into a jelly" (73), badly cutting her back and sustaining extensive bruising but making little fuss, she demonstrates a toughness that transcends the gendered Victorian concept of women's innate frailty. Although she was to travel frequently in mountainous regions, the ascent of Long's Peak was to be Bird's only ascent of a mountain. She retained a rose-coloured memory of her exploit, writing retrospectively to her sister that "I would not now exchange my memories of its perfect beauty and extraordinary sublimity for any other experience of mountaineering in any part of the world" (118).

"I say, my boys, doesn't she know how to climb"! Lucy Walker

Claire Eliane Engel has written that Victorian society became aware of lady mountaineers from about 1860 onwards, largely because of the successes of the mountaineer Lucy Walker. This realisation, she writes, "probably came as a shock to mid-Victorian minds: it was so much out of keeping with their idea of the well-bred young lady" (A History 135). In her book Victorians in the Mountains: Sinking the Sublime, Ann C. Colley begs to differ. Colley suggests that from 1850 onwards, an increasingly literary Victorian readership became accustomed to reading accounts of adventurous women in newspapers and periodicals of the period. Colley argues that:

when it came to climbing in the Victorian period, gender did not, as a rule, matter [...] lists of climbs done by women in the second half of the nineteenth century remind one that women were not summarily discouraged from participating in what [...] commentators assume was solely a male-centred sport based on power and privilege. (5)

Rather than, as Devine and Forsyth write, adventurous women being seen as transgressing “prevailing moral values and social mores” and threatening “cultural mythologies of gender at home and abroad” (363), they were often depicted as adventurous heroines in the press, a point to which I return to later in this chapter.

Lucy Walker (1836-1916) began her mountaineering career in the late 1850s and is referred to by Engel as “an almost legendary figure” in women’s mountaineering (They Came 105). Engel suggests, in her description of Walker gleaned from “notes which have been given to me by one of her friends” (A History 136), that Walker was:

in every way the perfect Victorian young lady. She was not an athlete and her greatest asset, when climbing, was her unflinching will-power. She did not ride or fish or take walking tours. She indulged in no outdoor recreations but croquet. She was an expert needlewoman and read a good deal in several languages. She took an active part in the social life of Liverpool, where she lived with her parents. She was a charming hostess and a devoted friend. (136)

Like Marie Paradis, Walker did not publish anything about herself or her mountaineering. Mary Louise Pratt suggests a reason for Walker’s apparent lack of willingness to write about her own achievements, arguing that nineteenth-century women’s travel writing represented a body of work which provided men with every opportunity to “complain about” (170) women. It is likely that Walker had a highly developed sense of middle-class respectability which caused her to shy away from publicity, positive or otherwise. Being the daughter and sister of eminent Victorian mountaineers she would also have been acutely aware of the damage caused to reputations as a result of mountaineering incidents which would have been heightened by the presence – and implied contributory factor – afforded by a woman mountaineer. Walker was successful in balancing the conservative expectations of her sex by carrying out her mountaineering with modesty and decorum – exactly what was expected of ladies.

The Walkers, dealers in lead, were a wealthy family based in Liverpool who frequently holidayed in Zermatt in the Swiss Alps. The family patriarch, Francis Walker was one of the early Victorian mountaineers and a founding member of the Alpine Club. On family visits to the Alps, Walker’s wife and daughter would remain in the valley to walk, converse, paint, read and socialise while he and his son, Horace, climbed the peaks. In 1858, aged 22, Lucy joined her father and brother on a strenuous high-level mountain walk which would include climbing over one of the steepest

passes, the Theodule Pass. Engel speculates that Lucy had a spirited character and requested to join them, finding her confinement to the valley floor frustrating. She suggests that the new experience “was a revelation to Lucy [...] in the course of which a new vision had begun to open out for the girl” (*They Came* 101). This high-level mountain walk was the start of what was to become an illustrious mountaineering career for the quiet, middle-class girl from Liverpool.

Lucy Walker became a regular participant in her father’s and brother’s mountaineering exploits – always, as Engel notes, climbing in an old print dress: “When climbing she never dreamt of dressing as a man; she used to wear a white printed dress to which some decent shape had to be restored after a strenuous expedition” (*A History* 136). A well known photograph of her from the period archived in the Alpine Club’s Library which shows her seated in her alpine dress, represents her as a model of Victorian conservatism in her adherence to the dress and mannerisms. The photograph also shows that women – if endowed with sufficient determination, a sense of adventure, skill and courage – need not let the wearing of a dress prevent them from becoming mountaineers. Another image of her in an engraving by Edward Whymper shown in Figure 3, depicts her standing in the doorway of the Swiss Alpine Club in Zermatt. In the picture she is one of only two women. Unlike the modest gaze of her companion, possibly the club guardian’s wife – which is turned away from the artist – Walker’s gaze is direct.

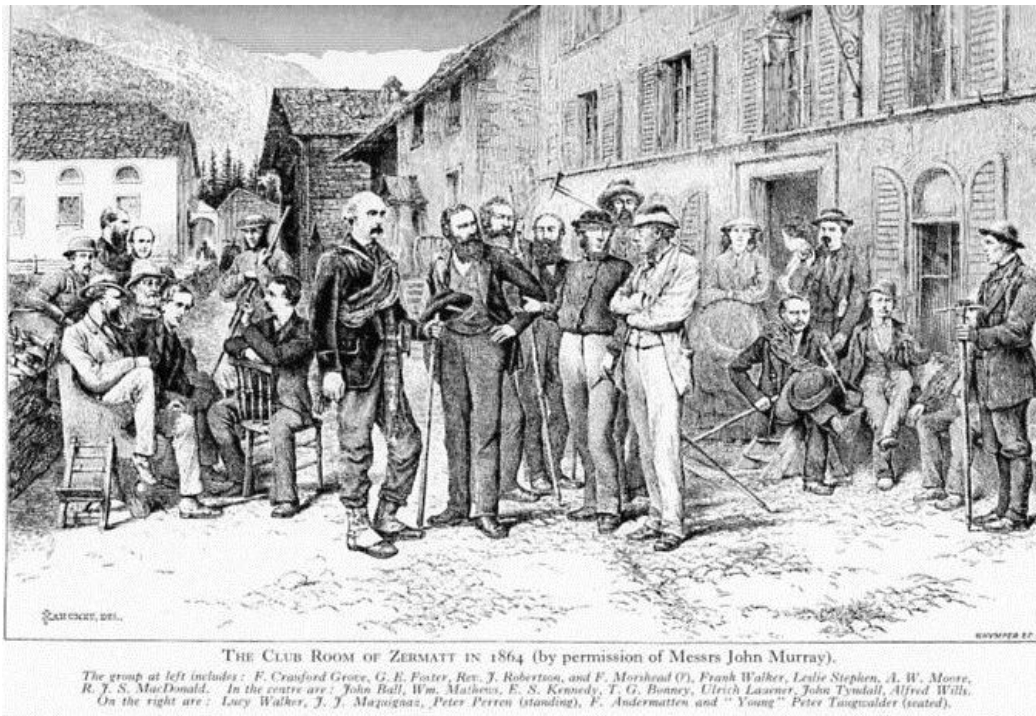


Fig.3. “The Club Room of Zermatt in 1864”. The *Alpine Journal* Vol LXII (London, The Alpine Club 1957), between pages 38 and 39.

In July 1871, accompanied by her father and a party of guides, Walker made the first ascent of the Matterhorn by a woman and thus sealed her place in mountaineering history. Unlike Henriette D'Angeville's ascent of Mont Blanc, Walker's climb was done quietly, without any attempt by her to self-publicise the expedition, despite the excitement and speculation about her climb by the mountaineering fraternity of Zermatt (Brown 59). Walker's ascent of the Matterhorn was in the end publicised widely by the press and prompted the publication of a poem in Punch on 26 August 1871 entitled "A Climbing Girl", which celebrated Walker's success in respectful tones:

A lady has clomb [sic] to the Matterhorn's summit,
Which almost like a Monument points to the sky,
Steep not very much less than the string of a plummet
Suspended, which nothing can scale but a fly.

This lady has likewise ascended the Weisshorn,
And what's a great deal more, descended it too,
Feet foremost; which, seeing it might be named Icehorn,
So slippery 'tis, no small thing to do.

No glacier could baffle, no precipice balk her,
No peak rise above her, however sublime.
Give three times three cheers for intrepid MISS WALKER.
I say, my boys, doesn't she know how to climb! (86)

Although Punch became notorious for its highly caricaturised cartoons of modern women, particularly of the New Woman, this poem appears to be genuinely appreciative of Lucy Walker's success, probably, I conjecture, because she conducted herself modestly, following the conventions for respectability by always climbing with her father and/or brother, never alone with guides. Walker was modern but not radical, equally at home in the middle-class drawing room as in the mountains.

Lucy Walker attracted wide praise and tributes; Engel's description of her includes an observation from the journal of Emile de Laveleye, a mountaineer and biographer of King Leopold I of the Belgians who was himself a keen mountaineer. De Laveleye wanted to observe the attraction of the mountains and to capture it on paper. He wrote of the surprise of himself and the King when, on a visit to the Theodule Hut above Zermatt:

Creeping into that dark den we saw a young woman endeavouring to dry her garments soaked with water and crisp with frost in front of a wretched fire. The guides told us that she was a young English lady who travelled by herself. She was coming from the top of Mont Blanc and was going to the top of Monte Rose; indeed she climbed that peak a few days later. Her name was Miss Lucy Walker (qtd. in A History 136)

Walker proved that women could climb mountains and retain their femininity whilst doing so, successfully transferring the mannerisms of the middle-class nineteenth-century drawing room to the mountains as Isabella Bird had done in her travels in the American Rockies. There is one other point, however, to be made about Lucy Walker which throws a different light on her character. Rebecca Brown's discussion of Walker's achievements and those of the American mountaineer, Meta Brevoort, a contemporary of Walker's, alludes to an intense rivalry between the two women as each determined to become the first woman to ascend the Matterhorn (59-61). This rivalry, if it existed beyond Brown's imagination, resulted in Walker beating Brevoort. The latter later became the first American woman to ascend Mont Blanc. David Mazel also speculates on this rivalry but there is no first-hand account from Walker which corroborates this. Cicely Williams suggest that Meta Brevoort felt "bitter disappointment" in being beaten to the Matterhorn summit by Lucy Walker (51). The suggestion of rivalry adds a new dimension to Walker's motivation for mountaineering and throws her into a new light – one which is tougher, more competitive, challenging the fragments of information about her in the public domain which inscribe her as a decorous lady in the mountains.

"They will overstep the limits of their God-appointed Sphere": the New Woman in *fin de siècle* women's mountaineering

In this section I explore the cultural characteristics of the period referred to as the *fin de siècle*, an era of cultural and political change at the end of the nineteenth century which implicitly and explicitly informed developments in women's mountaineering. I draw on the scholarship of writers such as Bernard Bergonzi, Ross G. Forman, Sally Ledger, Scott McCracken, Maureen Moran and Joan Smith to reflect on the extent to which women's mountaineering at the *fin de siècle* reflected or challenged New Woman discourse, the term being attributed, as Ledger argues in her various writings on New

Woman fiction, to the writing of Sarah Grand. Grand's 1893 novel The Heavenly Twins, as Ledger argues, "established the New Woman [...] as a cultural icon" leading the way for New Woman fiction to become "a central and massively popular feature of the *fin de siècle* culture (157). Maureen Moran writes in Victorian Literature and Cultures that the "New Woman" was a term which opposed "traditional views about female sexuality and gender roles" (124) and that New Woman fiction was "a literary phenomenon that emerged from social, rather than artistic concerns" (124), a point which Sally Ledger emphasises. New Woman fiction in the late nineteenth century, foregrounds and politicises themes such as work, suffrage, marriage and sexuality and became pervasive within late nineteenth-century literary discourse in diverse media forms such as the national press, women's periodicals and fiction. I use New Woman discourse here to illustrate contradictions in women's mountaineering as it positions itself in the fragmenting cultural territory of the late Victorian age. I also explore emergent themes which appear in women's mountaineering literature, for example, in the writing of Gertrude Bell and Elizabeth Le Blond and consider how these themes influence women's mountaineering in the early twentieth century. I also consider the different ways in which Bell and Le Blond straddled the competing claims of tradition alongside increasing social, economic and political freedoms for women during the *fin de siècle*.

Bernard Bergonzi writes that defining the parameters for the *fin de siècle* is complex, arguing that it "metamorphoses into the more radical and ambitious programme of the modernists" (xii). He also suggests that it commences in the 1890s when established forms of art, culture and intellectual thought started to splinter, requiring new approaches. In their Introduction to Cultural Politics At the Fin de Siècle Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken echo Bergonzi and suggest that the "process of cultural fragmentation which characterised the *fin de siècle*" (1) began in the 1890s, challenging Victorian values and throwing the late Victorian Age into crisis, enabling various forms of resistance to emerge and flourish such as women's suffrage movements, along with new expressive styles in architecture, art, music and writing.

There appears to be no consensus on the exact period which the *fin de siècle* covers. Bonnie Kime Scott suggests it can be viewed as the start of an extended period – or third phase – of modernity which commenced in the 1890s and extended up to 1940, but Peter Brooker in his introduction to Modernism/Postmodernism echoes Bergonzi in discussing the difficulty of reaching a consensus about the duration of the process, highlighting the various competing claims and counter-claims (5-6). Ross G.

Forman agrees with Brooker and Bergonzi, suggesting that the *fin de siècle* was “fraught with contradictions” (92). For the purposes of this thesis the contradictory elements of the *fin de siècle* are important in terms of informing New Woman discourse which emerged during the period and which in turn is specifically important in helping to illuminate the discourses in women’s mountaineering in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

According to a poem entitled “The New Woman” by an anonymous author, D.B.M., published in the periodical The Monthly Packet on Saturday 1 June 1895, the New Woman was intelligent, “radiant”, concerned with the social problems of the age such as drink and violence, overtly political, almost certainly a supporter of women’s suffrage and used the opportunities provided by a fracturing of Victorian values to break free from centuries of tradition where her lot had been to unquestioningly follow her husband, “lord and master” (750). Pauline Moran suggests that the New Woman was an icon of revolution but the fiction of Sarah Grand and others in the late nineteenth century show that the New Woman was more complex, combining the values of the new and old centuries, feeling her way from the end of one into the start of another. In an article entitled “Sarah Grand On the Old and New Woman”, published in the women’s periodical The Woman’s Signal on 1 September 1898, Grand wrote that the key to being a New Woman was to “do so many things in a womanly way [...] she is a well balanced creature, with many interests in life” (140), increasingly including outdoor activities such as cycling, ski-ing and mountaineering. Key to being “womanly”, Grand argued, was the New Woman’s ability to engage in traditional roles such as a mother and wife with pride, without subservience or feelings of inferiority. In another article “On Clubs and the Nature of Intelligence” [date unknown] Grand wrote that being a New Woman did not mean abandoning traditional roles but recognising that “the highest, holiest, and noblest position on earth was the position of wife and mother” (838). She viewed clubs as beneficial for women, bringing like-minded women together not just on a basis of self-help but for the purpose of helping others. Grand urged other men to particularly help mothers, who, she thought, should receive all possible help in terms of “education, mental, moral and physical training to fit them for their sacred duties”, declaring that “this is the primary outcome of the woman movement” (838). In the next chapter I will consider whether there are any links between Grand’s rationale for women’s clubs and the aims of the Ladies’ Alpine Club.

This recognition that the New Woman could combine domestic roles with activities outside the home marks an important departure in Victorian gendered

discourse. The Victorian concept of a “lady” was being re-shaped into a conceptualisation of womanhood that positioned the gracious, well-educated “woman” as mistress of her home but not subservient to it. The expectation of the New Woman, Grand argued, was that she should take increasing responsibility for becoming well-read, intelligent, public-spirited, interested in art and social affairs and an agitator against social evils such as drink and debauchery. Mary Bedford echoed these sentiments in her poem “The New Woman: A Rhyme of the Times”, published in The Woman’s Signal on 10 January 1895, overlaying Grand’s rhetoric with nationalist sentiments: “‘Tis right that we should make a stir/For God and Land and Home we fight” (26). In terms of cultural values, the New Woman embodied womanly virtues in supporting home and family – she supported change, but not revolution and she would fight against anything which threatened to de-stabilise the concept and practice of Home.

The fiction of women novelists of the *fin de siècle* such as Grand, George Egerton, Edith Wharton, Evelyn Sharp and Charlotte Perkins Gilman challenged the prevailing view that a woman’s “natural” place was in the home. Perkins Gilman’s short story “If I Were a Man”, illustrates the views of the day with regards to the role and aspirations of a woman:

‘The real danger’, began the Revd Alfred Smythe [...] ‘is that they will overstep the limits of their God-appointed Sphere’.

‘Their natural limits ought to hold ‘em, I think’, said cheerful Dr. Jones.

‘You can’t get around physiology, I tell you’. (391)

Lucy Walker had shown, however, that in mountaineering, women were capable of “getting around their physiology” to perform outstanding feats in the mountains whilst retaining their femininity. Whilst Sally Ledger writes that the Victorian concept of femininity was transformed during the *fin de siècle* to a more arguably liberal notion of womanliness – particularly visible in suffrage campaigns in the form of articles which, according to Ledger, described and contextualised the new “form of emancipated womanhood, marking a new departure in femininity” (xxxiii) – women still had to balance their “God-appointed Sphere” alongside mountaineering aspirations and successes as the women mountaineers Gertrude Bell and Elizabeth Le Blond showed in their approaches to mountaineering, a point to which I return later.

What and who was the New Woman? Two articles published in the conservative periodical The Monthly Packet in May and June 1895 inscribe the New Woman in tones of disapproval, variously writing the New Woman as a dishevelled,

untidy, un-natural being, increasingly mobile and moving outside her ordained domestic sphere. An article written by C.C. in the edition dated 1 May 1895 described her thus:

A woman riding about in clothes which, though passed by the police, were never in Nature's eyes when woman was created, rushing about on a bicycle to meetings, making herself conspicuous on public platforms.
(433)

An article by Nora in The Monthly Packet on 1 June 1895 entitled "The New Woman: Does She Exist"? suggested that the New Woman is:

The many-headed monster [...] pre-eminently strong-minded; she wears strange garments. Her gowns are occasionally beautiful and costly but they must be startling [...] She is sometimes beautiful, but it is with a repellent, defiant beauty; she is an agnostic, if not pronouncedly atheistical; she disapproves of marriage (though she herself usually marries on small provocation); she is often journalistic, generally socialistic, and above all she smokes. (748)

But she was also "very often untidy, [...] she lives a rackets life in flat or lodging, working hard at school or studio" (748). The article written by Nora hints at the tensions and challenges faced by the New Woman who, politically vilified and a source of amusement for the conservative press and periodicals, appeared to symbolise the threat to the old order. Cartoons and verses published in Punch and its sister publication Judy: the Conservative Comic lampooned and denigrated the New Woman as can be shown, for example, in the cartoon shown in Figure 4, which was published in Judy on 10 August 1887.



Fig. 4. "Woman Suffrage – The New Electorate". *Judy: The Conservative Comic*, 10 August 1887

The popular press showed at times an alternative, more tolerant and sometimes implicitly approving view of the aspirations of the New Woman, particularly if she could, as Lucy Walker had done, disport herself with grace, decorum and modesty – attributes which are suggested in the illustration of the woman mountaineer in Figure 5, prominently positioned on the front page of a September 1886 edition of *The Illustrated London News*.



Fig. 5 “Mountaineering in the Tyrol: Turning a Corner”. The Illustrated London News Saturday 18 September 1886.

The illustration depicts a woman traversing a mountain with a guide in the front and to the back. The anonymously written accompanying article, entitled “Lady Mountaineer”, stated unequivocally that:

If a woman has nerve and self-possession, in which qualities, partly moral and partly physical, not a few women are quite equal to men, she can learn to perform a feat of this kind, with her light, firm tread and good balance of the whole body, as deftly as the more robust sex [...] this faculty, moreover, of enduring the unusual position of very great altitude, without disturbance of the brain and nerves is not always found in men of undoubted courage [...] women, as a general rule, are not

cowards at all, unless they have been made so by a bad education and indolent habits of life. (299)

The double-entendre in the illustration's title suggests that *fin de siècle* society had turned a corner in its perception of the physical capabilities of women. Mountaineering, the writer urges, can be beneficial to women, some of whom, it is argued, are better suited to mountaineering than men. This "turning a corner" discourse finds echoes in other debates on women and sports such as bicycling in the period of the *fin de siècle*, referred to earlier in this chapter. The article argues that exposure to physical exercise, risk and adventure will develop women's faculties, a point later to be reinforced by Elizabeth Le Blond with respect to women's mountaineering, to whom I return later in this chapter.

The concept of the New Woman as a moderated balance between old and new values is reflected in women's mountaineering by the *fin de siècle* mountaineers Gertrude Bell and Elizabeth Le Blond in addition to the constitution and membership of the Ladies' Alpine Club in the early twentieth century. I have already suggested that despite the moderated views of Grand and the more liberal attitude of some sections of the press, there was adverse reaction in other quarters to the ideology of the New Woman. Some of the conservative women's periodicals found the notion of the New Woman abhorrent and anti-feminine. Fashion periodicals such as Myra's Journal of Dress and Fashion published frequent advertisements throughout the 1880s and 1890s for traditional, feminine clothing, fearing that the New Woman with her support of "rational dress" would herald changes in clothing that were inappropriately masculine. Cartoons which appeared in Punch over the *fin de siècle* seem to have been particularly concerned about the influence of the New Woman on women's dress. Other members of the public and more avant-garde manufacturers of clothing appear to have been divided over women's dress. In an anonymously written article entitled "Rational Dress" on 22 May 1883 which appeared in the The North-Eastern Daily Gazette, the writer stated that he/she took issue "with women wanting to wear Rational Dress, as it makes women look like animated stove-pipes" (2). On the issue of women wearing bloomers, he/she claimed that they remained "in doubt" but extolled the virtues of women adopting a garment referred to as a "diminished skirt", created specifically for walking long distances, cycling "and other open-air exercises" (2).

A version of this dress appeared in advertisements for ladies' and gentlemen's mountaineering clothing in the Alpine Journal during the *fin de siècle*, showing that although the Alpine Club were keeping women at bay as members they were at least

acknowledging their existence on the mountains by including advertisements from manufacturers keen to exploit a new market. Given that the writer of “Rational Dress” also advertises a “costume for climbing recommended to lady mountaineers” (2), it appears likely that the writer could have been that of a manufacturer advertising his/her goods, suggesting entrepreneurs were keen to respond to demand for change in women’s clothing.

In her article titled “Athletic Fashion, Punch, and the Creation of the New Woman”, Tracy J.R. Collins suggests that in the fifteen years which she defines as encompassing the *fin de siècle* (1885–1900) Punch took a particular interest in the New Woman’s clothing, increasingly depicting her wearing figure-hugging clothing that showed off her form (310). In showing the New Woman thus, Collins argues that “Punch unintentionally created a liberating picture of women while simultaneously using its captions and border texts to make the New Woman’s body signify the anxieties patriarchal culture had about her social personality and politics” (309). Collins suggests that an increase in women’s sporting activities can be directly attributed to the rise of the New Woman. Some periodicals of the late nineteenth century showed the New Woman as being increasingly sporty, often being depicted riding a bicycle or playing tennis or shuttlecock, participating in mountaineering and alpine sports such as ski-ing. Collins writes that:

Punch rarely missed a chance to depict the New Woman as athletic, either by drawing a woman in some form of athletic clothing or by having her engaged in some sort of athletic activity. Between 1885 and 1900 there are no fewer than 200 cartoons and drawings that identify the New Woman by this particular clothing. (310)

Whilst Collins argues that Punch viewed the New Woman as a “comic fictional figure” (312), new leisure and sports industries thought otherwise, seizing on the commercial potential of a new buying audience for sports clothing, adapting bicycle dress, mountaineering boots, shoes, clothing, etc., a trend nowhere marked so sensationally perhaps, as through the risqué introduction of “Bloomers” which split women into “ladies” (non-bloomers wearing) and “women” (some of whom did). In her reminiscences of her Cambridge childhood, the artist Gwen Raverat recalls men and women cycling in the 1890s, writing that “real ladies” did not wear bloomers. “I only saw a woman once, (not, of course, a lady) in real bloomers” (238). Cycling magazines of the late nineteenth century such as the still-running Cycling magazine and wider sports periodicals such as The Sporting Gazette and The Sporting Times increasingly

carried advertising for new, comfortable cycling and sports costumes for the sportswoman. In an 1896 article titled “Women and Sport: A Retrospect”, Florence Baillie-Grohman suggested that the sporting woman, was, in fact, not “New”, but had been in existence at least since the 11th Century (287). N. G. Bacon, in an article entitled “Our Girls A-Wheel” published on 2nd January 1897, argued that in cycling, a woman’s “cares of her liliputian world, with the cobwebs of the brain, are swept away in the tide of quickened, oxygenated blood that courses through the veins in response to the new spirit of breath and action” (219).

Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, adolescent girls’ magazines such as The Girls’ Own Paper published a series of articles written and illustrated by Edward Whymper celebrating the achievements of lady travellers and mountaineers, Lucy Walker and Elizabeth Le Blond being the subject of his article “Two Lady Alpine Climbers” which appeared in the issue of the Girls’ Own Paper dated 12 December 1885.⁹ The feats of these two women, he wrote:

have both astonished the natives and caused a feeling of wonder, sometimes not unmixed with apprehension in the minds of those who were brought up in the more sober and cautious school of the last generation. (164)

Whymper is also mentioned in an advertisement entitled “Young Women in Switzerland” in the edition of The Woman’s Signal of 15 March, 1894 which communicated a radical opportunity for “a great holiday gathering of young men and women and their friends” (175) in the Swiss Alps, to include lectures by Edward Whymper and a paper on the experiences of a lady journalist, Miss Freiderichs (175), the latter of which reflected a growing interest by young women in journalism as a means of earning a living. To offset this egalitarianism other magazines celebrated the importance of traditional household skills for women. In the edition of the Girl’s Own Paper published on 5 June 1881, there is a lengthy article entitled “The Girl’s Own Exhibition”, which celebrates an exhibition of girls’ craftwork which ends with an exhortation to girls not to forget these skills. The exhibition included:

English essays, drawing and illuminating, plain needlework, (night shirts), crochet shawls and sailors’ bags. We encourage girls and young women to try their skills in the respective

⁹ In this article, Whymper refers to Elizabeth le Blond by one of her earlier married names, ‘Mrs Burnaby’.

departments and to supply articles that would be valuable for hospital patients. (616)

Thus does the literature of the 1890s illustrate the ambiguity of the New Woman, a position which is also reflected in women's mountaineering during the period. Striving for change, the New Woman is often depicted as caught between two worlds, the old and the new, as Sarah Grand explored in her short story "The Story of Evadne", serialised in the Woman's Herald between April and May 1893. Grand tells the story of a nineteen-year-old girl, Evadne Fraling, who initially resists marriage to an older man because of his persistent infidelity. When her mother writes her an impassioned plea, on the grounds that the reputation of the family (and her sisters' marriages) will be compromised by Evadne's stubbornness, Evadne consents, marrying the older Major Colquhoun but not entering into marital relations with him. George Gissing's novel The Odd Women (1893) is another exploration of the ambiguities facing the New Woman. Gissing's juxtapositioning of the modernism of Rhoda Nunn with her ambitions for women's economic independence sits uneasily with the hoped-for and eventual marriage of Monica Madden but perfectly illustrates the tensions between traditional Victorianism and the ambitions of the new order. Gissing's portrayal of the Madden sisters' father is a powerful reminder of the paternalism and andro-centricism of the Victorian age as are his ambitions for his three daughters: "as to training them for any path save those trodden by English ladies of the familiar type, he could not have dreamt of any such thing". (3) These tensions also exist within women's mountaineering in the same period as illustrated in the development of women's mountaineering sororities in the early twentieth century within which modernism and conservatism jostle for space and identity, a point to which I return later in this thesis.

The women mountaineers discussed in this chapter demonstrate the cultural duality of the *fin de siècle* and illustrate the extent to which women's mountaineering straddles the emerging critique of the fading Victorian social order as evidenced in theoretical and literary considerations of the New Woman. Two women mountaineers who I suggest embody the ambiguities and contradictions of the ideology of the New Woman within women's mountaineering in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are Gertrude Bell and Elizabeth Le Blond. The next section of this chapter seeks to contextualise their mountaineering within New Woman discourse.

“Seven new peaks – one of them first-class and four very good””: Gertrude Bell

In this section I consider the extent to which the *fin de siècle* mountaineer Gertrude Bell personifies the tensions between the competing elements of conservatism and modernism in women’s mountaineering in the period. I refer to her diaries, letters and H. V. Winstone’s biography of Bell to explore the extent to which Bell managed the collision between Victorian values and the freedom which she sought to secure for herself through her mountaineering.

Gertrude Bell was born into a wealthy, middle-class family in the north-east of England, and was encouraged to read widely from an early age. Although not offered the same expensive and elite education as her brother, she was given free rein of her industrialist father’s extensive library and indulged in her academic ambitions by her father and step-mother Lady Florence Bell, herself a published author. Bell grew into a voracious and wide-ranging reader with particular interests in geography, classical literature, modern and ancient languages and was accepted for a university education at Oxford at a time when women’s higher education was rare. She achieved first-class honours and went on to become a world expert in Arabic languages, archaeology and culture. Lady Bell acknowledged her step-daughter’s polymathic brilliance in the introduction to her edited edition of Bell’s letters, writing that they did not just demonstrate her prodigious ability for correspondence but also showed her exuberant spirit and academic excellence:

She was able at the close of a day of exciting travel to toss down a complete account of it on to paper for her family, often covering several closely written quarto pages. And for many years she kept a diary as well [...] From 1919 onwards the confidential detailed letters of many pages, often written day by day took its [the diary’s] place [...] Besides these home letters she found time for a large and varied correspondence with friends. (xi)

The letters, Lady Bell wrote, “show such an amazing range of many-sided ability [...] Scholar, poet, historian, archaeologist, art critic, mountaineer, explorer, gardener, naturalist, distinguished servant of the State, Gertrude was all of these and was recognised by experts as an expert in all” (xii).

Winstone observes that the Bell family clung onto a “conflicting order of social priorities” (99), a conflict observed in the way in which Bell was treated by her parents. Whilst they allowed Bell extensive freedom to further her scholarly interests, supporting her in her academic ambitions at Oxford in addition to indulging her wish for extensive

travel, they maintained a close, albeit an arms' length, proprietary involvement in her affairs. Bell also appears to have exercised judicious diplomacy in her freedom, keeping her parents fully informed in ebullient letters home, as instanced when she wished to travel to Petra and wrote to them: "I would telegraph to ask your permission but there's no telegraph nearer than Jericho"! (Winstone 102).

In mountaineering as in her academic, linguistic and diplomatic work, Gertrude Bell excelled, despite not embarking on her first climb until 1899, at the age of 31. Her mountaineering career was brief, occurring over the four years 1899-1902. It was characteristic of what Lady Bell described as her "many-sided ability" that Bell became a highly skilled mountaineer very quickly. Winstone points out that she did not climb to make any feminist point. He suggests that:

She was no early feminist, indeed she disliked and distrusted her own sex, seldom missing an opportunity to comment on their ineptness or their unfitness to engage in those activities which were better left to men. (130)

This is evidenced in Bell's letters to her parents. She was, in fact, an ardent anti-suffragist, disdaining the more radical, poorly dressed and "ruffian" elements of the suffragist movement as unbecoming to their sex. Her letters and diaries bear frequent references to her anti-suffrage activities as in the following sentence which appears in a letter to her father written from London sometime between January and April 1908. "Then I flew off to an anti suffrage Council meeting – very well attended, very encouraging and very good speeches". Bell's descriptions of some of the women suffragists portray them almost in an animalistic light, as in the following example from a letter to her father dated 28 March 1913:

Last night I went to a delightful party at the Glenconners' and just before I arrived (as usual) 4 suffragettes set on Asquith and seized hold of him. Whereupon Alec Lawrence in fury seized 2 of them and twisted their arms till they shrieked. Thereat one of them bit him in the hand till he bled and bled. And when he told me the tale there he was steeped in his gore. (Bell Letter, 28 March 1913)¹⁰

Bell would have concurred, perhaps, with the author of the anonymous article entitled "The Whole Duty of Woman" which suggests that "had the pioneers of the movement [women's suffrage] been prepossessing and prettily gowned, there is no doubt [...] that

¹⁰ Extracts from Bell's letters and diaries are drawn from Newcastle University's online archive and are referenced parenthetically by a brief description. Further information is in the list of Works Cited.

men would have been clearer-eyed to see the necessity of upholding the rights of women” (338).

Sandra Stanley Holton suggests women anti-suffragists argued that politics could not be the business of women, as the world of politics fell within the separate, public sphere of men and only men had the necessary physical strength and force of character to conduct affairs of state. “The state”, she writes, “could be no business of women because it rested, finally, upon the exercise of physical force. Women could never provide the stern hand needed for government” (13). This was not the case where Bell was concerned. Her letters and diaries evidence her support and admiration for the early twentieth-century politics of the British Empire as shown in letters where she talks enthusiastically of a united, English-governed Protestant Ireland and in later extensive correspondence relating to her well-researched role as a major diplomatic player during the campaign for a British-supported candidature for the leadership of the new state of Iraq in the 1910s. It is not hard to depict Bell as an exemplar of the New Woman, whether writing about her Eastern diplomacy or her mountaineering. She retained, as Cicely Williams observes, “Paris frock, Mayfair manners” (78) throughout all aspects of her life, including her mountaineering but was also aware of her myriad abilities and saw no reason why her sex should limit her potential. The sentiments expressed in the quotation attributed to Sarah Grand (“I should disapprove as strongly as anyone, of women undertaking any duties which would make them unwomanly”) could apply to Bell. She conducted herself rigidly within the cultural parameters of the age. Whether in the Arabian Desert or on an alpine ascent, these sensibilities did not leave her.

Once Bell had tried mountaineering she saw no reason why she should not excel at it and set herself to do so. Her character was such, as Winstone suggests, that “if she found an equal footing on mountains and in deserts, or in academic life, it was not because she demanded any special ‘rights’ or fought any battles of emancipation, but because in her own view she merited the freedoms that were accorded her” (130). Bell’s writing is highly descriptive and very detailed but unlike the writing of Henriette D’Angeville which gives much insight into her feelings and emotions when ascending Mont Blanc, Bell’s writing is almost devoid of personal emotion, focusing instead on communicating description and detail. I conjecture that Bell disdained more emotive writing because she did not perceive the need to write in this vein – why should she seek to justify and explain her emotions and motives? For Bell the most important thing was to capture the moment of success rather than a detailed description of her feelings. I also suggest that she may have associated personal, more emotive reflection with the

less positive characteristics of her sex as can be seen in her recording of the disdain and contempt she felt towards emotional tendencies in the women suffragists.

Bell's diaries record that after concluding a round-the-world journey with her brother Maurice in 1897 at the Hautes Alpes in France, Bell walked up to a high level mountain refuge and stayed the night, coming down the next day determined to return and engage in some serious mountaineering. In August 1899 at the age of 31 Bell travelled with friends to the Dauphiné Alps for a walking holiday. Her diary entry for 24 August 1899 shows that she appears to have decided on the spur of the moment to take up mountaineering after conversing with another woman mountaineer. If this other woman could do it, why not herself? "The Meije", she wrote, "is looking splendid. It has been done 3 days running, yesterday by a German woman with whom I talked after dinner. Snow and rock said to be perfect – I must have a shot at it!" (Bell Diary, 24 August 1899). Bell hired a guide and then set off. Her diary entry for 26 August shows her confidence and assurance in her ability to succeed in the ascent:

A long walk up the moraine, then up the glacier cutting steps. I fell over and let a stone down on my head, but Marius caught me. Reached the Col at 8.15 and slept for an hour there. Rather done. Got down to the Chatelleret at 11 quite fresh. No rope. (Bell Diary, 26 August 1899)

Bell went on to ascend the Pic de la Meije in the French Dauphiné mountains. In August 1900 she returned to the French Alps to traverse the Grépon and Dru, both classic climbs and at the time very rarely climbed by women. In the mountains Bell took her place assuredly alongside men (as she did within a fraternity of diplomats, politicians, tribal elders and fellow archaeologists in the East) with never a question that she should not do so or ever doubting that she lacked the technical expertise. There is a comparison to be made between herself and Henriette D'Angeville in terms of their shared self-confidence, never-doubted ability and certainty that they would succeed. The following extract is from a diary entry Bell made on Friday 3 August 1900. Her writing is highly descriptive and punchy, making use of short sentences. Her narrative is almost breathless in its enthusiasm to communicate the scene. In this extract there is a reference to her mending her skirt, showing that she climbed with what Dorothy Pilley was to refer to in Climbing Days as the "emblem of respectability" (121):

Off at 5 French time. The Dru the Grepon and the Geant all clear. Very exciting walking up the Mer de Glace and seeing all the famous things, Requin, Verte, Jardin, Glacier Talefor and so on. Up the glacier, then a long broken serac on the top of which we put on the rope. A snowy good

glacier, then a long pacte de neige, from which the Aiguille du Geant showed finely, then the Col at 12.15 and down to the Refugio Torina. A nice Frenchman and a girl, I think Italian, whom I passed on the road are sleeping here also. Italian side very steep and fine. Mont Blanc standing up to the right and Courmayeur below. Lunched, slept on the rocks, mended my skirt and looked at the Dauphine peaks with the others' guide, Damarquille's uncle - Alphonse is all the name I know. Cold wind but very fine. (Bell Diary, 3 August 1900)

In 1901 Bell travelled to Rosenlai in the Swiss Alps, having booked her guides. She appears to have been intent on claiming for herself as many ascents by a woman as she could, demonstrating a highly competitive spirit which appears to be at odds with Grand's concept of the "womanly" New Woman. On 21 August 1901, Bell wrote a letter to her "Dearest Father", keeping her parents up to date with her intentions and expressing her delight at being in the mountains again:

We've lost no time in getting up into alps, have we! I have Fuhrer with me and a younger brother of his, Heinrich, also a guide. He seems as nice and civil as the elder brother and I think I shall do very well with them. Fuhrer was up the Finsteraarhorn yesterday and says the snow is in fine order. We have a great plan of doing it up a new arete which has not been done before. We shall probably try that next if the good weather lasts. They have had a great deal of rain and snow lately so with good luck I may just come in for a fine spell. It's perfectly enchanting to be among mountains again. (Bell Letter, 21 August 1901)

Bell's ebullience of spirits and single-mindedness are similar to those shown by D'Angeville in her Mont Blanc preparations but her diary entry of 22 August, 1901 is devoid of personal emotion, her writing is factual, the sentences staccato-like and urgent as if she is racing to record them whilst the moment is fresh. Dorothy Pilley was later to write about the importance of writing up diary entries whilst the experiences were immediate, even if the need for food and rest was paramount. Bell's diary entry of 22 August is written in the tone of someone who has just returned, exhausted, from a climb, the sentences brief and curt:

Left the hut at 2.15, perfectly clear and starry with some foolish lightning away in the east. Walked up an arete to the Dossen Sattel 3.15. Down a couloir cutting some steps and across the head of the Rosenloui glacier.

The east was white, at 4.30 we reached the Wetterkessel at the foot of the ascent and put out our lanterns. Up snow not steep, to the Wellhornsattel 5.20 where we rested 15 minutes and eat. Up snow again and reached the Wetterhornsattel at 6.20, the sun came red on the Wetterhorn and rushed down the slopes about 1/2 hour before we got there. Magnificent view of the Schreckhorn, the Metternich, the Eiger and the Jungfrau. 6.25 up the last snow aretes, very steep, and got to the top at 7-7.20: it consists of a snow cornice. (Bell Diary, 22 August 1901)

On 8 September 1901, Bell wrote a long letter to her father listing her alpine successes of this trip. The following extract from this letter shows her enthusiasm and technical aptitude for mountaineering in addition to a desire to summit as many peaks as possible. Again, she writes in the manner of someone who is breathless and excited. There is no sense of a narrative being deliberately and slowly crafted, the words tumble out:

I don't think I ever had two more delightful alpine days. Today is a resting day, for which we are not sorry. Tomorrow I go over to Grindelwald; the weather looks quite settled. Wednesday up to the hut from whence on Wed. night we try the Finsteraarhorn arete. If we do it we sleep at another hut on Thursday night, and at the Grimsel on {Saturday} Friday and Saturday. Sunday night we bivouac under the Lauteraarhorn and Monday try the arete to the Schreckhorn. Probably I would leave for England on Tuesday. This is all if the weather holds. If it doesn't I should come home sooner. I shall stay a night or two at 95 and if Aunt Maisie will have me, go to her for a night or two and then to the Pollocks.

I am very sorry to leave this nice place. It has been great fun and I have thoroughly enjoyed my peaks and my Colliers. What do you think is our fortnight's bag?

2 old peaks

7 new peaks - one of them first class and 4 others very good

1 new saddle, also first class.

The traverse of the Engelhorn also new and first class.

That's not bad going, is it! (Bell Letter, 8 September 1901)

Bell was keen to be the best mountaineer she was capable of being, a desire which was entirely in character, aiming as she did to excel in everything. The reference to a “fortnight’s bag”, also shows a competitive streak in her mountaineering which accompanied her keen-ness to achieve as much as possible. Whilst she was embarking on what showed every sign of being an illustrious mountaineering career in the European Alps, the American mountaineers Fanny Bullock Workman and Annie Peck were competing with each other to achieve the women’s altitude record, using the press to claim and counter-claim, until the New York Times proclaimed in Workman’s favour in 1911 (Brown 197). Bell was aware of the rivalry between the two American women and – I suggest – probably aspired to beat Workman’s record.

In July 1902 Bell travelled to the Swiss Alps for what was to be her last alpine season although she did not know this at the time. She wrote a letter to Lady Bell on 8 July 1902, telling her of her journey to Rosenlauri, writing of her pleasure at being recognised for her mountaineering achievements:

I had a most luxurious journey. [...] I must tell you that the guard on the train of the Brunnig line asked me if I were the Miss Bell who had climbed the Engelhorn last year. This is fame. There is another climbing woman here, Frl. Kuntze, very good indeed but she is but not very well pleased to see me [...] Tomorrow we propose to do a new rock [...] The flowers are entrancing. (Bell Letter, 8 July 1902)

Bell and her guides planned to climb the Finsteraarhorn by its – at that time – unclimbed north-east face, but were driven back by appalling weather and snow conditions after two and a half days out on the mountain. On her safe return Bell wrote long, descriptive, dramatic accounts of the attempt in her diary on 1 and 2 August 1902 and in letters to her parents on 6 August 1902. Cicely Williams describes these diary entries and letters to her parents as “the most dramatic and colourful” accounts that any mountaineer can ever have written” (80). Bell’s colourful, tense and exciting narratives of 1 and 2 August are some of the most explicit and insightful descriptions of mountaineering in women’s mountaineering life-writings of the period of the *fin de siècle* as can be seen from the following extract from her diary entry of 1 August. The danger, cold and discomfort are keenly described:

I fixed the extra rope but cd not hold on to it and called out to H. I was going to fall. In another minute we were both headlong down the couloir. Ulrich put the point of the axe in a crack and held us all up. I came to my

feet directly I felt the rope, caught Heinrich and the axes and we cut ourselves up. He said he wd not have believed he cd have held us up there. The wind and cold were bitter - we shivered all day. The snow rose round us in clouds and we saw the birth of avalanches. (Bell Diary, 1 August 1902)

Her diary entries of 1 and 2 August were written on Sunday 3 August 1902 whilst she was recuperating from frost-bite to her feet, a consequence which summarily ended her short mountaineering career. In her diary entry of 3 August she makes a reference to the achievements of the American mountaineer, Annie Peck:

Stayed in bed till 4 and wrote to Father. Then up and had tea with Mr Campbell who told me the astonishing tale of Miss Peck the American editor, the Ostler, the Matterhorn and Mont Blanc. Saw my guides U. [Ulrich] looked awfully tired. So was I. Swollen feet. (Bell Diary, 3 August 1902)

On Bell's safe return she contravened one of the alpine codes in delivering a damning verdict on one of her guides, Heinrich Fuhrer, in her letter of 6 August to her parents, claiming that he had lost his nerve on the ascent. Winstone notes that in doing this Bell was speaking in disrespectful fashion "of one of the most distinguished and courageous of Swiss guides" (118). It was an unwritten rule in mountaineering etiquette at this time – when access to the mountains was dependent on attaining guides who in turn depended on the livelihood that mountaineering brought them – that guided parties did not publicly criticise their guides and Bell had breached that understanding.

Although Gertrude Bell had failed to conquer the Finsteraarhorn, her courage and competence had won her such accord and respect in the mountaineering fraternity that she was invited to join an expedition to the Indian Himalaya, a highly unusual honour for a woman mountaineer. However, due to the frostbite she sustained during her attempt on the Finsteraarhorn, Bell decided to draw her mountaineering career to a close and thereafter put her considerable energies and abilities into the world of Arabian politics, archaeology and the deserts of Arabia. In 1903 she made plans to travel out to Persia. As Winstone notes, Bell had reached, "to all intents and purposes the end of her climbing career" (128). Winstone provides a postscript to her attempt on the Finsteraarhorn written by her guide Ulrich Fuhrer, brother of Heinrich, who in 1907 wrote a letter to the Alpine Club, acknowledging that all the honour of the Finsteraarhorn attempt belonged to Bell. "Had she not been full of courage and determination we must have perished" (qtd. in Winstone 116). In 1926, the year of her

death, Colonel Strutt, the Chairman of the Alpine Club wrote an “In Memoriam” notice for the Alpine Journal, which made reference to Fuhrer’s letter. Strutt wrote that:

Everything that she undertook, physical or mental, was accomplished so superlatively well, that it would indeed have been strange if she had not shone on a mountain as she did in the hunting field or desert [...] to this day her guide and companion Ulrich Fuhrer [...] speaks with an admiration of her that amounts to veneration. He told the writer, some years ago, that of all the amateurs, men or women, he had travelled with, he had seen but very few to surpass her in technical skills and none to equal her in coolness, bravery and judgement. (qtd. in Winstone 127)

Despite the brevity of Gertrude Bell’s mountaineering career, her place in the history of women mountaineers is assured. She had made her point: she had proved to herself that she could excel at mountaineering once she had set herself to do so. She also showed beyond doubt that she could compete with, equal and better the best of women mountaineers at that time and I have no doubt that if she had not sustained frostbite to her feet from the attempt on the Finsteraarhorn that she would have gone on to challenge Gertrude Bullock Workman’s altitude record. Winstone suggests that women who were “intelligent and intrepid enough to seek recognition in a world designed by men” (128) should reach out and take every opportunity to do so and this is what Bell succeeded in doing. She was gifted, indulged, wealthy and well placed to take advantage of her own abilities to excel in what was predominantly a man’s world. Her life-writings reflect a supreme self-confidence in herself and her abilities, marking her out as a woman who exemplifies the modern aspirations of women in the *fin de siècle* period. Bell’s modernism was, however, contradictory. She abhorred the political ambitions of a specific faction of the women’s suffrage movement, yet made an exception of herself by entering the world of international politics and diplomacy. Bell’s style of mountaineering and that of her mountaineering life-writing brings a new cadence to women’s mountaineering life-writing which in its confidence and optimism ushers in a new typology of woman mountaineer sure of her ability to succeed.

“Stop her climbing mountains! She is scandalising all London”: Elizabeth le Blond:

The twice-widowed Elizabeth Le Blond (1862-1945), also known as Mrs Burnaby and Mrs Main, had money, beauty and an independent nature which enabled her –

as she acknowledges in her memoirs Day in, Day Out, a book defined in her own words as more of a “volume of reminiscences which does not pretend to be a biography” (137) – “to travel, learn to climb mountains and spend time doing “interesting things” (17). Le Blond writes that as a child she was “fired” by her mother’s readings from Edward Wimper’s Scrambles in the Alps, particularly by the “vigour and picturesqueness of his writing and draughtsmanship” (87). In common with other women and men who had taken to the hills in search of medicinal and spiritual health, Le Blond’s first experience of the Alps occurred in the 1880s as a result of orders from doctors: cold, clear air, taken at altitude, they urged, would help her counteract her family’s tendency towards lung disorders such as tuberculosis. She writes that “Interlaken was considered suitable. So with a girl friend I set out and saw for the first time those glacier-clad Alpine ranges which were to mean so much to me for the rest of my life” (30). In an article entitled “Alpine Climbing Past and Present” published in The Badminton Magazine, Le Blond wrote of the many benefits which mountaineering afforded women, suggesting that “it affords the body and mind opportunities to overcome difficulties or because of the greater health it brings, or because it is an opportunity to exist in beautiful scenery and because it tends to call forth our best qualities – self-reliance, alertness of mind, calmness in moments of danger, infinite patience” (17-18), comments which accord with those of the writer of “Mountaineering in the Tyrol: Turning a Corner”.

Elizabeth Le Blond writes that she relished the physical discomfort which often accompanied mountaineering, writing gaily of an attempt by herself and a girl-friend to climb in the French Alps:

We young people [...] bought alpenstocks [...] on which, after each excursion was burnt the record of our accomplishment [...] Our boots were pulp, our stockings wet sponges, our skirts sodden [...] By that time we were altogether reckless, and did not hesitate to ask, ‘Why not go to the top of Mont Blanc tomorrow’? (87-90)

By the summer of 1882, Le Blond had gained more mountain experience and importantly, for a woman of her privileged background, some humility. She noted, “a supreme debt of gratitude to the mountains for knocking from me the shackles of conventionality” (90), realising that she could, in fact “do without a maid, and it was not until one of the species had incessant hysteria, whenever I returned late from an expedition, that I gained my independence of all assistance” (90). Le Blond may have

learned to dispense with the services of a maid but she still had to face her family's disapproval of her mountaineering. She writes:

My mother faced the music on my behalf when my grand-aunt, Lady Bentinck, sent out a frantic SOS. 'Stop her climbing mountains! She is scandalising all London and looks like a Red Indian!' For I was usually copper-coloured when I returned to England after a series of ascents. (90)

In writing about one of her early mountaineering forays Le Blond notes that a "stern uncle was very stern indeed, and the tear-stained visage of my fellow-transgressor bore visible witness to it" (90).

Le Blond was not dissuaded by her relatives' disapproval and went on to make two ascents of Mont Blanc in one of her early alpine seasons. Despite the reservations towards women's mountaineering within the membership of the Alpine Club, Le Blond – with her aristocratic and wealthy antecedents – was able to cut through the misogyny of the Alpine Club and the wider mountaineering fraternity to be honoured by a mention in the Alpine Journal in 1883, receiving a vociferous accolade about her alpine achievements. Le Blond notes that the Journal "electrified me by referring to in its issue of May, 1883, as 'this unparalleled series of ascents executed by a lady which will form one of the most brilliant chapters in the history of winter mountaineering'" (91). Other women mountaineers were not so lucky. Meta Brevoort, as David Mazel points out submitted an article to the Alpine Journal in 1872 which was "carefully written to conceal the author's sex" (42) and published under her nephew, W. A. B. Coolidge's name.

As Mrs Main, Elizabeth Le Blond contributed to a chapter on clothing in the Badminton Library's book on equipment and outfits, Mountaineering, written by C. T. Dent, a member of the Alpine Club and others. Dent recorded his "indebtedness" to Mrs Main (Le Blond) for this section of his chapter. Le Blond's suggestions enabled Dent to include a commentary in his chapter "Equipment and Outfit" on suitable attire for lady mountaineers. Consequently, Dent's description of suitable women's mountaineering clothing – under a subheading of "Climbing outfit for ladies" – is one of the fullest accounts on women's mountaineering clothing in *fin de siècle* mountaineering literature. After soberly noting that "women who climb should, like men, dress in such a manner that they are protected from extremes of either heat or cold" (50) Dent goes on to suggest that skirts "should be made perfectly plain [...] When climbing, the skirt must, whatever its length, be looped up, and therefore it is easy to have a skirt which, in the valleys or towns, does not look conspicuous" (50-51). He goes

on to include instructions about belts, underskirts, knickerbockers, bodices, hats, which should be “light grey felt” (51), woollen stockings, a “large silk handkerchief” – for securing hats in a wind – gloves, underclothes and boots (51-52). At the least, Dent’s inclusion of a section on ladies’ clothing demonstrates a more progressive attitude towards women mountaineers in some quarters of the Alpine Club. As long as lady mountaineers dressed modestly – showing a respect for conservatism whilst pursuing their progressive aims – they would be accorded some respect by elements of the mountaineering fraternity.

By the 1880s, the achievements of lady mountaineers were being reported nationally in newspapers and periodicals as mountaineering became more popular amongst ladies of leisure and increasingly accepted by late Victorian society as a respectable activity for ladies. The Derby Mercury reported anonymously on 22 October 1884 in its column “The Household” under a heading “Lady Mountaineers”, that “Ladies are again to the fore. Mrs Jackson has achieved one of the most perilous and difficult ascents – that of the Dent Blanche” (6). The Western Mail in Cardiff wrote on 20 July 1882 about “Ladies’ Feats in the Alps”, informing its readers that a Mrs Farrar had successfully ascended the Matterhorn adding “yet another to the long list of Alpine feats performed by the sex popularly believed to be the weaker” (3). The unknown reporter is almost blasé about this achievement, noting that “of late years, lady climbers have multiplied [...] similarly stirring achievements of the fair sex are recorded every year” (3). The weekly Women’s Penny Paper in its column headed “Current News About Women” on 28 September 1889 stated that “Lady mountaineers have a great advantage in their lightness and agility. One lady has performed the feat of climbing, in one day, the five peaks of Monte Rosa” (2). In a column entitled “People, Places and Thing” written by The Cricket, for Hearth and Home: An Illustrated Weekly Journal for Gentlewomen on 14 September 1899. The Cricket drew attention to “some of the many lady mountaineers who have distinguished themselves” (704) including Lucy Walker and Elizabeth Le Blond.

In the supplement to the Manchester Times the paper reported that the women’s magazine The Queen had published a brief article entitled “Women as Alpine Climbers” on 6 June 1885 which gave a cautious endorsement to women’s mountaineering. “It is enough”, the journalist wrote, “to show that, given a steady foot, a calm head and a constitution suited to walking, the delights of mountaineering are open to women” (4). However, the writer continued, they felt “bound to offer one word of warning. It is by no means every woman who is fitted for the exertion of mountaineering” (4). The

seeming growing acceptance of women mountaineers in late Victorian society did not, however, represent a consensus in approval. The anonymous editor of *Cycling* magazine, who described himself as a “tame misogynist” in his editorial for the edition dated 12 October 1895, mourned that it had been his “lot to be thrown into the company of many ladies in mountaineering expeditions and to have suffered at times from the collapse of a fair member, who, an hour before, proclaimed herself perfectly fresh” (1). “Women”, he noted, “are more prone to over-exert themselves than men, for in them, indeed, the spirit is strong but the flesh weak” (1).

Women’s mountaineering life-writings, together with varied reportage of women’s mountaineering in a range of newspaper and periodicals throughout the nineteenth century demonstrate a myriad of approaches to the inscription of women’s mountaineering, in addition to providing an evolving commentary on the changing role of women. This commentary is many-sided and positions itself against the prevailing consensus that a woman’s position was in the home. Nineteenth-century women’s mountaineering thus develops across a huge continuum, commencing with Dorothy Wordsworth’s journal-based narratives which locate her and other mountain women as active members both in their domestic and environmental landscapes. Rebecca Brown has suggested that contemporary feminist discourse “often seeks to put the relationship of women and nature in less confrontational, more harmonious terms” (191), but this chapter has shown that this interpretation of the relationship between women and mountains is only one theme in nineteenth-century women’s mountaineering discourse. Almost forty years on from Dorothy Wordsworth’s early feminist ecology, the memoir of Henriette D’Angeville urges other women mountaineers to put their “feminine stamp” on mountaineering and to start to inscribe a mountaineering literature of their own. At a mid point in the continuum Mrs Cole, Mrs Freshfield and Lucy Walker find ways of engaging in adventurous travel and mountaineering which are acceptable to the culturalised sensibilities of the middle-to-late Victorian period. At the end of the century sits the New Woman, a feminist challenger who seeks to straddle conservative, gendered views of a woman’s place alongside a fledgling modernism which itself illustrates wider ambiguities in New Woman discourse. The letters and diaries of Gertrude Bell show something of these ambiguities, embracing Sarah Grand’s womanliness alongside an unwomanly desire to be the best. Rebecca Brown suggests that the “imagery and language” of late nineteenth century women mountaineers take on something of the masculine mantle of their male counterparts, imbuing their style with a “cry for battle and conquest with the same vigour” as the men (191). Whilst the life-

writing of Gertrude Bell is vigorous and shows an appetite for conquest, the style is her own, hewn from her supreme self-confidence in her ability to succeed in everything she turns her hand to.

The “feminine stamp” in mountaineering in the nineteenth century is thus diverse, illustrating various approaches to inscribing women’s mountaineering throughout the century, moving from the self-confident and determined voice of Henriette D’Angeville to the more self-effacing “stamp” of mid-Victorian women mountaineers and ends in the *fin de siècle* with the discourse of the New Woman mountaineers Gertrude Bell and Elizabeth Le Blond. The Victorian mountaineer Alfred Mummery, responding to the growing number of women mountaineers, observed in his book *My Climbs in the Alps and Caucasus*, that “all mountains appear doomed to pass through the three stages: an accessible peak – the most difficult ascent in the Alps – an easy day for a lady” (113). Mummery’s phrase summarises the changes and gains in women’s mountaineering by the end of the nineteenth century, but there were still battles that women had to win, not the least of which was, as Johanna Alberti suggests, the “one especial barrier” (267) of women’s suffrage. This chapter has shown that in the field of women’s mountaineering at least, women could challenge the gendered barriers that sought to limit their social and cultural identity as women and as mountaineers and used the written word in diverse ways to inscribe their own experiences. Early twentieth-century women mountaineers like Dorothy Pilley continued to erode the socio-cultural and political barriers which limited women’s horizons and were able to build on the gains which had been made in women’s mountaineering by the end of the nineteenth century, adding their distinctive voices to the evolution of the “feminine stamp”.

In the following chapter I draw on the unpublished and published life-writings of Dorothy Pilley to consider how, in her diaries and memoir she continues to evolve women’s inscribing of their mountaineering in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Chapter 3

“It went down into the very form and fabric of myself”: Dorothy Pilley and the years 1900-1921

This chapter seeks to explore connections between the position of women in the early twentieth century and women’s mountaineering, drawing particularly on the unpublished diaries of Dorothy Pilley. Through readings of selected diaries I will discuss Pilley’s relationship to mountaineering, showing how mountaineering increasingly synonymised freedom from an upbringing she found chafing from early adolescence onwards. I will refer to Johanna Alberti’s discussions of two “streams” of women’s suffrage movements – the “one an effort to break down barriers, the other an effort to expand into fresh life” (267) – to show how mountaineering is used by Pilley and other women to enlarge their horizons beyond the home. Alberti’s observation of the dual-streamed aspirations of the women’s suffrage movement offers a helpful framework which connects women’s mountaineering in the period to the wider socio-economic and cultural landscape within which mountaineering is located. I will argue that women’s mountaineering in the period reflects the ambitions of women suffrage campaigners for wider freedoms beyond suffrage, particularly in women’s mountaineering clubs which seek to expand women’s mountaineering skills in order that they can climb independently from men. The movement towards greater independence in women’s mountaineering is highly significant as it erodes Victorian etiquettes in mountaineering which insisted that women mountaineers had to be accompanied by skilled and trusted men in the form of mountain guides or male members of the family – as was meticulously observed by Lucy Walker and Gertrude Bell.

Few women mountaineers capture the spirit of women’s mountaineering in the early twentieth century better than Dorothy Pilley. Cicely Williams, David Mazel, Bill Birkett, Bill Peascod, Shirley Angell and Rachel da Silva acknowledge her as Britain’s most important woman mountaineer between the two World Wars, seeing her as the embodiment of women’s mountaineering in the period: middle-class, well educated and increasingly politicised in terms of her frustration with her upbringing and its gendered restrictions. The foci of this chapter are the extracts from Dorothy Pilley’s diaries which move my exploration of women’s mountaineering beyond the descriptive, self-assured life-writing of Gertrude Bell into a more personal domain, one which is reminiscent of Henriette D’Angeville’s self-reflective gaze. Paraphrasing Rose and

Douglas' title of their biography of the late twentieth-century mountaineer Alison Hargreaves, Pilley's diaries takes the observer of women's mountaineering into the "regions of her heart" to explore how mountaineering, (as Pilley herself stated in Climbing Days), went "into the very form and fabric of myself" (36). Pilley discovered mountaineering whilst on a walking holiday with an aunt and friend in North Wales in 1914, finding the allure of mountaineering irresistible, seeing it as affording limitless opportunities for escape from domestic and working life. The publication in 1935 of Climbing Days, her mountaineering memoir of the period 1916-1928, brought widespread recognition of her mountaineering achievements, establishing her prominence as the commentator and analyst on women's mountaineering in the inter-war period. Whilst Climbing Days remains a women's mountaineering classic in terms of its importance as a personal memoir and in contextualising women's mountaineering within the wider socio-cultural and political landscapes of the time, it reveals little of Pilley's inner passion for mountaineering. That which is revealed, hints enticingly at deeper felt emotions. For this reason, in their shining of a light on the more private evocations of Pilley's love of mountaineering, her unpublished diaries are important. Their intense, intimate and revealing insights reveal the full extent of her passion for mountaineering.

A Victorian heritage

Born in Camberwell, London, in 1894, Pilley's birth straddled the period of the *fin de siècle* and the height of the discourse around the New Woman which I have discussed in the preceding chapter. She was the eldest of four children born to John James Pilley, a wealthy food manufacturer, industrial chemist, occasional science lecturer and his wife, Annie Maria Young. Pilley's parents exemplified many of the highly gendered values of those born in the middle of the nineteenth century. Diary entries from the period of her adolescence reveal how her upbringing, family values, education and, ultimately, her mountaineering, were shaped by the highly gendered landscape inherited from Victorian Britain.

The feminist and suffragist Sarah Emily Davies who lobbied hard for women's access to university education and became the first mistress of the women-only Girton College in 1869, discusses the social and cultural demarcation of men's and women's roles in Victorian society, the so-called "separate-spheres ideology" (Sandra Stanley Holton 13). In her treatise on women's higher education, The Higher Education of

Women: A Classic Victorian Argument for the Equal Education (1866), Davies

expressed this ideology thus:

The man is intended for the world, woman for the home. Man's strength is in the head, woman's in the heart, the man's function is to protect, woman's is to soothe and comfort [...] closely connected with these separatist doctrines is the double moral code, with its masculine and feminine virtues, and its separate law of duty and honour for either sex.
(12)

In his wide-ranging study The Secret History of Domesticity, Michael McKeon notes that what later became known as “separate spheres” ideology had been constructed over hundreds of years. It was being gradually legitimised through a powerful consensus between Church and State, leading, as he suggests, to a specific sanctifying of the family and marriage (122) which conceptualised the home as a place of harmony and concord. Ben Griffin goes a step further, noting – in relation to the granting of women's suffrage – that “the one issue which dominated all others in political discussions”, was a fear of anything which would “cause discord in the home” (37). McKeon re-visits “separate spheres” ideology, reconstituting it in terms of “indoors” and “outdoors”, and suggests that the “outdoors” was understood to be the realm of commoners in the form of markets, lady-days and outdoor fairs. The cult of the “indoors”, on the other hand, he writes, gave the gentry opportunities to reinforce their distance from the commoner by “indoor privacy, privilege and enclosure” (168).

Victorian mountaineers became adept at appropriating “the outdoors”, reproducing in the apparatus and structure of mountaineering from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards the privileges previously accorded to the “indoors”. I argue that they reconstituted “the outdoors” for their own benefit, legitimising – and limiting – access through organisations and clubs such as the Alpine Club and the Royal Geographical Society. Griffin's recent analysis of “separate spheres” ideology argues that the Victorians were particularly canny at adhering to a “particular kind of domesticity which sought to reconcile the ideals of domestic harmony, marital unity and male authority” (23). The Victorians, he argues, saw the home as the place where these principles would be unified and legitimated and in which women would take their rightful place. This was the ordained future against which Pilley set herself.

In his introduction to an edited collection of Ivor Armstrong Richards' letters, Richard Lockett writes of Pilley's (known to him as “Dorothea”) Victorian upbringing, explaining how she struggled to participate in mountaineering from an upbringing

informed by a culture that did not relax any “of the restrictive bands of the Victorian family” (xiv). Her busy and preoccupied father, often away from home on business, exercised a moral form of discipline, instilling in his children from an early age the importance of regular church attendance, daily exercise and – as I have written in Chapter 1 – of diary writing in terms of promoting moral and physical welfare. Pilley’s mother, a highly strung, nervous woman, totally unsuited to the rigours of house-keeping and domestic management maintained an irregular hold of household affairs, increasingly shrinking from her responsibilities by taking refuge in long shopping trips, sometimes away for days at a time. Her mother’s frequent absences meant that from an early age the young Dorothy became proficient at domestic work, often intervening in domestic crises due to the high turnaround of servants in the Pilley household because of her mother’s growing erratic behaviour and frequent bouts of temper. Her father, whilst loving his wife, found it easier on him and others to indulge her whims, shrugging aside the mental weaknesses in her which later in life were to turn into insanity. In the first volume of her autobiography Traveller’s Prelude, the explorer and mountaineer Freya Stark (1893-1993), a contemporary of Pilley’s, reflects on her parents’ also difficult marriage, analysing it against the gendered-laden backdrop of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, observing that “the Victorians thought to manage it [marriage] through a hierarchy of subjection, taking the Church as their analogy for wedlock” (20).

Adolescence, Education and Profession: 1906-1913

The earliest surviving example of Pilley’s life-writing from Dorothy Pilley Richards and Ivor Armstrong Richards’ Papers is a school-book from 1906, inscribed “Form Lower III, Geography” when she was in attendance at Mary Datchelor’s School for Girls, a charity-endowed girls’ school in London, one of the many endowed schools which were set up for girls at the end of the nineteenth century (Borer 280). Within the pages of her school-book there is an example of her first writing about mountains in the form of a factual account of the geological characteristics of mountains:

The Alps.

The Alps are the great mass of mountains, reaching from the Gulf of Genoa, round the mouth of Italy to the West of the Adriatic Sea. They’re in France, Switzerland, Italy and Austria. These mountains are the

grandest in Europe...Mont Blanc is one of the highest mountains in Europe. (Pilley school-book, 1906)

From 1910-1912 Pilley attended Queenwood, a private girls' school in Eastbourne. Her 1912 diary, written in an A4 Boots Scribbling Diary opens with a list of Christmas presents she received for Christmas 1911. The presents are illustrative of her background and include money, jewellery, music-sheets, books and "motoring grey swede [sic] gloves" (Pilley Diary, 1912). She has meticulously recorded the present-givers and among them there is a reference to "W Ellermann", who gave her "Green Shakespeare, Red Tennyson". This attribution connects Pilley to Winifred Ellermann, known as Bryher, one of the foremost women practitioners of literary modernism.¹¹

In 1912, Pilley's secondary education at Queenwood finished and she reluctantly prepared to go to Germany, for the purposes of "finishing" her education with experiences of German language and culture in common with many young women of her class, experiences which the novelist Elinor Brent-Dyer caricatured in her series of Chalet School novels in the early twentieth century. By 1912 Pilley had established views on what her future should be – a career in horticulture. This aspiration severely clashed with parental expectations, her father by this time having determined that she should train in domestic science in readiness for her intended future as a housewife. In her diary entry for Saturday 13 September 1912, Pilley writes about the difficulty in fighting for the career of her choice, her writing showing her determination to follow a career in the face of immense opposition. She writes: "rather dreading ride with Father for fear of interview about future career. It is so hard to decide definitely for the gardening with everybody against you. However, nothing was mentioned" (Pilley Diary, 13 September 1912).

On visits home from school, Pilley undertook an increasing amount of domestic work, loathing it. On Friday 26 September 1912 she wrote vociferously in her diary that she "did some housework in the morning, am getting quite a good hand at it but can not bring myself to like or even tolerate making beds. I hate it!" (Pilley Diary, 26 September).

Joanna Alberti views middle-class women's desire for a profession as a key component of the "second" stream of suffrage activity in the early twentieth century, arguing that this expression of ambitions beyond suffrage is reflected in a "struggle for

¹¹ Winifred Ellermann was the eldest daughter of the wealthy shipping magnate, Sir John Ellerman. She went on to become the companion of the controversial Modernist poet and novelist H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) and adopted the pseudonym Bryher.

equal opportunities in the professions and in industry” (267). This tussle is frequently referred to by Pilley throughout her 1912 diary, as in the following entry from Saturday 27 September 1912 where she again challenges her father about his domestic aspirations for her:

Down to the bottom again with Father, discuss again the horticultural question. He is much against it, says I shall be closing myself up in a convent and I shall give up all idea of home of my own. I say that it is better to do gardening properly than potter about at half a dozen things, doing nothing thoroughly as many girls do. (Pilley Diary, 27 September 1912).

She reflects on 30 September 1912:

The usual constitutional with Father. I shall go on as a housemaid when I’m hard up for a job and I’m going to Germany for culture – such is life! Father talked logic with me and I saw his side of the Germany question a little but I don’t see what good plenty of enlightenment is to a lady gardener”! (Pilley Diary, 30 September 2012).

On Saturday 19 October 1912, Pilley notes in her diary that she is reading Baroness Orczy’s 1910 novel Petticoat Government, an account of the influence of Madame de Pompadour on the intrigues and policies surrounding the court of Louis XV. Orczy’s account of the most powerful woman of Louis XV’s court places a woman at centre stage as a key protagonist and holder of considerable political power and influence and it itself, portrays a woman who did not conform to the gendered expectations of her age. Whilst Orczy is arguably better known for her novels about her fictional hero the Scarlet Pimpernel, this text takes Orczy into more radical waters. Pilley’s choice of reading here evidences her evolving feminist beliefs and further indicates her intention to challenge the cultural and gendered norms for her sex in the early twentieth century.

Winifred Holtby has pointed out that young, middle-class women such as Dorothy Pilley expected to be “educated, trained and ‘brought out’ to attract husbands and become mothers of children. For this end their interests were limited and carefully detached from permanent absorption in activities which might distract their minds from this main purpose” (129). Pilley’s 1912 diary contains several entries in which she reflects on the subject of sex, having discussed it with close friends. Writing from Germany in her diary on 11 October 1912 she writes of feeling “revulsion” at the thought of marriage:

Having passed the morbid curiosity of adolescence on the questions of sex – we have now entered a period beyond indifference, one in which with perfect calmness we contemplate giving ourselves completely to a man we love. I am certainly more revolted than the other two. (Pilley Diary, 11 October 1912)

Pilley's 1912 and 1913 diaries vacillate between a twin discourse of "outdoors"/horticulture and "indoors"/domesticity. I am reminded here of Rita Felski's discussion of use of the diary as a reflective tool to explore the process of self-awakening and self-realisation – what she refers to as the "feminist Bildungsroman". If we apply Felski's concept of the "feminist Bildungsroman" to Pilley's diary narratives in 1912 and 1913, we can see that Pilley is "the heroine who has to struggle painfully forward by freeing herself from the subordinate role" (137). Pilley's 1912 diary becomes an important tool to explore her own "struggle" for independence

The following diary entry from Sunday 9 January 1913, written during Pilley's nine-month sojourn in Germany, shows her reaction after having read George Meredith's 1885 novel Diana of the Crossways, a novel about a woman trapped in an unhappy marriage who, eventually finding herself free from that marriage, is urged by her close friend into making another one, after a brief period of independence. Pilley writes that Diana unsettled her, creating "a terrible fear of the world and myself. Blind impotent antagonism against things as they are [...] which suddenly overcomes a woman before realisation of its meaning comes". Here she evidences her anger about her relative impotency to challenge her father's will, railing against the cultural influences which seek to constrain women's lives and ambitions.

By June 1913 Pilley had returned to England. Her 1913 and 1914 diaries include frequent commentaries and reflections on an activity which was to largely consume these two years – domestic training. Although she had stubbornly resisted this, she bowed to the inevitable whilst continuing to fight with her father over other issues to do with her increasing desire for independence, as can be seen in the following diary entry from Thursday 27 July 1913:

Father will not hear of my going over to Kensington alone in spite of my pointing out that I shall have to get used to looking after myself sometime. Evening or train I can understand but not by bus or tram amidst a good many people in broad daylight? Still, he does it for my good. (Pilley Diary, 27 July 1913)

Throughout her 1913 diary, there is a counterpoint or secondary theme which runs alongside the main narrative of domesticity – the voice of an aspirant journalist as can be seen in the following diary entry from September:

My first book will be “From Bad to Worse by One Who Knows”. Really though, to-day I have done all the work including potatoes, cooking them, laying table, washing up – who dares say I am not domesticated!
(Pilley Diary, 19th September 1913)

Because of the high turnover of servants in the Pilley household, coupled with the growing frequency of duties left undone by departing maids and increasing difficulty in replacing them, it fell to Pilley to undertake more and more domestic work. Her younger sister, Violet (Vi), away at boarding school, was also expected on each visit home to make up the domestic shortfall as a result of a decline in the numbers of working-class girls entering domestic service in the 1910s. In her introduction to the co-edited collection of her correspondence with Winifred Holtby, Vera Brittain observes the extent to which parents viewed their daughters as an extension to the servants, writing that they tended to regard daughters as “heaven-sent conveniences upon whom ‘duty’ laid the combined functions of nurse, companion, secretary and maid-of-all work” (ix). Pilley’s diary entry for Saturday 27 September 1913 reinforces this:

Did my room, wrote to Miss Donington, dusted the drawing room, practised and did some mending. Then Mother came in after a fruitless search for servants, she was quite desperate. I spent the afternoon sewing for Mother on white pigne which she is suddenly making for me.
(Pilley Diary, 27 September 1913)

In her history of the feminisation of domestic service in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Alison Light writes of the relationship – and tensions – between employers and their servants, taking as her basis Virginia Woolf’s various references to servants in her diaries wherein she wrote about them with a mixture of vexation, spite and affection (26-30). Pilley’s diary entry of Saturday 1 November 1913 describes a specific domestic crisis in the Pilley household but also shows her growing understanding of a situation which, when she was younger, she uncritically accepted and took for granted:

Lizzie has left. She has never been shown any consideration, has been left for days alone – and when we did come home, not a word spoken to her [...] she washed up disgustingly – true – but how she has managed to start us off with early tea, get round the housework...[sic] all washing,

including sheets is beyond my imagination, none of us lifting a hand ...[sic] there is the stiff hate on. It makes me wretched. She called me to the kitchen to show me the things she was taking. (Pilley Diary, 1 November 1913).

This last comment reflects a change in servants' attitudes during the early twentieth century. The taking of items, Light writes, was seen as a way of servants "revenging" themselves on their employers (141).

The relationship between middle-class educated women and the professions particularly exercised the mind and pen of Virginia Woolf who wrote in A Room of One's Own of the difficulties and barriers presented to women hoping to enter into a profession. If only, she wrote, her forebears had:

learnt the great art of making money and had left their money [...] to found fellowships and lectureships and prizes and scholarships [...] we might have been exploring or writing; mooning about the venerable places of the earth; sitting contemplative on the steps of the Parthenon, or going at ten to an office and coming home comfortably at half past four. (25)

In his history of women's horticulture Peter King argues that women knew "in most cases they would either marry or, if working class, become a domestic servant" (12), but marriage was not on Dorothy Pilley's horizon as a young woman. It was imperative to her to achieve financial independence first and foremost and she saw a career in horticulture as a way of achieving this. King writes of the growing interest from 1900 onwards of the perceptions by middle-class and upper middle-class parents that gardening or horticulture could offer a respected career profession for educated young women such as Dorothy Pilley. Despite the existence of respectable and doughtily run women's horticultural colleges such as Waterperry in Oxfordshire and Swanley in Kent, both of which had been established in the late nineteenth century, and benefited from often very generous endowments from wealthy families, Pilley's father put his foot down. It was no use Pilley arguing that, as King writes, the colleges offered one of the rare opportunities for women's of Pilley's class to learn a profession and income. These "settlements of women in different parts of the country for the cultivation of the land and which thus enabled them to add to their incomes by the sale of fruits, flowers, vegetables, poultry, eggs, honey, etc." (9) remained closed to her. Pilley experienced life-long regrets at her father's refusal to contemplate horticulture training for her. Later, in a lengthy monologue at the back of her 1926 diary in an entry dated 24 January

1927 she fully reveals the extent of her continual rebellion against her parents' expectations for her. This highly reflective monologue includes the following observation about how she had continually battled against her parents' wishes:

Everything I have ever done has been expressly against home wishes. When I left school I wanted to become a gardener. I didn't carry it through. I had a great talk with F. in the drawing room in which I was told I should become a cabbage, etc. I am sorry I did not get 3 years horticultural training – with special qualifications, living in the country, out in all weathers as I am now, I know I should have fitted the life, if I had adopted it at 17. (Pilley Diary, 24 January 1927)

“All the morning spent sewing. I am sick of it”: Domestic Training 1913-1914



Fig. 6. Dorothy Pilley, 1913. Unknown photographer. © Magdalene College, University of Cambridge, Box 51.

In September 1913 just before her nineteenth birthday, Pilley enrolled at a London institute which trained young middle-class women in housework and domestic management. She was to spend the period September 1913-December 1914 undergoing thorough and rigorous domestic management training. Emily Davies had written of the problems experienced by the eldest daughters in Victorian households, observing that “they had no distinct functions of their own” (94). However, as potential mistresses of a household they required experience in “government and administration” (94) which Davies perceived to be “the qualifications chiefly necessary for the performance of home duties” (97). This was a powerful argument for an organised and systematic

approach to domestic education as well as a perceived means of gainfully employing the energies of middle-class girls like Dorothy Pilley where in many cases their expectations – unlike Pilley’s – seldom rose above marriage. The two decades subsequent to the publication of Davies’ Argument, not only saw girls’ schools make increasing provision for domestic education but also witnessed the increase of private establishments solely devoted to educating young women in domestic economies as Mary Cathcart Borer, Gaby Weiner and Jane McDermid have written. Domestic training was, as Emily Davies argued, “the best training that the conditions of modern society can supply for the special functions of the mistress of a household” (98).

Pilley’s 1913 diary vividly captures her experiences of domestic training, which contained a mixture of practical domestic science, moral training, theology, literature and art history, reflecting the expectations of the skills and knowledge expected of the mistress of a middle-class household. I quote extracts here from her diary entries from 2- 22 October 1913 because of the insight they provide on the nature and content of the training.

Thursday 2 October

Had my first lesson in laundry work today but had brought nothing to do so went up and did needlework instead. The demonstration was on the removal of stains, a most useful item to know. We had before that class, Divinity with Miss Paull. I suppose the idea is so that she should get into contact personally and also so that we should have some kind of moral training.

Saturday 4 October

Joy, bliss, no dirty work today [...] my eyes very bad and head aches, go therefore shopping with Mother.

Thursday 21 October

All the morning spent sewing. I am about sick of it.

Wednesday 22 October

Spent a good deal of the morning doing those silly samples and while the others were doing hygiene, copied out essay on Egyptian architecture for Mr. Bannister. (Pilley Diary, 2-22 October 1913)

A diary entry for Sunday 26 October shows evidence of Pilley’s evolving awareness of the gendered nature of post-Edwardian cultural politics. Preoccupied as she was with the minutiae of domestic training, her closing comments in this entry demonstrates her

thinking about the challenges involved for women in striving for equality alongside men in the context of an impending war.

Beastly day with a thick fog. I was in a vile temper all day. Things were rather provoking too. I had a racking headache and stayed in to help Mother but she swore at me so much [...] Father and I discussed the rise and fall of nations [...] the futility of women trying to be men's equals. (Pilley Diary, 26 October 1913)

There are some signs that Pilley actually enjoyed elements of her training, such as laundry. Her diary entry for Tuesday 27 January 1914 records her satisfaction in doing it well:

Laundry – my favourite work – so enjoy life – even though my hands get soft, then sore and finally, when dry, very chapped – I care not. It is so satisfactory getting rid of the dirt and seeing, after a lot of bother [...] nice clean things appearing. Getting quite a good ironer. (Pilley Diary, 27 January 1914)

At the end of term Thursday 18 December 1914 Pilley completed her training and concluded that she had found it useful, despite her antagonism towards it:

One by one we are called out to see Miss Paull. My turn comes at last [...] Says she is pleased to see so good a report...Did I like the work? No. Well it was creditable to have done so well. I did think however, that it was a useful course and not a waste of time. (Pilley Diary, 18 December 1914)

“Shall I ever feel a grown up lady”? The First World War, Women's Suffrage and Women's Patriotism

Throughout her final term in domestic training, a 20 year old Dorothy Pilley viewed her future with increasing uncertainty. By October 1914, desperate for some economic independence from her father and very aware of the national catastrophe that was unfolding she devised a scheme to give her both gainful occupation and to assuage her burning wish to be of some help in the forthcoming crisis. I reproduce her diary entries for 1 and 2 October 1914 in detail here as they capture her longing for respite from what Pilley saw as an increasingly constricted home life and a strong desire to “do her share” as a woman. She wrote on 1 October 1914:

I must take the law into my own hands and see if I can be of use – Father assures me I can not and naturally tries to persuade me to go with domestic economy. He means well and is thinking of my future but this I regard as my duty, to help in this time of crisis if I possibly can [...] It means giving up a career for the time being I know, but then how many men have had to give up more than that? [...] What is the use of slinking off in times of need because one is a woman, and why should I not do my share because I'm a girl? Why should I not do my share for my family? I must or I shall never forgive myself. (Pilley Diary, 1 October 1914)

Pilley suggested to her father that she should help with the Wives of Soldiers' and Sailors' Relief Association, a benevolent organisation which gave financial and self-help advice to soldiers' and sailors' wives in cases of hardship, a suggestion he met with ambivalence. Pilley wrote in her diary on 2 October 1914:

Father wants to know whether this scheme of mine to help out at the Wives of Soldiers' and Sailors' Relief Association is one merely to fill up time or a matter of duty. I tell him the latter and somehow feel that this time he really does understand that I shall not be happy – unless I help in this crisis in however small a way. He promises to call and see the lady and there acts fond-papa-of-little-girl. Hear that the visiting he does not wish me to do, thinks I shall come into contact with undesirable things. I guess I ought not to mind. (Pilley Diary, 2 October 1914)

She reflected on her first day at the WSSRA:

Felt sinking in pit of stomach [...] shall I ever feel a grown up lady? [...] At last I found myself seated at the big table with the others – all ladies, and very much not from Camberwell! (Pilley Diary, 8 October 1914).

Her comments about “ladies” here, highlights the fact that upper middle-class and aristocratic ladies were heavily involved in charitable enterprises. In the following entry she positions “ladies” in opposition to the “women” who she is endeavouring to help. On Tuesday 9 October 1914 Pilley noted that her duties also involved:

Stopping (sic) all applicants at the door and if it is their first wait sending them to the first club room [...] I believe the house and the club rooms formerly belonged to the Friendly Society [...] The tragedy is the almost impossibility of seeing anyone in authority – the women have to plunge

through yards of red tape before they can get assistance and sometimes they are starving! (Pilley Diary, 9 October 1914)

In her memoir Testament of Youth, Vera Brittain wrote eloquently of her own experiences of juggling parental expectations and demands vis-à-vis her own desire to be of practical use during the First World War. Her parents had moved to a hotel for reasons of safety and, finding themselves unable to cope without servants or her help, recalled her from nursing duties. Of this, Brittain wrote that war service was:

Supposed to be above all but the most vital domestic obligations. When I arrived at the hotel to find that my mother [...] was in no urgent need of me, I felt that I was perpetrating [...] deceit [...] Forgetting that parents who had been brought up by their forbears to regard young women as perpetually at the disposal of husbands or fathers [...] I gave way to an outburst of fury. (185)

Brittain also wrote of the helplessness of women to prevent the war, observing that women were “at the mercy [...] of an agonising, ruthless fate” (187) which they could do nothing to prevent. Unlike Edith Wharton, who in her account of travels through France in 1915 titled Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort, glorified the war in literary, heroic terms – “war has given beauty to faces that were interesting, humorous, acute, malicious, a hundred vivid and expressive things, but last and least of all beautiful” (54) – Brittain, Pilley and other women such as Freya Stark (who undertook front-line nursing in the Italian war front) saw the real consequences of war for women in outcomes such as starvation and impotent rage.

In a chapter entitled simply “1914-1918” in her memoirs Day In, Day Out, Elizabeth Le Blond writes about women’s contribution to the First World War, indicating that patriotic Englishwomen everywhere had a “fervent desire [...] to be of use” (188). Like other ladies of her class Le Blond offered her services to nursing – in her case, the Red Cross. In common with Vera Brittain and Freya Stark Le Blond made her own way to Europe and was accepted at a French military hospital where in her words, she made herself “generally useful: that is to say I made beds, washed patients, helped them with their meals, gave medicines, took temperatures, sterilised instruments” (189). Le Blond also makes reference to a war contribution from the highly patriotic Ladies’ Alpine Club (LAC) of which she was a member. The members of the LAC subscribed to a fund for the purchase of a motor kitchen and mountain boots for alpine guides working as ambulance men in the Alps. Le Blond noted that “The Alpine Club and the Ladies’ Alpine Club gave generous help [...] our little Ladies’

Alpine Club had been busy on behalf of the Chasseurs Alpains [...] stout mountaineering boots flowed in to the Club and were periodically dispatched to France” (189-190).

Sandra Stanley Holton has also written of the patriotic effort of women’s suffrage organisations during the First World War, noting the difference of views about the war in the various factions of the women’s suffrage movement. Democratic suffragists, she writes, sought a quicker end to the war to stop the bloodshed but leaders such as Millicent Fawcett were concerned that such sentiments might be perceived as pro-German and therefore threaten the women’s cause: “It would associate votes for women with what was seen by themselves and others as pro-German, unpatriotic sentiment” (134-135).

Dorothy Pilley was intensely patriotic and her suffrage sympathies were liberal, a point to which I return shortly. After spending almost two years with the Wives of Sailors and Soldiers Relief Association, Pilley accepted a job in 1916 as secretary to the British Women’s Patriotic League which was founded in 1908, affiliated to the National Council of Women and the Women’s Institute. “The League”, as Pilley referred to it, was a patriotic organisation created to bring together like-minded, educated, middle-class and aristocratic women in order to further the interests of Great Britain within a spirit of harmony, demonstrated by its motto, “Our Country First”. Chaired by Lady Florence Campbell, the “League” gained patriotic support from many ladies, cushioned by their class from the more dirty and unpleasant aspects of war work such as arms manufacturing and nursing, displaying as Paul Ward writes, “a sense of patriotism in a variety of ways both in domestic and public spheres” (23). The following extract from a longer diary entry of Monday 10 January 1916, shows that Dorothy Pilley’s motivation for joining the League was driven by a desire to be of help during the war. She is clear that any effort she can make will help the national effort to “set a man free”:

It behoves everyone to specialise in something in case of necessity and gives one an admirable feeling of independence [...] in these war times every woman who can should work and set a man free – of course it means giving up freedom and a grand opportunity of culture, but that is a drawback which has to be faced and cannot be overcome. (Pilley Diary 10 January 1916)

This patriotic fervour was echoed, as Sandra Stanley Holton argues, across all women’s organisations, including the militant women suffragists who suspended their political agitations for the duration of the First World War. “It was decided [...] to suspend political activities for the time being and use the staff [...] and organising capacities

[...] for relief work” (131). There appears to have been strong consensus on the cessation of suffrage activities across the wider women’s movement. As far back as 1909, Mrs E. C. Wolstenholme Elmy, writing in her booklet Woman’s Franchise: The Need of the Hour, had urged for unity across the women’s suffrage movements, arguing that “the Woman’s Movement is now in the fullest sense an international one, and whatever is won by women in these islands would speedily be achieved for the women of all civilised nations” (13).

In a letter written out in her diary entry for 26 July 1918 to an anti-suffrage male friend, Lewin, Pilley laid out her own views on women’s suffrage. The letter establishes that she sought a state of collaboration between the two sexes, based on mutual respect, a stance which she brought to her mountaineering and maintained throughout her life, particularly whilst working for women’s greater independence from men in mountaineering through her membership of the Pinnacle Club:

For men and women to work in collaboration in home, office, or workshop and in matters that affect the universal citizenship seems to me the highest good. To suggest the abominable spirit of bitter rivalry, which you, and the militants encourage, to lay special stress on man as the superior being with, therefore, women fighting to get into the position of top dog (odious expression) is to create an atmosphere of the worst kind of despicable rivalry. (Pilley Diary, 26 July 1918)

Johanna Alberti suggests the achievement of partial women’s suffrage after the war – that “breaking down of one especial barrier” (267) which “had eclipsed the other aspirations of the women’s movement” (268) – freed suffragists’ energies to secure wider freedoms for women such as greater employment opportunities. In her book Women and a Changing Civilisation, Winifred Holtby argued that the war had “accelerated” women’s entry “into new forms of economic activity” (71) which they were reluctant to relinquish at the end of the war. These opportunities had, she noted, stood women in good stead, affording them momentum to attain the “freedom to qualify themselves, seek equal opportunities with men, a fair field and no favour” (71). Gains achieved in the war could be used, as Alberti suggests, to expand opportunities for women beyond suffrage. Once the vote had been secured, Alberti argues, women had a bigger battle to win, aimed at the “wider aspirations of the women’s movement” (268); for example, employment for women, improved access to health services, better education and support for mothers. For Dorothy Pilley these wider aspirations would come to be realised through mountaineering and success in journalism.

“It went down into the very form and fabric of myself”: a mountaineering novice

Initially, there was nothing in a holiday with an aunt and cousin to North Wales in September 1914 – the purpose of which was to celebrate Pilley’s twentieth birthday – which presaged the start of a life-long passion with mountaineering. On Wednesday 9 September 1914, a sceptic Pilley noted in her diary that: “Aunt Clara would like to take me up to Wales with her. Do not feel very excited as feel sure I will be disappointed as Father will almost certainly say no” (Pilley Diary, 9 September 1914). Living at home, trying to establish a future for herself which her father would approve of and at the same time give her financial and physical independence, Pilley was the obverse of women like her former school friend Winifred Ellermann, who, living in a *ménage a trois* on the Left Bank of Paris under her pseudonym, Bryher, was to play a significant leading role in the writing and publication of avant-garde Modernist women’s literature. Although Pilley’s upbringing had mirrored that of Ellermann – a comfortable, middle-class home, private education and a European finishing school – unlike Ellermann she had become trapped in her family’s conventional, Victorian respectability. In writing of the community of expatriate women authors and artists who lived and wrote on the Left Bank of Paris between 1900 and 1940, Shari Benstock has drawn a portrait of a community of women who found “in Europe the necessary cultural, sexual and personal freedom to explore their creative intuitions” (10). For Dorothy Pilley, mountaineering was to provide her with an equivalent experience.

On Thursday 10 September 1914, Pilley wrote jubilantly in her diary that her Father “rang up to say I might go and that it should have to be today – am very glad to be going” (Pilley Diary, 10 September 1914). Pilley, along with her Aunt Clara and cousin Elsie McNaught, took a train to North Wales. She noted the changes as she left familiar countryside behind, writing in her diary, “wonderful with cold grey sea on one side and mountains on the other” (Pilley Diary, 11 September 1914). She found their accommodation a delight, writing on Saturday 12 September that “the cottage has splendid views of a giant mountain with a torrential stream running down its face, and always, it seems, a glowing welcoming fire” (Pilley Diary 12 September 1914). On Wednesday 16 September 1914, the day of Pilley’s twentieth birthday, the three women undertook a trip to Snowdon. Pilley wrote in her diary that they took a “long drive up to Snowden [sic] behind weary steed, eats sodden sandwiches seated in puddles with utmost relish! Sea amidst glow of brass and copper and Pen y Pass Hotel” (Pilley Diary, 16 September 1914). Her diary entries of this holiday are enhanced by drawings contributed by her cousin, Elsie McNaught, as can be seen in Figure 7, which

humorously capture the wet but satisfying experience of the trip up to Snowdon on 16 September:

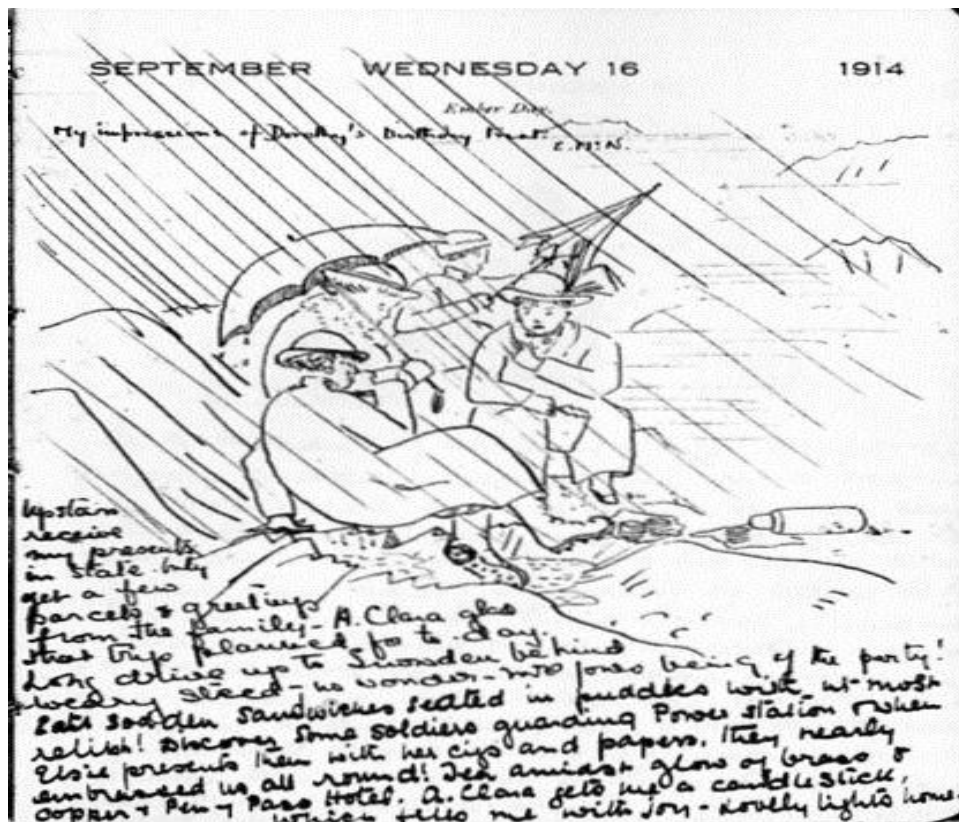


Fig. 7. Pilley Diary, 16 September 1914. © Magdalene College, University of Cambridge.

Elsie McNaught's illustrations also take – as Maria Tamboukou says of Dora Carrington's illustrated letters – the epistolary text of Pilley's diary “beyond the limits of narratives”(15), enabling the sketches to present and interpret aspects of the experience such as bad weather, soggy food, poor fitting boots and long skirts as comedy. This also confirms Timothy Dow Adams' acknowledgement that images in personal narratives create a “visual supplement” to the text (xxi). The illustrations additionally mark a shift in the function of Pilley's diaries (which have hitherto been a private media for her own reflective use) by taking them from the private into the public or shared domain. Her diary entry for 19 September, for example, is clearly a joint enterprise, with Elsie contributing the sketch and the words “Do and I go for an amble” (Pilley Diary, 19 September). Pilley's text captures the excitement of the occasion: “wander about and afterwards get caught in the twilight and have to come down the bare rock in the dark!” The full diary entry is as follows:

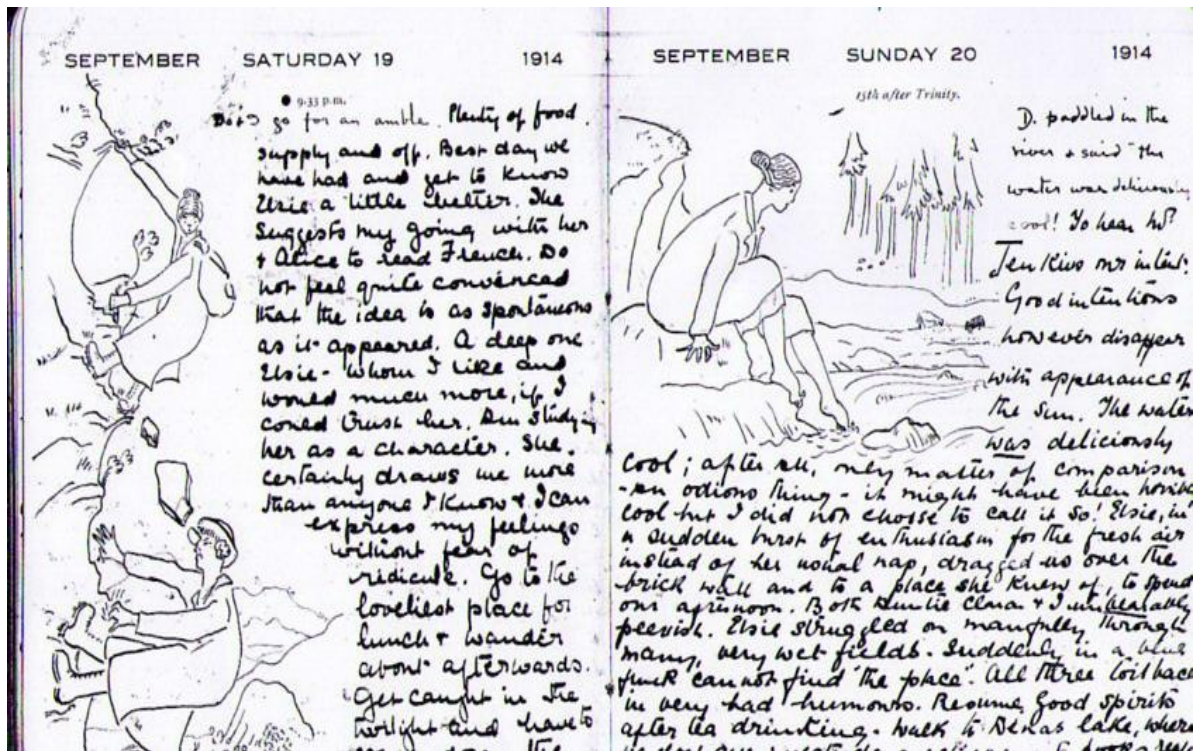


Fig. 8. Pilley Diary, 19 and 20 September 1914. © Magdalene College, University of Cambridge.

The same episode is described in Pilley's retrospective Climbing Days in terms which capture the girls' bravado but lacks the humour and spontaneity of her diary: "What did it matter that we went up Craig-y-Llan in long skirts and in what the boot-sellers regard as feminine walking boots? We found our way down by the mine-shafts in the dark" (1-2). Pilley's diary entries for 19 – 22 September 1914 are a remarkable record of the trip to Snowdon, capturing the essence of the girls' adventure and pleasure in a new-found landscape. Pilley's diary also captures the more prosaic side of the trip, describing mundane occurrences underneath the high adventure, as can be seen in her entry for Monday 21 September which is subtitled ironically by McNaught, "Admiring the views from Craig-y-Llan":

Intolerable time spent in preparing day's grub. Personally have grave misgivings as to pain in my thigh and am correspondingly disagreeable. Half way up refreshed by Elsie's [...] and cold water. At top – view of surrounding ranges grand – watch changing colours while Elsie reads selections from Punch and de Balzac! Discover immediately after lunch the wonderful effects produced by looking at scenery in above striking attitude! A.C. thinks our way down dangerous! (Pilley Diary, 21 September 1914)

McNaught's sketches enable Pilley to capture elements of her mountain experiences that she could not capture in text, particularly the more comedic side. This is evidenced in *Climbing Days*, when she writes, of her September 1914 trip to Snowdon, that she spent hours trying to capture, in a notebook, the scenery and impressions (2). The full diary entries for 21 and 22 September are as follows:

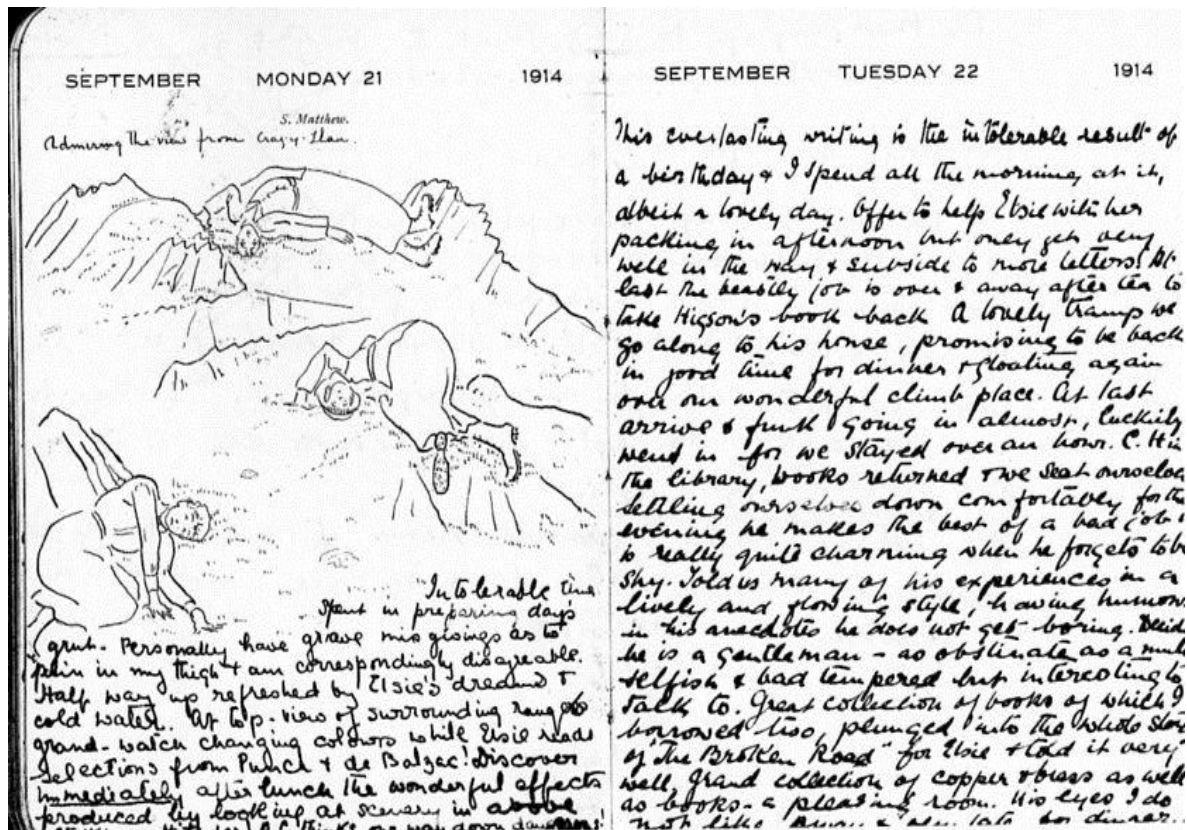


Fig. 9. Pilley Diary, 21 and 22 September 1914. © Magdalene College, University of Cambridge.

Pilley and McNaught clearly gained a sense of fun and achievement from the holiday. For both of them it was a considerable step outside their London world and gendered selves. There are links here with other illustrated diaries from the *fin de siècle* which depict women's lives in this period, such as Maud Berkeley's illustrated diaries, which capture with humour and spirit her life as a thirty-something woman. Despite being separated by a generation, both Berkeley's and Pilley's diaries show that outside the highly gendered constructs of their role and period, women actively engaged with opportunities that would extend their engagement in women's leisure, such as ice-skating, bicycling and mountaineering, widening their horizons beyond the home. Pilley's collaborative use of her diary is rarely seen in her other diaries, with the exception of 1916 – the year which marked her initiation into mountaineering properly

– and 1943, when her husband makes a physical appearance through his hand-writing, a phenomenon on which I have previously commented.

On arriving home from the Snowdon trip, Pilley felt a terrible anti-climax, positioning in her diary entry for Sunday 27 September, the mountains of North Wales against the “drab” existence at home. “It’s dreadful the drab colour existence has when I reach here – shall I never realise that I live here? Nothing matters, it is only for the holidays, I shall soon be going back to school” (Pilley Diary, 27 September 1914). For the first time Pilley had perceived possibilities opening up to her which were previously unimagined. In Climbing Days, Pilley drew on her September 1914 diary to explain that, for her, discovering the mountains “was like waking up from a half sleep with the senses cleared, the self released. It was as if I had never seen anything before to strike me as beautiful, I was distraught by the feelings that arose” (2).

1916 was a watershed year for Pilley, a time when she sensed herself at the doorway to increased independence. The illustrations in her 1916 diary capture a youthful and exuberant side to Pilley together with signs of a growing confidence as she recognises and takes advantage of the widening of horizons which mountaineering is enabling. It is also the year which marks her introduction to Ivor Armstrong Richards. I have commented previously on how her friendship, relationship and eventual marriage with Richards probably informed her style of writing and growing awareness of linguistics. One reason, perhaps, for the disappearance of sketches from her diary after 1916 could be that she felt the continuing inclusion of sketches may have represented a too frivolous use of her diary, given her aspirations by this time to become a writer and journalist, but this is conjecture.

In April 1915, taking a two-month rest from her work with the Wives of Soldiers’ and Sailors Families’ Association, Pilley undertook a walking and climbing holiday in North Wales with Winifred Ellerman, whom she describes in Climbing Days as a “tireless and imaginative walker” (3). During this holiday she completed her first “real” climb with Ellermann and the mountaineer Herbert Carr, the anticipation and excitement of which led to a sleepless night. In the following extract from Climbing Days, she writes of this first ascent of Tryfan (which was to become one of her favourite mountains), capturing her excitement:

In the exhilaration the climb seemed over before it had properly started. I felt like a child when the curtain goes down at the pantomime. Why hadn’t I enjoyed it ten times more while it was on? Every moment was glorious and quickly gone. If we had conquered the hardest climb in the

district we could not have rejoiced more. ‘Mountain madness’ had me now for ever in its grasp. (5)

After this trip, Pilley arranged to meet Carr in late June 1915 for a climbing trip which was to have far-reaching consequences. Pilley’s actions after this trip illustrated her increasingly stubborn and courageous defiance of her parents’ disapproval of her mountaineering. Post-Edwardian etiquette continued the Victorian tradition of expecting unmarried women not to consort with a man to whom they were un-related without being chaperoned either by their brothers or father – as Lucy Walker had been. Carr’s and Pilley’s trip challenged the still highly restrictive nature of cultural relations between the sexes in the early twentieth century. This explains several diary entries from 1915 when Pilley refers to occasions when either “John” or “Will” (her two brothers) joined her on mountaineering trips. Neither were natural mountaineers and, given the cultural context, it is likely they were there as chaperones. On this occasion, Carr had an accident, falling from his stance, but he and Pilley reached the ground safely. Of this accident in Climbing Days, Pilley wrote that:

This episode should have put a proper and summary end to my climbing aspirations. And, in fact, strong parental and other influences were marshalled to prohibit them. I was forbidden to climb again. Beddgelert shook its head. The lack of all proper perspective shown in such climbing enthusiasm was pointed out to me. But in vain! (9)

In this version of the incident, Pilley focuses on the objection by her family and the local community to the physical danger inherent in mountaineering. Her diary entry for 1 July 1915 shows clearly that as far as her father was concerned, he was more angry with her lack of discretion in going climbing with a man without a male family member in attendance. In the light of this, it appears even more surprising that, in the same diary entry, she reveals that her father had initially stood up for her in interchanges with the disapproving and conservative villagers of Beddgelert. She writes that “after fighting the whole village Father steps in and puts his foot down and says its most indiscreet, lacks judgment and tries to extract a promise that I will never do it again (Pilley Diary, 1 July 1915). She refused, defying her parents, taking every opportunity to leave London on Friday evening trains to climb with friends in Snowdonia for the weekend.

1916 was Pilley’s formative mountaineering year. Her 1916 diary is full of reflective and joyous writing as she tries to make sense of and express this transformation that had taken place in her life:

It's difficult. May 10th and I am trying three months later to record my impressions. I feel overcome with my own littleness, lack of knowledge and utter inconsequencies. If I could truly analyse [sic] my emotion or put down simply what I felt, life would be worthwhile. (Pilley Diary, 10 May 1916).

Pilley is clear that mountaineering is a welcome challenge to her, taking her away from domestic comfort and stretching her physical and mental capacities, an observation which recalls Elizabeth Le Blond's comments in Day in Day Out that mountaineering is beneficial to women exactly for this reason. On 17 May 1916 Pilley observed that "the days preceding a journey thither are full of wonders – what shall be learnt, what felt. One is never quite unafraid. So with Wales" (Pilley Diary, 17 May 1916). Pilley notes in the same diary entry that it is Wales (for which read mountaineering) that will comfort her in London, during all the noise and fret of her London life. I note in this entry that domestic comfort has been supplanted by mountaineering: "I shall remember the sunset over Dinas, and the magic of long evenings by the fire." She brings mountaineering together with domesticity with the following observation, noting that to be on "intimate terms with one's frying pan is a delightful experience, possible only in the cottage that is a palace".

The subject-matter of her reading also changed in 1916. Instead of novels, works on literary criticism, history and philosophy she listed in her diary that she was reading The Matterhorn by Guido Key, A F Mummery's My Climbs in the Alps and Caucasus, Edward Wymper's Travels in Great Andes and Climbing in Wales by W. Haskett Smith. Her friendship and developing relationship with Ivor Armstrong Richards from 1916 onwards also expanded her literary horizons and subsequently exposed her to a wider range of literature and literary styles as is shown in her diaries by references to her reading material.¹² Four years later she was still trying to find the right words: "Enjoyed being alone among the hills again more than I can say. Tried to analyse the deep happiness I gain from this intercourse with the hills but failed (Pilley Diary, 19 April 1920). She was rarely to find in her diaries the same easy, flowing style that she found came easily to her in journalism and in the writing of Climbing Days.

Throughout 1916, Pilley developed her mountain philosophy and mountaineering experience, coming into contact with a large and varied community of like-minded mountaineers who took her under their wing and were generous in terms of

¹² In her 1917 diary her list of books purchased included works by Hardy, Trollope, Meredith, Henry James, Joseph Conrad and John Buchan. From the 1920s her diaries include works by authors such as T S Eliot, William Empson, and Ezra Pound, arguably reflecting Richards' influence.

sharing expertise. They expanded her circle of friends outwards from the highly cloistered circle which surrounded her at home and in her voluntary work. In the following diary entry from Friday 16 June 1916, Pilley reflects on an experience of climbing with modern, highly educated “brilliant” girls:

Oh the climbing of a mountain with two brilliant girls! They talked incessantly, and expected me to respond, such stuff on mountains is a sheer waste of time. Simplicity and silence for the receiving of new and nature’s impressions seems to me to be the keynote of such a day. Rita is intensely modern, and cultivates the poise by wearing manlike clothes, going in for all sport wildly and talking with the air of a woman of the world. (Pilley Diary, 16 June 1916)

In this context, Pilley clearly positions herself in opposition to the girls’ expression of modern values but she is undeniably modern herself in the way she fractures the conservative and gendered certainties of Victorian Britain through her mountaineering. The difference between her and the “two brilliant girls” is the way she manifests her own modernism – Pilley’s is of a type which prefers to receive impressions reflectively, a philosophy which appears to be reminiscent of Leslie Stephen’s. On Monday 19 June 1916, Pilley wrote out in her diary a quotation in full by A.S. Salt; “A mountain is something more than a thing to climb”, which suggests that her own approach to mountaineering was more meditative and philosophical.

In her 1916 diary Pilley frequently and negatively positions her home life in relation to the mountains. In describing a trip to the summer sales with her mother on Monday 3 July 1916, Pilley contrasts the happiness she feels in the mountains with the exhaustion of shopping. “Shoping [sic] is decidedly the most tiring form of exercise. It makes your eyes ache and feet ache, its exhausting, it’s patience trying, it’s confusing, it’s debasing (at least when you fight with other females at a sale” (Pilley Diary, 3 July 1916). She notes her mother’s enjoyment, recording that “Still, there is another point of view, saling [sic] is an amusement, real relaxation for the tired housewife and therefore good”, a comment which positions herself in opposition to her mother, the housewife. Her diary entry for Monday 17 July 1916 depicts the joy Pilley feels at an invitation to go mountaineering, again contrasting its freedom to the constrictions of her home:

Elsie rang up to know if I would come Thursday. What a question. Everything in me cried to be away in the mountains. At home they naturally do not understand. I felt selfish, even thinking of leaving them again. They all come down in two weeks. Why should I not have the

wonder of the mountains in that extra time? To get away from the world, alone on the heights, is a desire which hurts, an agony of longing... I have never felt anything like the call of the mountains, it draws me, it carries me, sober me, off my feet. (Pilley Diary Monday 17 July 1916)

Through mountaineering, Pilley learned – as she was to observe in Climbing Days – wider social and life skills, for example, to “test myself against some external standard, when to trust myself, with caution, and when not, and to meditate on matters not merely personal. Companionship with men and women of all types, often under conditions of hardship and strain, gave useful lessons in human nature” (13). William A. Geiger agrees, writing in an essay on Pilley and Ivor Armstrong Richards that “mountaineering for Pilley functioned as a university functioned for others. She learned to trust her ability against an objective referent and scale of values, to trust others and to form important friendships” (82).

Some of her diary entries from August 1916 capture a sense of the companionship and camaraderie which Pilley was increasingly experiencing through mountaineering. A number of her mountaineering friends contributed sketches to diary entries which convey a strong sense of conviviality and friendship as can be seen in the following example:

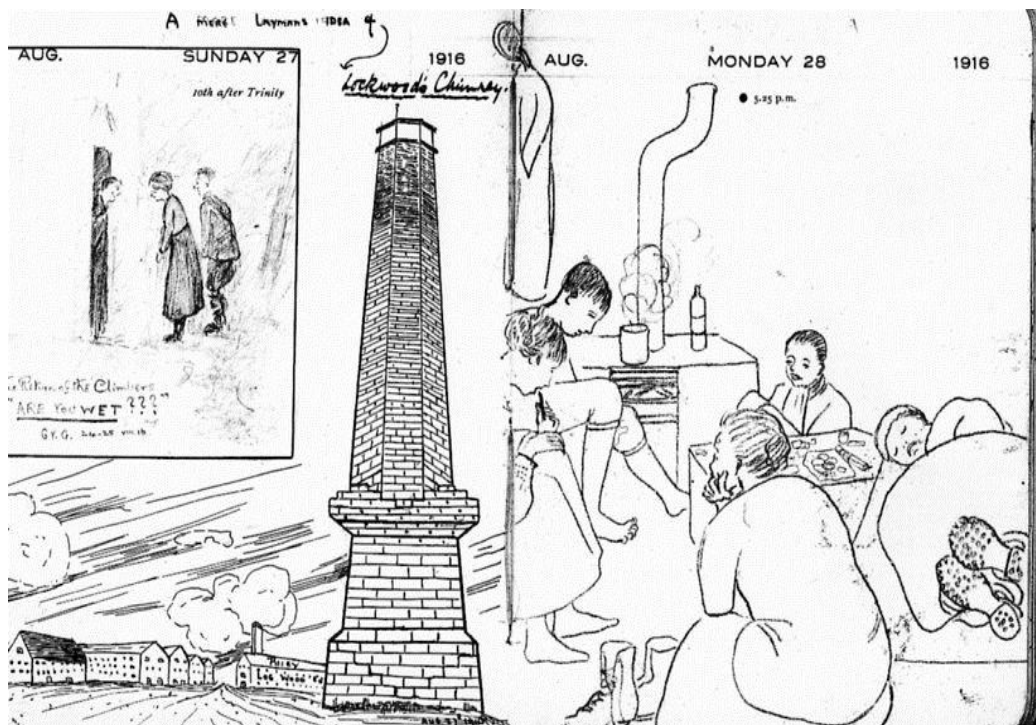


Fig. 10. Pilley Diary, 27 and 28 August, 1916. © Magdalene College, University of Cambridge.¹³

¹³ The sketch of Lockwood's Chimney is a visual pun, the Chimney being a rock climb in Snowdonia.

For Pilley, mountaineering came to mean much more to her than companionship, important though that was. In the case of Lucy Walker and Elizabeth Le Blond it enabled them to break the shackles of conventionality, but Cicely Williams suggests of Pilley that she viewed mountaineering as an “an answer to the meaning of life” (108). As Pilley observes in Climbing Days, climbing made her feel “ardently alive” (57). She records the dissonance she experiences on returning to London:

To go back to gloves and high-heeled shoes, pavements and taxicabs. Walking with an umbrella in Piccadilly one felt as though with a little more strain one would become a case of a divided personality [...] what reckoning could compare the personality that came to life only among such a different order of existence and was known only to such other minds and assessed by them for such other qualities. The strangeness of the dual life made, in those days, a cleft, a division in my mind that I struggled in vain to build a bridge across. Kind, firm friends would say ‘All good things come to an end, or ‘You can’t expect all life to be a holiday’. But to me, and to climbers before and after me, this was no question of holidays. It went down into the very form and fabric of myself. (36)

Elsie McNaught brilliantly captured Pilley’s sense of schizophrenia by contributing a sketch to Pilley’s diary entry of 14 October 1916. Simply entitled “Do in London”, McNaught captures Pilley’s London self, longing for the mountains as follows:



Fig.11. Pilley Diary, 14 October, 1916. © Magdalene College, University of Cambridge

I compare Pilley's feelings of a split personality with the experiences of women mountaineers such as Lucy Walker, who, as I have argued in the previous chapter, adeptly and deftly balanced the two halves of her life, switching between her drawing room in Liverpool and the Alps with seeming ease.

Pilley's diary entries throughout the summer and autumn of 1916 show that the timid girl who had with trepidation joined the Wives of Soldiers' and Sailors' Relief Association in 1914 was developing a strong personality and will of her own, with the boldness and courage to challenge the conventions of the day. This is illustrated in a diary entry for 8 October 1916 in which she writes about a letter she has received from Herbert Carr proposing a climbing trip to North Wales. "Had a letter from Carr. I thrilled with pleasure at the thought of being on the mountains again with an understanding soul. I shall go and risk what fools say, if they haven't thoughts above scandal and slander" (Pilley Diary, 8 October 1916). Pilley, however, was in a dilemma – although courageous, spirited and stubborn she was still living at home and financially dependent on her father. In the same diary entry she notes that "I am not independent enough to refuse, for he [her father] could stop me going there, he not

being a climber will never understand, and it's worrying and upsetting. How beastly everything is and how impotent I am" (Pilley Diary, 8 October 1916).

Her 1919 diary records that a change in her father's behaviour has taken place. By 1919, Pilley was travelling to the mountains at every chance she could get, regularly undertaking journeys on the train from and back to London, noting in Climbing Days that the "endless serried lights of Crewe shunting-yards seemed the great gateway to the hills (41). Going up to Wales or the Lakes became what she referred to as a "delicious habit; any gap in London duties offered itself to my imagination first as a chance to get in a day or a few days more in the mountains" (90). Her father appears to have become reconciled to her mountaineering by this time, as she notes in a diary entry for Wednesday 2 April 1919 that her father drives her to Kings Cross station to catch the train north. "Father taxied me up, generously getting my ticket, a kindness much appreciated, and was certainly rather surprised at, as he hasn't done such a thing since I've started going off climbing" (Pilley Diary, 2 April 1919). She does not explain how she has brought about this metamorphosis in her father's attitude. I conjecture that by this time she was regularly climbing with a trusted and experienced community of climbers and they may have won his respect and trust. He was possibly also secretly proud of her achievements.

Pilley's diaries from 1916-1920 contain frequent gaps as I have earlier noted which, whilst evidencing a form of "autobiographics", are frustrating for the reader keen to find the "kernel" of her motivation for mountaineering. These gaps can, perhaps, be explained in prosaic terms by suggesting that Pilley was too busy climbing mountains to write about them. There is another reason, however, which appears for the first time in entries in her 1916 diary and then frequently throughout 1919 and 1920. They reveal that as Pilley matured into an adult she developed an increasing ambivalence and cynicism towards diary-writing. An early example of this contrariness occurs in her entry for 4 November 1916, when she berates herself for not capturing her first impressions of and reactions to mountaineering:

Fool that I was not to capture the first time rapture in these pages. I shall be moved again but not in exactly the same wondering worship – extactic [sic] at the revelation. I only know from fragments of letters how the marvel of nature and the exhilaration of a sport I naturally acquired, exhilarated me. (Pilley Diary, 4 November 1916)

In April 1919 Pilley mourned that she had not written up an experience, lamenting:

“would that I had written up, what was a splendid climbing holiday. All this seems centuries ago, lost in some distant existence (Pilley Diary, 17 April 1919). The following example from her 1919 diary shows that she developed an increasing equivocal feeling towards her diaries as she matured:

Very futile being slack about entering up a diary. Not only are facts actually distorted, but impressions, which form afterwards the chief interest of a diary, as a copy or merely as a slight record of one's own development, are superimposed, so that when they are recorded late, they are inevitably recorded falsely. Whenever I write up really late, I must note it, so as to allow for this subtly altered point of view. (Pilley Diary, 16 June 1919)

The awareness of a “subtly altered point of view” caused her to make a pact with herself in a diary entry of 10 July 1919:

Let me now register the resolve that I will scrawl any old idea that comes in my head as the days go by. It isn't merely that memory fails one in the stating of outstanding facts. No – it is rather that small details escape one, slow changes in scene, subtle ones in people; unless written at once these are clouded by every subsequent change in oneself and one's point of view... I suppose like most people who love nature magnificent.....Beauty expressed in the common thought. I ache to be able to do it, to the sounds of the rushing water. (Pilley Diary 10 July 1919)

Despite this pact, Pilley continued to leave off her diary for days at a time throughout her life, probably chafing at the ingrained discipline of diary writing from childhood. However, she never succeeded in rebelling completely against the habit of diary writing, writing a diary each year until her death in 1986. The following entry synthesises her reluctance towards her diary but shows the sense of duty that always drove her back to it: “I am singularly disinclined to write this diary, and make my first entry, with a sense of duty to obey” (Pilley Diary, 3 February 1920).

In addition to mountaineering, there is one other recurrent theme in Pilley's diaries – her love for her husband – and from 1916 Richards appears frequently in her diaries. There are many entries which are intensely personal, in which she reflects on life, love and relationships, exchanging confidences with her diary much as a young woman in love might do. From 1926, the year of their marriage, her diaries mature in tone, language and the quality of their reflection but this may simply reflect her

maturing style and confidence. By this time she was a published author, having used her diary over many years as a tool to develop and hone her writing craft, nurturing long-held ambitions to be a published writer as I will later explore. Jeanne Schulkind has suggested that Virginia Woolf used her diaries, letters and autobiographical writings to teach herself to write and the same can be argued of Pilley. Schulkind has noted of Woolf that “it was Virginia Woolf’s practice to write out one or more rough drafts of a work and then to type out complete revisions, sometimes as much as eight or nine” (7). Although there is no evidence of this type of trenchant crafting from Pilley in the Richards’ archive, Pilley shows in some of her diary entries from 1919 the growing importance of her diaries in her writing apprenticeship.

This use of her diary can be illustrated by drawing on one example from her July 1919 diary when she made her first journey to the island of Skye, an experience she describes in her chapter “The Misty Isle of Skye” in Climbing Days. Pilley keeps the pact with herself to “scrawl” in her diary for most days of this trip, later transforming her brief diary “scrawl” into a highly descriptive and atmospheric passage in Climbing Days. I reproduce these two versions of the same trip here, as they demonstrate evidence of how she used her diaries to evolve her writer’s craft. Her “scrawled” diary recording for Tuesday 29 July 1919 is as follows:

After some discussion we decided to make Glen Brittle. Some 9 miles of unknown cross-country journey...what a desolate beautiful dale, with a magnificent barren-ness which impressed me deeply. Overhead the seagulls swooped and wailed... [sic] seals floundered in the smooth sea...it got too dark for safety so we encamped by a stream 500 ft above the sea. Fortunately it was calm, still and warm – the sea lay still and leaden ...[sic] black...[sic] significant mountain shapes flung around it...[sic]. There wasn’t much chance of sleep, it gave me a little idea of what a bad night might be like. After starting we had an hour of dreadful going, in which we can’t have done much more than a mile. I felt really sick...[sic] determined not to give in on a seemingly unending tramp. After that there was 5 miles of moorland over which we dragged ourselves...[sic] we were out 23 and a half hours, infernally heavy going, in distance about 10 miles, including four and a half miles of steady climbing. A memorable day. (Pilley Diary, 29 July 1919)

The same experience is rendered as follows in Climbing Days:

We set out for it [Glen Brittle] through the fair evening to be checked at once by a tide-swollen river. We tramped round Loch na Creitheach, and began to follow the coast-line. Overhead seagulls swooped and wailed. Seals floundered in the smooth sea that broke lazily in the hush. Deer cantered in a herd along a distant ledge. The novelty of the scene between water and high cliffs was like a spell. But stretches of smooth 'boiler-plate' slabs came between them and needed all one's attention [...] An island a little way out seemed never to be getting behind us, but we came at last to Loch Coruisk. It is indescribable [...] The sunset light high up on the surrounding slopes did nothing to soften its bleak inhuman beauty [...] We hastened as much as sacks which were perceptibly growing heavier would allow over ground that seemed to grow worse the further we went! [...] Giving up Glen Brittle we encamped for the night. It was warm and still, punctuated with cups of soup, and, for me, peering seaward from our perch, sleepless. I see in my Diary an innocent complaint that it gave one little idea of what a really bad night could be! [...] when an ashen light spread over the sky and we set off again, in the dewy beauty of the dawn, the seemingly unending five miles of heather that remained were beguiled for me by many minute observations on my sensations. [...] Just how much was I merely stiff and how much tired? Was this feeling of sickness that same and went important? [...] A deliciously refreshing bathe near Glen Brittle put a stop to these musings [...] My first twenty-four-hour expedition came to a contented end at Mrs Chisholm's door. (96-97)

Although the reader can read a more careful and precise prose style in the second entry, showing the evidence of hindsight and consideration, there is a level of harmony between her diary and memoir entry. Almost one year later, Pilley's pact to make regular impressionistic entries in her diaries appears to have lapsed and whilst struggling to write up her reflections retrospectively on her first alpine trip, she noted in her diary on 1 August 1920 that:

In Skye I discovered a quite commendable completeness in my diary, but in Switzerland and France it was always impossible...[sic] I am writing this, as best I can, fully conscious that I have completely wasted those fresh impressions which would have had the colour and movement, mild

pleasures and half-forgotten animosities, which these must lack. (Pilley Diary, 1 August 1920)

Pilley's diaries are a remarkable record of how one woman's passion for mountaineering evolves and is inscribed. In them we see the passion of Henriette D'Angeville communicated in an increasingly philosophical, reflective literary style which bears echoes of Leslie Stephen's mountain philosophy and elements of Dorothy Wordsworth's feminine aesthetic. Above all, however, her diaries capture and show the extent of the ways in which mountaineering synonymised freedom for her and how important that freedom is:

I am normally particularly contented with my existence, which is certainly happy, broad and very varied, embracing as it does such a range of classes, so many modes of thought and enthusiasms and with occasional bursts of joy and freedom in the mountains. I have always cared for freedom...my person demands its freedom. (Pilley Diary, 19 February 1920)

"A state of mind still more amazed": writing for publication

Mountaineering was not the only means of freedom to which Pilley aspired. Attaining financial freedom from her family was also a priority and it was a source of frustration to her that she was still reliant on her father for the money she required for her varied social life until the middle of her twenties. After her father had rejected her early career aspirations in horticulture, Pilley started searching for a respectable outlet which would bring in some financial remuneration and saw writing as a possible means through which to achieve the financial independence she craved.

In 1917 she started to think about whether she could publish articles on mountaineering as shown in the following diary entry for 21 August 1917: "Attempts at climbing notes, but to hit something between the personal poetic and the brief technical for public consumption is intensely and most unmanageably difficult – I persevere (Pilley Diary, 21 August 1917). She also tentatively submitted some articles for publication in women's magazines and periodicals of the period such as the Lady's Pictorial, which to her astonishment began to be accepted for publication. By 1918 Pilley was having articles regularly accepted in a range of ladies' pictorials such as The Englishwoman, the Pall Mall Magazine and the Lady's Pictorial. In her diary entry of Tuesday 28th May she wrote elatedly that she was:

Amazed and delighted at having pieces accepted by publication; Gratitude is due and is immediately given to the outcome of my yesterday's pilgrimage to the 'Englishwoman offices' where Miss Day..took ms ...thinking that in all probability mine would be taken, published...I departed elated for the rest of the day...I find Miss Lambert of The Lady's Pictorial equally anxious to take...short article left me in a state of mind still more amazed. (Pilley Diary, 28 May 1918)

By the early 1920s Pilley was regularly submitting articles on domestic management and occasional articles on climbing and mountaineering. Unlike her contemporary and former schoolfriend, Bryher, Pilley wrote articles which reinforced the traditional role of women as wives, housekeeper and home-makers, perceiving opportunities in the growth of women's journals in the early twentieth century to publish on these subjects. Writing under a pseudonym which she does not reveal in her diaries, Pilley put her domestic training to commercial use and submitted articles on diverse subjects including the best method of cleaning and preserving shoes, preparing a table for supper and bed-making, showing that her training in domestic housecraft had not been wasted. Pilley's pseudonym afforded her protection and ensured her journalism remained a secret, probably because she feared the adverse reaction her family and friends would have towards the more popular kind of journalism. In 1920 she accepted an appointment on a commission basis as a staff writer for the Daily Express newspaper and also kept this secret, acutely aware it was not "literature", as the following diary entry of Tuesday 20 January 1920 shows:

In the train today I have written an article (400 words) on 'Shoes: How to Preserve them'. Easy to do; write - perhaps £1 -1.0 to me. Now in the Daily Express I remain almost anonymous - well and good - my commercialism remains unknown - and I enjoy journalism provided I do not feel really ashamed - that is provided my sentiments aren't utterly false - and my English is moderately decent. If I were anonymous actually - as I am in reporting, I should still enjoy it. Not that I confuse this sort of thing with literature - thankful - still there is an awful fascination [sic]. The one overmastering drawback is that it does harden the sensibilities - for instance I was never able to realise or even to conjure up the possibility of any great antagonism to my climbing articles. I had only looked at them from a journalist's point of view - "a good story" - no other consideration entered my head [...] Only on being

pulled up can I smart from my consciousness of a bad lapse of taste.

(Pilley Diary, 20 January 1920)

Pilley also turned her hand to short stories and contributed the occasional article for the colour supplement of the Sunday Express. This too, she kept secret. On Wednesday 17 March 1920 she recorded that a short story of hers:

‘Lost, Stolen and Strayed’ was in this morning and acted as a further stimulant after “The First Aid Cupboard” appeared in the ‘Pall Mall’ on Monday [...] Miss Hoad asked me to tea with her, talking with that nervous hysterical voice quite wittingly [sic]. Then when I had settled to work again – Georgie called. After working a while we packed up for Chanticleer and dinner. I seem to have a fascination [sic] for lonely women – I certainly like and sympathise with them. (Pilley Diary, 17 March 1920)

Her final observation in this entry is interesting when viewed against the backdrop of the modernist movement and communities of women writers, poets and artists of the type described in Shari Benstock’s Women of the Left Bank. To what extent was Pilley aware of the intimate lives of some of her friends such as Bryher, who formed a lesbian relationship with the writer H.D? It is difficult to tell from her diaries. By 1916 she had discovered mountaineering, forming a close association with Richards and her diary entries focus on those twin loves from that point.

Pilley’s views on marriage were uncompromising: she was clear that marriage could only take place with a soul-mate, based on mutual love, respect and understanding. Her diary entry for Tuesday 20 January 1920 includes a statement in which she unequivocally states her philosophy on marriage: “The love that would make one marry, must be ‘everything’ – which means something complex and beyond the power of analysis, which would make one die or live for a person” (Pilley Diary, 20 January 1920). Richards asked her to marry him in 1922 but she refused, fearing a mixture of impecunity (he was not at that time firmly established as a scholar) and loss of her treasured independence. Her reply was measured but firm as she records in her diary on Saturday 6 May 1922:

To IAR: My dear, decidedly no...[sic] there are many reasons for this...[sic] although I know you valued my comradeship as I do yours immensely...[sic] I should like to come down and talk it all over, otherwise I’m very much afraid we shall find ourselves embarrassed, at a

later meeting and our friendship permanently hurt. (Pilley Diary, 6 May 1922)

Their friendship was not hurt and remained firmly cemented. Richards continued to search out opportunities which would give him financial security and a foundation from which to marry. In 1923 he planned to establish himself at Peking University and asked Pilley to go with him. She again refused and in her diary entry of Sunday 4 February 1923 reflected on why she could not (or would not) marry him:

Thoroughly approved the scheme for him but never included myself in it
 1) to marry him, to tramp for 2 years across Europe and Asia – without any provision for a future – with no preparation for illness – with no plans hopeless 2) to go out with a man, unmarried – without any funds or any way I can see to make them adequately, to court the criticism of the world, to upset my family, and to see no way of supporting myself – weak from A to Z. (Pilley Diary, 4 February 1923)

This diary entry not only shows the extent of her feelings about the need for financial independence from men – firstly her father and subsequently Richards – but also how her profound desire for freedom was hedged in and influenced by the gendered expectations of the day. The phrase “to go out with a man, unmarried” shows her awareness that she would upset her family in so doing and demonstrates the extent to which even Pilley was bound by the conventions of her era. This is perhaps surprising, given that in her early mountaineering career she had so boldly flaunted convention to go mountaineering with a man unchaperoned. I conjecture that by 1923 Pilley had moderated her position from the impetuosity of her youth. She had also by then acquired an increasingly varied life outside home which she may have been reluctant to relinquish, as she had previously revealed in her diary entry of Friday 21 May 1920:

Normally particularly contented with my existence, which is certainly happy, broad and very varied, embracing as it does such a range of classes, so many modes of thought and enthusiasms [...] I have always craved for freedom and though nominally tied to the office, in reality I am pretty well a freelance, going and coming as I like, accounting to no-one for my actions. Hence I roam from the Bohemian art of Issel, to the musical set of Will Mc, from Lady Cowan’s beauty and mysticism, to the patter of Westminster, from Petrie’s literary coterie, to the meagre existence of Miss Tarrant [...] but always different sets, living, seeing, thinking differently, I love it, the variety, the kaleidoscopic effect, the

sense of being in the rushed centre of things [...] I am the prey to a violent reaction, which I am lulling by means of this writing [...] which will make me restless, as I have ambitions as well [...] at the same time my reason demands its freedom. (Pilley Diary, 21 May 1920)

Pilley's diary writings reflect the balance she treads in the early twentieth century between tradition and modernism. They illustrate how she works at negotiating her own ground, moving herself between the convention offered by staying at home and the aspiring freedoms offered by mountaineering and journalism. Pilley was able to take advantage of opportunities to extend her reach for freedom into the hills and mountains afforded by communities of largely upper-middle class, educated, literary and professorial male mountaineers which had sprung up from her class in the early twentieth century. Members of these communities, away from the more rarified, formal atmosphere of their clubs – which, with the exception of the Lake District-based Fell and Rock Climbing Club, were only open to men – were generous with their time, providing Pilley and other women mountaineers with a useful apprenticeship in mountaineering techniques which they were then able to develop for themselves. In 1907, lady mountaineers started their own alpine club for women based in London. In the remaining sections of this chapter I discuss the formation of women's mountaineering clubs in the early twentieth century and explore how these sororities were fundamental in creating opportunities for women to increase their participation in mountaineering.

The Lyceum Club and the Ladies' Alpine Club

In an article titled "On Clubs and the Question of Intelligence" published in The Woman At Home circa 1895, Sarah Grand argued that women's clubs were one of the most profound symbols of increasing social freedom for women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Grand perceived clubs for women as providing ideal forums for intelligent, educated women to benefit from associating with like-minded women, affording them opportunities to do "all they can" for their country (838).

Johanna Alberti has also written that the new generation of young women at the turn of the century were highly motivated to progress their service to king and country (267). Grand argued that there was increasing expectation and hope in the women's suffrage movement that women would eventually take up public duties. This expectation created a natural impetus for "certain women's clubs", the latter giving them an "educational

advantage not hitherto associated with club life” (838). Previously, Grand asserted, women were shut away in domestic isolation with only very rich women being able to use the advantage of wealth to procure a widening of the mind through, for example, their hosting of literary salons throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. “How much”, Grand noted, “may be done to enlarge the mind by varied social intercourse few of us realise” (838). The advantages of bringing intelligent women together, Grand thought, were considerable, but she viewed the benefits mainly in terms of how the clubs would better equip young women with the necessary attributes that would make them better wives and mothers – for example, teaching them how to converse on topics such as literature and art.

By the early twentieth century, women’s clubs were an established part of the social landscape, responding to a growing demand from women for their own clubs and societies where they, like men, could meet in congenial, like-minded company to enjoy social gatherings, sporting activities and other interests. According to a tongue-in-cheek article in The Observer, reproduced in the 1962 Ladies’ Alpine Club Year Book, women’s clubs at the end of the nineteenth century were seen as a “formidable weapon of women”, among which were “terrifying places such as the Ladies’ Alpine Club, the Women’s Press Club, or the Sesame Club, for women explorers and pioneers” (30). Weapons or not, women’s clubs in the early twentieth century can be seen as an example of activity in Alberti’s “second stream” of the women’s movement, representing a wider manifestation of women’s aspirations to develop their social, economic and political identities beyond suffrage.

The Ladies’ Alpine Club (LAC), established in London in 1907, had its roots in The Lyceum Club, which was inaugurated in 1904 by Constance Smedley, a wealthy socialite, successful journalist, novelist and playwright with great empathy for the professional aspirations of other artistic women. The Lyceum Club grew in the first decade of the twentieth century as an international club with branches overseas, providing a place where middle-class women without substantial private means who were struggling or unable to enter a profession – particularly in the arts or writing – could meet with like-minded women in convivial surroundings in the absence of men. The New York Times reported the opening of the London Lyceum Club in June 1904, writing in an article entitled “Women’s Club in London: The Lyceum Club contemplates a common meeting place for all women” that:

The organisation intended to provide a common meeting ground for women throughout the world who are workers in literature, art or

science, including medicine [...] the club will offer all the features of a high-class club, including facilities for refreshment, recreation, work, and, so far as accommodation will permit, for residence.

In her unpublished history of the Lyceum Club, Grace Brockington emphasises that the Lyceum Club was a natural progression in the increasing development of women's only clubs which had been on the increase since the 1880s, growing from 2 in London in 1882 to 21 by 1900. These clubs for women addressed, Brockington writes, a need for clubs for professional women. "They catered", she writes, "for all interests and social classes, from aristocrats to actresses, university lecturers to city clerks" (1). The proliferation of clubs, she argues, was a reflection of wider social change which echoed "women's changing aspirations and their willingness, if not to challenge, at least to match, the Victorian institution of the gentleman's club" (1-2). The New York Times article also reported, according to Brockington, that membership "'was open to women of any nationality, a) who have published any original work in literature, journalism, science, art or music; b) who have university qualifications; c) who are wives or daughters of men distinguished in literature, journalism, science, art or music'" (qtd. in Brockington 2). Smedley's modern vision was international and cosmopolitan in that she wanted to create a global network of sister institutions. This was to be realised as other Lyceum Clubs opened in Germany, Europe, in outreaches of the British Empire and the United States.

The membership fee of the London-based Lyceum Club was one guinea to members living within a radius of twenty miles of Piccadilly, increasing to three guineas if members lived outside this area. For all other members, abroad or otherwise, it was two guineas – fees which were well outside the means of many women without an independent income of their own. However, Brockington suggests that Smedley shrewdly used the membership subscriptions and additional voluntary contributions of wealthy, aristocratic women to discount the membership fees of less wealthy women. Smedley appears to have been determined that the Lyceum Club would be a community for all women, poor or wealthy who could come together to share intellectual and artistic endeavour - provided they were of respectable backgrounds. This illustrates Smedley's vision of the Lyceum Club as a community which existed first and foremost to further opportunities of independence for educated but impecunious women, many of whom were struggling writers or artists, striving to make their mark in a man's world. This echoes the rationale of New Woman fiction such as Sarah Grand's The Beth Book and George Egerton's short story "A Nocturne".

The Lyceum's premises were impressive, having been previously the base for the British Imperial Service Club, which gave it an additional respectability. The image of respectability was important in that it enabled husbands and fathers to approve their wives' and daughters' membership of the club. Smedley's father, a successful businessman, was supportive of the view that educated women would benefit from like-minded company and helped fund the club's premises in Piccadilly. The prestige of respectability also brought, as Brockington notes, the social elite flocking to the doors of the Lyceum Club, bringing much needed money, patronage and volunteered time to devote to the club's running and maintenance.

In her article on "Alpine Climbing Past and Present", written in the same year as the establishment of the Ladies' Alpine Club – initially titled the Ladies' Alpine Circle – Elizabeth Le Blond wrote about the formation of the club under the umbrella of the Lyceum Club, noting that an "Alpine Circle has been formed at the Lyceum Club, which it is hoped will do for women what the Alpine Club has done for men" (542). Crucially, the Lyceum Club offered an initial home for the LAC in the form of subsidised rented rooms, closely affiliating the ethos and values of the LAC to the aims and vision of Constance Smedley. Therein lay a criticism of the LAC, as Shirley Angell has suggested – that its primary purpose was perceived to be a social club for upper-middle-class women (29).

By 1909 the LAC had outgrown the increasingly cramped premises at the Lyceum Club and re-located to a rented top-floor room at the Great Central Hotel, Marylebone. The principles of the LAC, of which the chief architect was its first President, Elizabeth Le Blond, were re-iterated by Le Blond in her Foreword to the first report of the LAC, published in 1913. The LAC, she declared, would promote high standards for ladies' mountaineering in an atmosphere that would be nourished and respected by the membership:

A Club such as ours must grow and expand in a natural and healthy manner. It cannot be spasmodically galvanised into renewed life from time to time by artificial means. It must be nourished by the unceasing interest and labour of the members, and above all its high standard must be maintained, so that, as membership carries with it a guarantee of efficiency, it may ever be an honour to belong to it. (3)

Constituted during the short Edwardian period, the LAC represented in its values and approaches to women's mountaineering much of the cultural ideology of the late Victorian age which had informed the mountaineering of Lucy Walker. For

example, club members were not encouraged to go mountaineering without experienced alpine guides and/or men to whom they were related because of fears that unchaperoned mountaineering would bring the club into disrepute. Whilst the LAC was therefore a product of an earlier liberal endeavour to bring women together collectively, its roots were firmly conservative, reflected in many aspects of the club's governance and philosophy. The early editions of the Ladies' Alpine Club Year Books from 1913 up to the 1920s show that first and foremost the LAC was a club for "ladies", with many members drawn from the upper middle-class and aristocracy. A small proportion of the membership was professional, drawn from the medical profession or the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Independent, professional women were not widely represented in the LAC until the mid-1920s, excluded by an element of class snobbery about professional women which remained strong into the 1930s. Many married women members were wives of men in well-paid posts connected to government, the armed forces or men who were working in one of the outposts of the British Empire. A small number of members were based in Europe (France, Holland, Sweden), the British colonies or the Dominions of Canada and New Zealand. Overwhelmingly though, the membership lists in club reports throughout the early twentieth century show that the majority of members were from London, Kent or Surrey with one or two in the north of England, Scotland and Ireland. The LAC's affiliation with the values of the British Empire links the LAC to the wider discourses of Empire, conquest and mountaineering rehearsed by Julie Rak and Peter Bayers. With a membership highly representative of the established aristocracy and upper middle classes which took seriously its responsibility as guardians of the Victorian values of the original Alpine Club, the LAC constituted itself within a triumvirate of Empire, Exploration, Exclusivity, a trio of values also reflected in the *raison d'être* of its founding father, the Alpine Club. The LAC's ethos was strongly patriotic, with support for King and Country uppermost and it is no coincidence that two of the club's members, Dorothy Pilley and Florence Campbell were also members of the British Women's Patriotic League.

The 1925 edition of the Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book shows how closely the values of the LAC mirrored those of the British Empire, in declaring, under a Resolution noted in the minutes of the General Meeting held on 21 October 1924 that the club would extend a welcome to "women members of similar clubs overseas", whilst stressing that "the overseas Clubs specified be confined to those within the Empire" (36). Reference to the Club Badge also emphasises that the Badge was an emblem of the "sociability and good-fellowship which are among the chief objects of the Club"

(38), but clearly the “good-fellowship” was only to be extended to women living within the communities of the British Empire.

Ann C. Colley writes in *Victorians in the Mountains: Sinking the Sublime*, that the LAC can be seen as an early feminist endeavour which came into being because of the impossibility of women joining the Alpine Club (115-117). If this is the case, then any feminist principles appear to have been subsumed by members’ refusing to allow women to mountaineer without an approved chaperone. I suggest that the LAC uneasily straddled the conservatism of the nineteenth century and the growing modernism of the twentieth century. What Brockington writes of the Lyceum Club also arguably applies to the LAC: “It threatened to disrupt the British Establishment, yet itself became a feature of the Establishment” (2).

The LAC published a yearly report from 1913 to 1924, aimed at publicising the activities of its members together with notifications of the year’s social calendar – dinners, teas, “At Homes”, musical soirees, deaths, in memoriam notices, correspondence from members, lists of lectures, club walks, picture exhibitions, a summary of the annual dinner, a notification of gifts received including additions to its library, information about the Club Room and Club Badge, notes of business meetings, general meetings, AGMs and a full list of members. In discussing “separate spheres ideology” (13) Sandra Stanley Holton suggests that the home was viewed as a safe, cosy haven nurtured by women. In the case of the LAC, “At Homes” combined several functions: they enabled women to show slides and hold lectures on various mountaineering exploits, display paintings and sketches; they provided opportunities to be social in like-minded company and they enabled hostesses to show their homes off to their best effect.

During the First World War, the LAC’s “At Homes” enabled women to come together in a common patriotic endeavour for the war effort, for example, in the knitting of blankets, wool shirts and socks. Archival records held by the Imperial War Museum include an advertisement for a lantern slide show given by Mrs Elizabeth Le Blond to fund-raise for the alpine motor kitchen to be sent to the Vosges mountains in France for the Chasseurs Alpin (alpine infantry). In her writing on women’s suffrage, Sandra Stanley Holton conceptualises the home as a place which allowed “British feminists [...] to use women’s domestic specialisation as grounds for their entry into the public world of politics” (14). This was not, I argue, the primary function of the LAC’s “At Homes” which were mainly social affairs. When, in the early 1920s, the club was confronted with a manifesto from its younger women members which requested more

opportunities for women to climb together without men – whether guides or male family – most of the membership retreated into the haven of the gendered and cultured Edwardian status quo, paving the way for the establishment of the Pinnacle Club. Established as it was within the contradictions of the *fin de siècle*, bridging the old and new centuries but anchored within the old and therefore unable or unwilling to embrace the more modernist aspirations of the new, the LAC increasingly found itself out of touch with the progressive aims of some of its members. In writing of the resistance by the LAC to innovative practice such as women leading climbs on their own during the 1920s, Miriam Underhill writes in Give Me the Hills, that:

After we had climbed with guides for a while and begun to think we were becoming competent, some of us started out to lead climbs on our own. This was not always approved of. I remember once in Zermatt, some thirty years ago, that one of the officers of the L.A.C. took me aside and said, with some embarrassment, but still doing her duty as she felt she should: ‘I feel I must tell you that the Ladies’ Alpine Club does not approve of manless climbing’. (30)

In writing about the entrenched Victorian conservatism in the novels of Ivy Compton-Burnett, Alison Light suggests that the violent years of the early twentieth century which found “their apotheosis in the Great War” (16) resulted in producing a “crisis in conservatism” (16) as well as avant-garde movements which challenged conservatism. The nature of the conservatism in the membership of the LAC appeared to be of type described in Compton-Burnett’s novels – what Light refers to as “mannered Victorianese” (21), which stifled and constrained its characters within a suffocating Victorian cocoon. Whilst the LAC did not restrain its membership to the extent of a cocoon – otherwise members would never have left the valley floor – it did limit the ambitions of its more progressive membership. The “mannered Victorianese” of the LAC, however, is curiously at odds with its use of an illustration of a woman mountaineer on the front cover of the Ladies’ Alpine Club Year Books in the 1920s and is a point to which I return in the next chapter.

Whilst it is true that the values of the LAC were largely entrenched in the Edwardian era, the club did provide a base and a *raison d’être* for women to come together in congenial surroundings with like-minded women to talk about mountains and to organise climbing trips both at home and abroad. Winifred Holtby robustly argues in Women and a Changing Civilisation that women’s clubs and societies had a positive impact on furthering the social, educational, leisured, political and cultural

ambitions of women. Clubs and associations provided an alternative, she writes, to the “vision of leisure, liberty and irresponsibility which sometimes appears to be the lot of the well-to-do married woman” (110). Holtby’s view of the purpose of women’s clubs ignores the overtly political rationale of more politicised and radical clubs for women such as the suffrage clubs and women’s unions. However, Holtby does at least acknowledge the importance of women’s clubs as a means of mitigating the boredom and lacklustre approach to life which sometimes accompanied women who had nothing better to do than, according to Holtby, “play golf on a Tuesday afternoon or to take the children out picknicking on a Thursday morning (110). This puts a different emphasis on the rationale for the LAC’s “At Homes”, suggesting that whilst they operated on one level as purely social occasions, on another level, they provided opportunities for women to gather and talk about mountaineering and to develop what Elizabeth Le Blond, in her article “Alpine Climbing Past and Present” refers to as women’s “best qualities”. Mountaineering, she writes, “brings forth our best qualities – unselfishness, self-reliance, alertness of mind, calmness in moments of danger, infinite patience” (537). This, at the very least, was what the LAC strove to accomplish.

In 1975, the LAC was finally merged with the Alpine Club, an event celebrated in the final edition of the LAC’s 1975 Year Book. Dorothy Pilley’s article in that edition, entitled “Looking Backwards”, celebrates what I perceive as being probably the most significant achievement of the LAC, that it enabled strong, like-minded women to come together collectively to advance their interest in mountaineering, albeit within an overall club ethos that was not focused exclusively on women’s mountaineering. “Most essential of all”, Pilley wrote, “I had found in the LAC so many to confirm and support my own fanatic passion, a bond which saved me from feeling as odd as to my other friends I seemed” (14).

The Ladies’ Scottish Climbing Club (LSCC)

In 1908, quick on the heels of the LAC, the Ladies’ Scottish Climbing Club (LSCC) was inaugurated by a trio of three ladies – Jane Inglis Clark, her daughter Mabel Inglis Clark and their friend Lucy Smith – all of whom had husbands or brothers in the Scottish Mountaineering Club (SMC), which like the Alpine Club, excluded women from its membership. Like the LAC, the LSCC collided with the confluence of old and new values of the *fin de siècle*, wrestling with a division in its membership between those who saw mountaineering as the preserve of ladies and those who saw

mountaineering in terms of a more inclusive vision which included women. This ambition eventually took precedence in the LSCC's manifesto, whilst the founding trio, anxious to mollify its more conservative membership, retained the word "ladies" in the LSCC's title and in much of its reporting. The Journal of the SMC recorded the formation of the LSCC in its journal of September 1908, electing to emphasise the more "ladylike" elements of the club, striking a pejorative note as it separated the aspirations of women from ladies:

Woman, making up the leeway of centuries, has jostled to the front to take her place alongside man in the many active pursuits so long considered to be alone suited for the masculine persuasion. But although women had shared in the joys of mountaineering with their husbands, brothers or guides, it has been left to the present gracious reign to find lady climbers banding themselves into Clubs with the same aims as those of the various male Climbing Clubs.

(qtd. in Steven 7)

The LSCC's avowed intention was to create a women's climbing club which would support women in developing mountaineering skills to enable them to climb mountains without guides, with a view to enabling women to make unsupported ascents. This was an unprecedented ambition at the time in women's mountaineering in Britain. The aims of the LSCC were twofold, "to bring together Ladies who are lovers of mountain-climbing, and to encourage mountaineering in Scotland, in winter as well as in summer" (Steven 8). The LSCC also seems to have taken a more pragmatic approach to problems of clothing right from the start, going so far as to issue guidance to members in 1908 on the desired "Outfit for Winter Climbing in Scotland", which included "Strong Boots, with Low Heels and Mountain Nails, Thick Stockings, Tweed Knickers, Short Skirts, Woollen Underwear, Woollen Blouse" in addition to ice-axes, ropes, compass, maps and a pocket knife (Steven 10).

The LSCC was quicker than the LAC in recognising the need to grow its membership and open the club's doors to working women, which it did after the First World War. In comparison, the LAC sought to retain its conservatism, fighting increasing rearguard actions from a faction of membership which, as the twentieth century progressed, became eager for change and a more progressive approach to women's mountaineering. Eventually, in 1921, unhappy with the LAC's increasing resistance to change, a community of women established, in the north of England, a more progressive women's mountaineering and rock climbing club, the Pinnacle Club, a

club which was to feature significantly throughout Dorothy Pilley's mountaineering career. The next section discusses the establishment of the Pinnacle Club, contextualising the wider manifesto for change which the club supported. I will argue that the Pinnacle Club was both a product and result of evolving changes in women's mountaineering and that it might therefore be considered a referent for modernism in women's mountaineering.

"A long conspiracy": The Pinnacle Club

The Pinnacle Club was formed in Easter 1921 following a letter published in The Manchester Guardian advertising the formation of a club for women climbers (Angell 3). It is not the intention here to provide a full history of the Pinnacle Club, which has been comprehensively written by Shirley Angell, but to contextualise it within the gathering pace of change during a period which was to usher women's mountaineering away from its Victorian roots into an increasingly democratic and collective era. The ladies of leisure who had dominated travel, mountaineering and adventure in the nineteenth century – with its associations and preoccupations with Empire and Class – were gradually being superseded by women with more egalitarian and inclusive visions. In terms of women's mountaineering, this evolution was overtly informed by the interplay between modernism and women's mountaineering which found its expression within the Pinnacle Club. The Pinnacle Club was thus a club of its time, building on the new social and economic capital available to a wider community of women which sought to move away from the class-based ideology of Victorian gendered relations.

The primary impetus for the Pinnacle Club came from a desire to develop a women's mountaineering club in England which would create opportunities for women mountaineers to practice and improve their climbing away from men, in order to acquire the skills that they needed in order to climb independently of men. Shirley Angell writes that the over-arching aim of the Pinnacle Club was to give women mountaineers opportunities to develop their mountaineering within a collective and supportive women's community, thus:

Women would help each other to become more proficient in the art of rock climbing and mountaineering [...] they were bound to gain confidence, as one after another they learnt to lead, not necessarily anything very difficult, and, little by little, their confidence in each other would develop. (4)

Founding members included Dorothy Pilley, who was to become president of the club in the middle 1930s and the literary editor of the Pinnacle Club Journal, whilst retaining her membership of the LAC. This was not a clash of interests for Pilley, who was comfortably able to straddle and reconcile the two contrasting cultures of the clubs. In Climbing Days, Pilley suggests that the Pinnacle Club actioned what Pilley refers to as “a long conspiracy, prompted by the feeling we many of us shared that a rock-climbing club for women would give us a better chance of climbing independently of men, both as to leadership and general mountaineering” (84). She was also clear that the Pinnacle Club was “no mere feminist gesture”, arguing that its aspirations went much deeper than a superficial embracing of feminist principles. The club was, she wrote, rooted in “a sense that training in the fullest responsibilities of leadership in all its aspects is one of the most valuable things that climbing has to offer, and that women could hardly get such training unless they climbed themselves” (84). Nea Morin echoes Pilley’s sentiments in A Woman’s Reach, writing that the Pinnacle Club was formed to “encourage independent rock-climbing among women” (199) as opposed to advocating women to climb in a “spirit of bravado” (200). In her article on the formation of the Pinnacle Club which was published in the 1922 edition of the Alpine Journal as “Alpine Notes”, the first club president, Eleanor (Len) Young, wrote that:

This club is the outcome of a steadily growing conviction among many women that it was desirable to have a centre – social, educational and advisory – for women and girl climbers [...] women have little opportunity to master, or to enjoy, the finer points and sensations of the art itself [...] The new Club makes a special feature of the training of its beginners, both in route-finding and in technique [...] it supplies an energetic criticism – free from the polite restrictions imposed by differences of sex (qtd in Angell 15).

Parallels can be drawn here with women’s cycling clubs which, as I suggested in the previous chapter, had since the 1890s enabled women to develop confidence and independence in cycling within a female community. Young’s article explicitly set out the Pinnacle Club’s intentions to revolutionise women’s mountaineering – a brief welcomed by frustrated LAC members. The Pinnacle Club set out to be a different women’s club from the LAC in two ways: first, it was committed foremost to developing women’s technical mountaineering skills. Second, it looked outside the home to develop its club ethos rather than centralising the club’s activities within the home, like the LAC’s “At Homes” and musical soirees. Because of these two points of

departure, the Pinnacle Club closely aligns itself with what Sandra Stanley Holton has described as a “feminising democracy” (9-10), a philosophy underpinned by a desire to nurture women’s abilities in new democratic communities led by women.

Another of the distinguishing features of the Pinnacle Club was that it had its roots in the north of England, attracting women who lived outside London. The new club was supported by close affiliations with the Manchester-based Rucksack Club and the Lake District-based Fell and Rock Climbing Club (FRCC), both of which had members whose wives were keen to become members of the new club.

Lilian Bray, the outspoken daughter of a judge, was the only other member of the LAC in addition to Pilley, to join the Pinnacle Club. In a letter written to “Pilley” by “Bray” in 1923 – the members of the Pinnacle Club referred to each other by their surnames because, as Eleanor Winthrop Young explained in Pinnacle Club: A History of Women Climbing “it was trendy and modern to be known by one’s surname in the Pinnacle Club and everyone was known by their surname or nickname” (6) – Bray explained her difficulty with the LAC’s resistance to change, referring to her growing frustration with “opposition” from older members, which progressive members like Bray and Pilley found chafing. In this letter Bray voiced her frustration, writing that:

I am not keen on the Ladies’ Alpine at present. I don’t think it can ever be made a success after all this time. We could never so alter it, there would always be perpetual and very powerful opposition from the old members and unless it was very completely changed it will never have any real standing in the climbing world. (Lilian Bray Letter, 13 November 1923).

Bray also mooted a possible merger with the Alpine Club. This was revolutionary thinking in 1923 and Bray was ahead of her time – the LAC would have to wait over fifty years to realise a fully inclusive vision for men and women’s mountaineering. Bray’s impatience with the LAC had been compounded by the attitude of the club towards an aspirant member, Mabel Jeffrey, the strong-willed and independent daughter of one of the founding trio of the LSCC. Jeffrey appears to have exhibited characteristics of modernism which the LAC found unacceptable. In a letter written by Pilley to Ivor Armstrong Richards on Friday 11 January 1925, Pilley writes of what appeared to be a class-driven “turmoil” within the Ladies’ Alpine Club, positioning herself as one of the members opposing the snobbery which is bent upon obstructing Jeffrey’s membership. Pilley’s letter records that:

The Ladies' AC in a turmoil again. McAndrew – aided and abetted by that formidable snob Mrs Wedgwood (Longstaff's sister) is now on the warpath. They intend to blackball; Wedgwood says ...[sic] that if Mabel Jeffrey were the stuff wanted in the Club she wouldn't allow her name to stand after all that has happened! [...] I have written M.J. saying that the organised opposition still insists that she will run a big risk but that we would back her – A most awkward decision for her – but a very grievous mess. (Pilley Letter, 11 January 1925)

The Alpine Club, the Rucksack Club and the Fell & Rock Climbing Club (FRCC), supported the new women's club by publishing articles by Pinnacle Club members in editions of their respective club journals throughout the 1920s but there was by no means a consensus of support in the wider mountaineering community for the aspirations of Pinnacle Club members. Writing in her autobiography, A Woman's Reach, Nea Morin, one of the leading woman mountaineers in England and Europe in the 1940s and 1950s, notes that members were often rudely dismissed by the wider fraternity of mountaineering (200). In Climbing Days, Dorothy Pilley noted that men did not waste any time in pointing out the shortcomings of ladies' technical incompetence, noting one example of an instance when a party of three ladies on a rock climb did not manage their leader's rope adequately, causing the audience to lose "few opportunities of commenting on feminine rashness" (67). John Hurst, a member of the Rucksack Club, wrote a tongue-in-cheek article, as Angell notes, about a party of three women mountaineers (Dorothy Pilley, Paddy Wells and Lilian Bray) who had travelled to Switzerland in June 1921 to undertake some guideless climbing. Hurst noted in his article that "our party was reinforced by the left wing of the Pinnacle Club, intent on guideless conquest" (qtd. in Angell 13). His reference to "left-wing" members is a strong indication of the perceived revolutionary character of the women's intent.

The mountaineer, crime author and Pinnacle Club member Gwen Moffat, in her Foreword to Shirley Angell's History of the Pinnacle Club suggests that the founders of the Pinnacle Club were largely unaware of the cultural and social revolution they were creating. What started off as a club with modest ambitions developed into a *tour de force* for change in women's mountaineering. She writes:

When it was formed in 1921 the founders knew only in part what they were about. Initially they were creating an environment in which they could lead on their own choice of route and, refuting all suggestions that

a woman could lead only with the support of a male second, they led all-woman ropes. From that point we developed. (viii)

These few sentences from Gwen Moffat encompass the intent of a mountaineering community for women which threw down a gauntlet to women mountaineers to join in creating something different and which had bigger implications outside the club – a mountaineering movement that was dedicated to encouraging women to climb without men; exhorting women to take the lead, to make their own decisions about how, where and what to climb. The taking of a lease on an empty cottage in the Cym Dyli valley in North Wales for use as a club hut was a further measure of the club's intention to nurture a women's mountaineering community. The hut, opened formally on 5 November 1932, provided a much needed and valued base for club members, offering basic, affordable accommodation for a shilling a day – a bonus for the more impecunious member – and a venue for club meetings and social occasions. The hut was a significant and revolutionary development, giving members their own space away from men. From these humble beginnings, the Pinnacle Club's membership expanded to reflect largely professional membership; doctors, writers, teachers, artists and scientists – a new community of mountaineering women. It has developed into its current international sorority of women from a range of social backgrounds and communities who share a love of rock-climbing and mountaineering.

A brief discussion here of women's mountaineering clubs in Switzerland and France will provide a European contrast to the British women's clubs which I have discussed in this chapter. Cecile Ottogalli, Olivier Hoibian and Anne-Lise Dufey have written about the Club d'Alpin Francais (French Alpine Club) and the Club Suisse de Femme Alpinistes (Swiss Club of Women Mountaineers, of which Dorothy Pilley was a member). The Club d'Alpin Francais, inaugurated in 1874, permitted women to join from the start, thereby negating the need for women to form a club of their own. Hoibian has suggested that the reason for this lies in the historic organisation of French mountaineering which unlike other sports in France was not organised for the sole enjoyment of men. Rather than allow more traditional gendered stereotypes of a woman's role to influence the constitution of the Club d'Alpin Francais, a more modern view prevailed which, according to Ottogalli, recognised the benefits of outdoor recreation to the health of women. Switzerland, Dufey argues, held a different view, based on similar views of a woman's place to those held in Britain. In her study of minutes of the Swiss Alpine Club – a similar fraternity to England's Alpine Club, inaugurated in 1863 – Dufey reveals the furious opposition by most Swiss Alpine Club

members to suggestions that women should be allowed to join, informed by members' concerns about women's physical ability to manage the technical demands of the alpine terrain and loss of their discounts on Swiss railways if they travelled alone. Finally, members agreed reluctantly that the admittance of women would be an asset because they could keep the huts clean and cook meals. This concession led infuriated Swiss women alpinists to form their own club, the Club Suisse de Femmes Alpinistes, in 1918.

The next chapter contextualises and connects women's mountaineering in the 1920s and 1930s to the wider cultural and literary framework of modernism, including the development and significance of the two "little magazines" of the Ladies' Alpine Club and the Pinnacle Club.

Chapter 4

“Free and Unencumbered”? Tradition and Modernism in Women’s Mountaineering 1922-1938

“What centuries would seem to stretch”, commenced Mrs Herbert Dawson’s “Editorial” to the 1930 edition of the Ladies’ Alpine Club Year Book, “between the records of our fellow members’ achievements during this past year and those of the Victorian era! Strolling down the main street of Zermatt last summer [...] our members set forth in their trim, practical climbing kit, free and unencumbered” (3). One year later, in the 1931 Ladies’ Alpine Club Year Book, Mrs Dawson’s editorial claimed that whilst “1930 has been called the Women’s Year [...] the standard of this year, as compared with that of 10 years ago, has been raised to a quite remarkable degree” (3). Together, these two statements highlight the nature of the changes in women’s mountaineering during the 1920s and 1930s, two decades during which women’s mountaineering benefited from change in the political and socio-cultural landscape of that era. With women’s suffrage having become universal in Britain in 1928 – and modernism informing new cultural developments in art, literature, music, science, sports and outdoors leisure – a new *tabula rosa* of women’s mountaineering was starting to be inscribed from the early 1920s onwards. The nature of this inscription in the 1930s reflects the closeness of the relationship between culture and mountaineering, as can be seen in the fiction, poetry and women’s mountaineering life-writing of the period.

I underpin discussion on women’s mountaineering by referring to the scholarship of Juliet Gardiner, Bonnie Kime Scott, Shari Benstock, Jane Goldman and Nicola Beaman, whose work on the literary and cultural impact of modernism I use to inform readings of women’s mountaineering writing in the period 1922-1938. I also refer to the mountain fiction of Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf, examine how two of the little magazines of women’s mountaineering in England (the Ladies’ Alpine Club Year Book and the Pinnacle Club Journal), along with extracts from the life-writings of Dorothy Pilley, Nea Morin, Miriam Underhill differently react to, interpret and inscribe aspects of progression in women’s mountaineering such as *les cordées féminines* (women-only ropes in mountaineering) and the increasing internationalisation of women’s mountaineering. Benstock’s research on the community of women living on the Left Bank in Paris, Jayne Marek’s research on the women editors of little magazines, Melinda Knight’s research on the connections between little magazines and

modernism together with Suzanne Churchill's and Adam McKible's research on this topic, will specifically inform links between modernism and the little magazines of women's mountaineering. I conclude by showing how women's mountaineering in the period 1922-1938 represented the the diametrically opposed impulses of conservatism and progression in women's mountaineering in a period when it seemed that the considerable forces of modernism would surely triumph, propelling women's mountaineering into the 1940s.

Jane Goldman has suggested that modernism is generally understood as occurring between 1910-1940, encompassing "the Imagist movement at the start and the Apocalypse movement at its close", these two movements representing "transformational languages, new and conflicting models of engagement and interpretation between art and real life" (Modernism xi). This view is supported by Bonnie Kime Scott, who suggests that the year 1940 serves "as a typical terminal date for studies of modernism", coinciding with the Second World War and the publication of "major experimental works such as The Waste Land," (The Gender of Modernism 6). Elizabeth MacLeod Walls suggests that modernism "collaborated" with New Woman discourse, arguing that modernism was "as much a patchwork of previous ideas as it was a bold foray into 'the new'" (230). Juliet Gardiner defines modernism as a process which sought to harness new knowledge and technologies in the fields of art, literature, music, architecture, painting, sculpture, poetry and film in order to break from the certainties of the past. "It was the role [...] of creative people to harness modern knowledge and modern technologies to build that better world, a more honest, pared-down, unfussy world free from hypocrisy and illusion in which mankind could function better, live more equitably" (327). In his introduction to The Modern Movement, Chris Baldick uses Sally Ledger's and Scott McCracken's theorising of the *fin de siècle*, as a "process of cultural fragmentation" (1) to define a process in modernism which was "oblivious to its origins, uncompromisingly severing itself from any allegiance to the past" (1-2). This sense of cutting off from the past was a quality in modernist literature which Virginia Woolf emphasised in her essay "How It Strikes A Contemporary" in The Common Reader, writing that "we are sharply cut off from our predecessors. A shift in the scale – the war, the sudden slip of masses held in position for ages – has shaken the fabric from top to bottom, alienated us from the past" (238).

Gardiner writes in the Preface to The Thirties: An Intimate History, that there were many Englands in the 1930s – the England of the Depression, poverty, unemployment, hunger marches, the England of the suburbs as depicted in the novels of

J. B. Priestley and the England of prosperity and modernism (xiii-ix). Her myriad concept of England is reflected in the twin impulses influencing women's mountaineering in the period covered in this chapter. One impulse sought to progress women's mountaineering to reflect what Holtby perceived as a new confidence and determination in women after the gaining of universal female suffrage in 1928 – manifesting itself by what she referred to as “increased self-confidence, freedom of judgment, interest and activity” (134). This, she argued, partially resulted from the impetus which had arisen from new economic and social freedoms accorded to women during the First World War. The second impulse hesitated to progress the *fin de siècle* interests of the New Woman beyond the conservative “womanly” discourse of Sarah Grand. This more conservative impulse, I suggest, sought to maintain a cultural *status quo* in women's mountaineering which was a throwback, according to Winifred Holtby, to the gendered certainties of the Victorian and Edwardian periods, hoping to ensure that women's “domestic and humanitarian” duty informed their *raison d'être* both on and off the mountains as it had done for Lucy Walker (134).

Benstock, Marek and Scott write that modernist women writers played an important role in re-defining a woman's role during the period between the two world wars. They draw on modernist writings by an international community of women, who in addition to writing fiction also wrote about film, literary criticism, music, art, women's suffrage and dance to illustrate the importance and complexity of gender as a locus for re-defining the scope of modernism. In her introduction to The Gender of Modernism, Scott locates the term ‘modernism’ as a “gendered sub-category” (4), which a diverse community of women writers such as Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf, Radclyffe Hall, Jean Rhys, Hilda Doolittle (H.D), Winifred Ellermann (Bryher), Evelyn Sharp, Dorothy Richardson and Martha Gelhorn sought to problematise through a discourse which dismantled anachronistic Victorian and Edwardian values (4-6). Here were women writers who themselves comprised a mix of the avant-garde: socialist, lesbian, left-wing and intellectual writers who inverted previously-held certainties of a women's role. Their aim can be illustrated by Evelyn Sharp's 1910 short story “The Women at the Gate”, written from the perspective of a woman who on impulse finds herself watching women suffrage activists trying to gain admittance to the House of Commons. Watching these events, the narrator finds herself “treading a new world, in which things that matter were given their true proportions and important scruples of a lifetime dwindled to nothingness” (41).

However, there was no consensus in women's modernist literature for the avant-garde aspirations which writers such as Sharp represented. Novelists such as Eleanor M. Delafield, Elinor Glyn and Angela Thirkell represent the flip-side of modernism in their concerns with romantic love, marriage and home. This flip-side is also represented in some of the women's journals of the inter-war period such as Woman and Home whose literary themes sit at the other end of the continuum to the little literary magazines and periodicals such as The Egoist, published by H.D. and Bryher. Woman and Home and their ilk, as Holtby argues, waged a "defensive war against this powerful movement", setting out to wrest the female body away from the "post-war fashion for short skirts, bare knees, straight, simple chemise-like dresses, shorts, shirts and pyjamas for sports and summer wear" and re-clothe it "in swathing trails and frills and flounces, to emphasise the difference between men and women – to recall Woman, in short, to Her True Duty" (119).

This duel between modernity and conservatism is emphasised by Nicola Beauman in her scholarship on the women's novel from 1914-1939. She writes that a literary war developed between novelists who wrote about "basic, everyday, middle-class, female preoccupations such as married love, the bringing up of children, the finding and keeping of domestic help [...] describing the pleasure and pains of a generally rather steadfast life" (95) and writers such as Virginia Woolf who attacked what Goldman refers to as "the notion of the feminine" (The Feminist Aesthetics 74). In A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf wrote that the construal of women's social and economic role over centuries had resulted in a *status quo* for women. As a result, she noted, a woman was:

A very queer, composite being [...] Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. [...] She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she [...] was the property of her husband. (51)

Both Woolf and Dorothy Richardson used mountain landscapes in their fiction to define and position "the notion of the feminine" in modernist literature. Woolf's mountaineering short story "The Symbol", uses the image of a mountain as an immutable force, a symbol of continuity and a metaphor which represents change, aspiration and freedom for women. "The Symbol" also connects life-writing and fiction

through Woolf's use of letter-writing to explore one woman's relationship to mountains. In Woolf's story, a woman is vacationing in the Alps, based in a hotel in the valley and is sitting on the hotel balcony writing a letter to her sister: "The mountain', the lady wrote, sitting on the balcony of the hotel 'is a symbol'. She paused. She could see the topmost height through her glasses. She focused the lens, as if to see what the symbol was" (7). From her balcony the lady sees a group of young men setting off to climb the mountain and this reminds her of other men who have died whilst mountaineering and of the death of her mother. In her mind, death and climbing the mountain are intertwined. The death of her mother has given her freedom to marry the man she wishes. "I thought, when I reach that point – I have never told any one; for it seemed so heartless; I shall be at the top" (7). The mountain is thus dually symbolic – of death and of achieving her ambition. It is also, I suggest, symbolic in a third way: in its immovability the mountain is a symbol of continuity at a time of increasing upheaval as Auden, Michael Roberts and other modernist poets were to later show in their poetry in the 1930s. Whilst mountains remained, the urge to climb them would continue, as Woolf suggests. "Sometimes it looks just across the way. At others, like a cloud: only it never moves. Somehow the talk, even among the invalids, who are everywhere, is always about the mountain" (8). In the midst of the woman's letter-writing, the mountaineering party fall into a crevasse and are killed. The lady concludes the letter to her sister by suggesting that the men "died in an attempt to discover" (8). Thus, in Woolf's short story the mountain is a metaphor or symbol of freedom, aspiration, progress and continual exploration. In this way, Woolf presents the mountain as a symbol of modernism as well as continuity.

Dorothy Richardson's "Oberland", a novella in Volume IV of her Pilgrimage series, represents an example, of Rita Felski's "feminist bildungsroman". In it, the main character, Miriam Henderson, based on Richardson herself, travels to the Swiss Alps to recover from over-work. In the same way as Dorothy Pilley saw the mountains as an escape from her London self, so they fulfil the same escapist need for Miriam. Her experiences in the Alps – walking, skating, tobogganing and the company of different people loosen her from the constraints of her former gendered life, and allow her to feel alive and open to emotion and sensation. When Miriam starts packing to prepare for her journey back to her London life she finds that now London has "reached forth and touched her", Switzerland falls "into its future place as part of life: an embellishment, a golden joy to which she would return" (125). This is reminiscent of Dorothy Pilley's description of the dissonance she feels between her London and her mountaineering

selves, so brilliantly captured by Elsie McNaught in her drawing of “Do in London” (see fig.11, page 126). When Miriam leaves, the paying of her hotel bill breaks the brief and fragile link to the mountains; “With the paying of Frau Knigge’s bill, her last link with the Alpenstock had been snapped” (126). Making the journey to the railway station in a coach-sleigh, Miriam finds that she is not the only woman for whom the alpine spell is breaking. Domesticity intervenes at the end of “Oberland” in the form of a man asking his sister if she can mend a fraying glove, but the mountains have given his sister a new perspective. The woman regards the glove “undisturbed and turned away the scornful sweetness of her face towards the window and the snowflakes falling thickly upon the shroud of snow” (127).

If modernism heralded a new set of cultural relations which were to help shape a world which was keen to achieve greater social, economic and political egalitarianism for women, as suggested in Sharp’s story “The Women at the Gate”, then the wider socio-cultural world of leisure in the 1930s reflected other change which echoed this egalitarian mandate. Increasingly, during the inter-war period, men and women were setting their faces towards the mountains as part of a wider movement to democratise leisure.

As Howard Hill writes in Freedom to Roam, the inter-war period witnessed a movement to increase access to the northern mountain landscapes in the 1930s for the purposes of leisure. Hill’s research focuses on how the combined effects of increased leisure time created by holidays with pay and the establishment of the Youth Hostel Association and other youth movements such as the Outward Bound movement, led to a demand for greater access to private land for walking and mountaineering. In writing about the struggle for access to the northern moors and mountains of Britain in the 1930s Hill noted that “the twenty years which divided the two World Wars are the most important for the struggle for access” (50). In part, the purpose of the access movement was to create more opportunities for the working classes to participate in leisure for health and enjoyment, but its wider impetus was overtly political, informed by the social divide in England between the land-owners of large private shooting estates and those who aspired to have greater access to fresh air and exercise. The mass trespasses carried out on swathes of privately-owned upland moorland in the Peak District in the 1930s were symptomatic, as Hill argues, of the class divide between the upper and lower classes. Hill writes that the eventual opening of land was an inevitable consequence of a movement which sought greater democratisation within outdoor leisure and resulted in an increase of professional and lower middle-class men and women joining

mountaineering, rambling, cycling and other outdoor clubs. The mountaineering traditions of the Victorian and Edwardian eras, which had done so much to develop mountaineering were now in abeyance, being over-taken by forces which became focused throughout the 1930s on creating opportunities for leisure for people outside the wealthy middle and upper classes. Scholars in the field of the sociology of leisure such as Chris Rojek continue to view the 1930s as the decade which saw the emergence of “mass leisure” with greater numbers of people seeing fresh air, health and exercise as beneficial to their health and well-being – an impetus which, over the next twenty years turned the outdoors into sites of leisure for all.

Many mountaineers were ambivalent about the effects of increased democratisation of leisure. Dorothy Pilley was one of these. For example, during a mountaineering trip to the Lake District in August 1933 Pilley observed in her diary how changes in accommodation and an increase in public holidays were making their impact felt on mountaineering and other outdoor pursuits. “It is very comfortable (baths, hot meals) but how I miss the feeling of being in touch with the farm and the land, but these days it is more like a boarding house, where people who have nothing in common gather in the evening” (Pilley Diary, 15 August 1933).

Modernism and women’s mountaineering in the little magazines of the Ladies’ Alpine Club and the Pinnacle Club

In her Preface to Modernism, 1910-1945: Image to Apocalypse, Goldman suggests that some of the most important literary movements and texts of the period 1910-1940 are “energetic and experimental. They pushed [...] the ‘literary’ as a genre out of all recognition” (xi). She perceives the literature of this period as one in “transition”, posing the question: “What are the major transitions occurring in the literature of this period? [They] are in the inventing, the forging, the laying down and recasting of these new, conflicting and transformational, modernist and avant-garde languages” (xii). Goldman suggests that it is in the pages of the “little magazines”, particularly in the independent publications, that the transformative nature of modernist literature can best be seen. The two “little magazines” of English women’s mountaineering, the Ladies’ Alpine Club Year Book and the Pinnacle Club Journal, inscribe the transformational nature of women’s mountaineering throughout the 1920s and 1930s, connecting women’s mountaineering and its literature to the wider social, literary and cultural

relations informing their publication. Several broad themes emerge in the content of the two journals which differently help to inform and explain the nature of women's mountaineering in this period. These themes, according to Rita Felski, consider the "complex interplay between the social and material conditions affecting" (123) women's mountaineering and the publication of women's mountaineering literature.

In their article "Little Magazines and Modernism: An Introduction", Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible describe some of the functions of the "little literary magazines", which:

acted as open, heterogeneous social settings in which writers of various races, nationalities and classes read and responded to each other's work [...] they provide loci of identification and difference, allowing us to map the lines of connection, influence, conflict and resistance that entangled the many strands of modernism [...] little magazines pulsed with the excitement of their times, and they anticipated or forged future literary and political trends. (2)

In Churchill's and McKible's article the "little magazine" is positioned as overtly literary, experimental and political. Whilst the Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book and the Pinnacle Club Journal are not literary experimental endeavours in the same way that other magazines of the period such as The Egoist are, they do, arguably, reflect some of the radical ambitions of little magazines in terms of the opportunities they gave women to put pen to paper whilst being distinct from The Egoist in terms of the quality of writing, subject matter and style. Given what Jayne Marek in Women Editing Modernism: Little Magazines and Literary History, calls the "cultural constraints upon women at that time" (3), I argue firstly that the Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book and Pinnacle Club Journal provided opportunities for women to write about and publish their mountaineering experiences. Second, they gave women like Dorothy Pilley the opportunity to carry out an editing role – Marek has written that a "striking number of women editors were active during the rise and flowering of modernism" (4).

These women editors included Pilley's former schoolfriend Bryher, who worked with H.D. to publish little magazines of the modernist era, such as The Egoist, using her considerable wealth to promote her husband's publishing endeavours in addition to H.D.'s foray into cinematic art (101-102). The Year Book and Journal enabled women to write and publish in congenial, supportive and like-minded communities. Although the Ladies' Alpine Club disconnected itself from the more modern elements in women's mountaineering (continuing, for example, to publish notices about "At Homes",

exhibitions of paintings, musical evenings and notification of marriages in its Year Books throughout the 1930s), it did increasingly publish articles which illustrated the increasing diversity and internationalisation of women's mountaineering. It was left to the Pinnacle Club to represent, through articles in the Pinnacle Club Journal, the more modernist vanguard of women's mountaineering, through, for example, publishing writing on the first *les cordées féminines* as early as 1924 whilst continuing to straddle what Melinda Knight calls more traditional "middle-class values and beliefs" such as marriage (29). Many of the members of the Pinnacle Club were or became very happily married – more often than not to other mountaineers as in Pilley's case.

The articles published in the Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book and Pinnacle Club Journal reflect a diverse feminine consciousness in women's mountaineering. The flipside of Mrs Dawson's editorial comments in 1930 and 1931, discussed at the start of this chapter, is that the membership of the Ladies' Alpine Club was reluctant to embrace change, staying resolutely middle and upper-class in its values throughout the inter-war period and beyond. This, as I have argued, frustrated some members of the Ladies' Alpine Club who wanted change – members like Dorothy Pilley and Lilian Bray who recognised that changes in women's mountaineering would be best achieved outside the club and not within it, thus providing the Pinnacle Club with its key *raison d'être*.

However, notwithstanding its reluctance to recognise wider social change through a broader church of membership, the members of the Ladies' Alpine Club engaged in extensive mountaineering around the mountain ranges of the world throughout the 1920s and 1930s, reflecting an increasing internationalisation in women's mountaineering activities. They did so whilst retaining a cultural climate where support from men as guides and travelling in comfort remained the norm for its largely monied and leisured members. Reports in the club's Year Books throughout the 1930s publicise and celebrate the achievements of women mountaineers in locations as diverse as Greenland, the European Alps, Canada, The Tatras, the Atlas Mountains, Kilimanjaro, Mount Kenya, Japan, Canada, Poland and Czechoslovakia, in addition to mountain ranges in Great Britain. Articles also include writings about the exotic flora & fauna and geology in far-off places, showing that women mountaineers were starting to contribute in more scientific ways to mountaineering knowledge, mounting a substantial challenge to the position of the Alpine Club's Alpine Journal as the established resource for scientific alpine research. The increasing visitation and inhabitation of international landscapes by women is a theme particularly reinforced in Benstock's research of

women of the Left Bank and in Marek's discussion of women editors of little magazines, highlighting the increased mobility of women in the period.

“I am not able to write in the required style”: conflicts in The Ladies' Alpine Club

In the early 1920s there had been much discussion among the Ladies' Alpine Club's membership about turning the annual report into a Journal along the lines of the much respected Alpine Club's journal the Alpine Journal. This received general approval but it was one thing to have general acceptance for the concept of a Journal and another to get the full support of members to provide contributions. The following extract from the “Proceedings of the Ladies' Alpine Club General Business Meeting” of June 1924, reported in the 1925 Annual Report, records that: “A Form of Enquiry re the question of starting a journal having been sent out, the Hon. Secretary reported that 17 forms had been filled in and returned, but that, while most approved the idea, only two promised active support” (Ladies' Alpine Club Annual Report 34).

A letter was, in fact, sent out to all members in early 1923 together with a tear-off slip, asking for members' responses to the issue of whether or not they would be interested in a Journal and, if so, whether they would be prepared to contribute. The replies were mainly anonymous and provide insight into the ultimate failure to persuade members of the Ladies' Alpine Club to subscribe to a journal. Some slips simply bore the word “No”. Others replied in the affirmative, giving examples of what they felt they could contribute – photographs, an illustration, a lecture (Ladies' Alpine Club, un-numbered box). Some were apologetic and gave a reason, for example, “I am not able to write in the required style”. Another said “I do not have the time”. A letter published in the 1925 Ladies' Alpine Club Annual Report from a member, Mrs B. H. Stevens, offers another reason for the members' reluctance to submit articles for publication. She writes:

A year ago I opposed the idea of a publication under the impression that we were going to strive to produce a “journal of mountain adventure and scientific research” like the A. J [Alpine Journal], in which we were bound to fall far below our admired “big brother”. I now realised that a simpler friendly Year Book would certainly be of interest to London members and would, we hope, have a double welcome from country members. (Stevens Letter, December 1924)

The point made by Mrs Stevens is noteworthy – namely that many women members felt that they lacked the literary skills to write in a style acceptable for publication. This is important because it not only provides a reason for the poor response to the plea for material but also offers a contrary view to Jayne Marek’s assertion that many women were keen to contribute articles to literary “little magazines”. Marek argues that women saw “little magazines” as an opportunity to practise writing skills for publication within a culture which was sympathetic to new writers which would challenge the public pervasiveness of male writers in the modernist literary landscape (2). This was not the case for the members of the Ladies’ Alpine Club.

The possible reasons for reluctance from some members to give support for a journal included the heavy list of social engagements which the membership committed themselves to, including “At Homes”, which inevitably placed a heavy burden of work on the hostess in terms of organisation. Add to this the wider household management and family responsibilities including the probable care of elderly parents for some members and it is not surprising that support for articles did not receive a wider mandate. As a keen Ladies’ Alpine Club Committee member throughout most of the 1920s, the lack of a proper journal vexed Dorothy Pilley who – keen to advance her journalistic ambitions – had made the fulfilment of this objective a particular project of hers. Letters written by Pilley in 1923 to the Honourable Secretary of the LAC, Miss Beatrice McAndrew, urge McAndrew to support a mandate for a proper journal, showing Pilley’s support and enthusiasm. Other correspondence to Pilley from members such as Rose Allen, also demonstrate support. Allen writes: “I had already written to Miss McAndrew saying how much I hoped we should have a Journal – I said that I could not think there would be great difficulty in making up the required material” (Allen Letter, 21 May 1923). The Committee of the Ladies’ Alpine Club did not agree with members’ proposal for a journal but they did propose a compromise. Additional notes from the “Proceedings of the Ladies’ Alpine Club General Business of 1924” in the club’s 1925 Annual Report record the following resolution:

It be resolved that there should be an enlarged annual publication in place of the present Annual Report [...] to contain interesting notes and articles and that a circular be sent to all members asking them to send in articles, notes or information [...] that in order to give this a fair chance a sum of £90 be ear-marked to the purpose and spread over three years.
(Ladies’ Alpine Club Annual Report 35)

Dorothy Pilley was disappointed that the club did not support members' proposal for a journal, as is shown in the following letter written by the secretary, Miss McAndrew, in response to a letter from Pilley:

I am sorry you are disappointed about the Journal, but if you, and any other members who are keen to have one, will only help to make the Annual Report larger and more interesting by contributing articles of climbing interest it may develop into something worthy of a changed name. (McAndrew Letter, 17 October 1923)

Pilley recorded her disappointment in her diary, as is shown in the following entry from 13 October 1923 in which she iterates her view that a journal would not just reinforce the club's position as a serious mountaineering club for women. She additionally makes the point that by this time the women members were doing enough climbing to justify the enterprise. Pilley also notes that by this time, the Pinnacle Club had avowed their intention to produce a journal – another measure of the cultural differences between the two clubs:

I should like to record how very much I regret that the scheme put forward by Miss Bray for a Journal has been abandoned. It appears to me that a Ladies' Alpine Club Journal would strengthen our position; be of interest and a real bond of union between our town and country members [...] I am one of those who believes that our members do enough climbing to justify a Journal – that a Handbook is insufficient and I regret to hear that the Pinnacle Club is producing a Journal while we are not attempting such an enterprise. (Pilley Letter, 13 October 1923)

As Pilley was by then an experienced journalist it was proposed that she make the production and publication of what was to become the expanded Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book, her responsibility, with an Editing Committee to help her. Pilley worked hard and persuasively to support members of the Ladies' Alpine Club in their efforts to expand the club's Annual Report. By 1928 the Ladies' Alpine Club Annual Report became the extended Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book, with the proportion of articles submitted on women's mountaineering (as opposed to social activities) slowly increasing throughout the 1930s. Despite Pilley's best efforts, however, the Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book was to remain largely a social calendar, with, on average, just 1/3 of the total of printed pages in each yearly edition covering women's mountain achievements, a missed opportunity given the increasing expansion of mountaineering

activity in the French and European Alps by the club's membership from the early 1930s as noted by Miss B McAndrew in her "Editorial" for the 1927 edition of the Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book:

It must not be forgotten that if we are to justify the name of our Club we must learn to be efficient and responsible in the more dangerous business of snow and ice, and we are therefore happy to find also such ascents as the Aiguille Verte, the Ober-Gabelhorn from Zinal and the Grand Combin. (McAndrew 3)

If I position, as I do here, the Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book and the Pinnacle Club Journal within modernist literary culture, this suggests that I see some convergence of the aim and ambition of the two publications with modernism. As I have previously written, the Ladies' Alpine Club's relationship to modernism was problematic, but there is evidence that within the membership, there were members who had empathy and quietly supported (if not verbally) the mandate for change expressed by members such as Lilian Bray. This can be illustrated by looking at the front cover of the Ladies' Alpine Club Annual Report throughout the 1920s, which is reproduced in Figure 12. The image of the women mountaineer seems to be a metaphor for progression in the LAC for which there was no consensus among the club leadership. This is an interesting, almost subversive illustration which disappears from the front cover of the Year Books after the 1920s. It poses an interesting question about the extent of a rift which may have existed between more progressive elements in the LAC membership and the overwhelming conservatism in the club's leadership and committee structure.

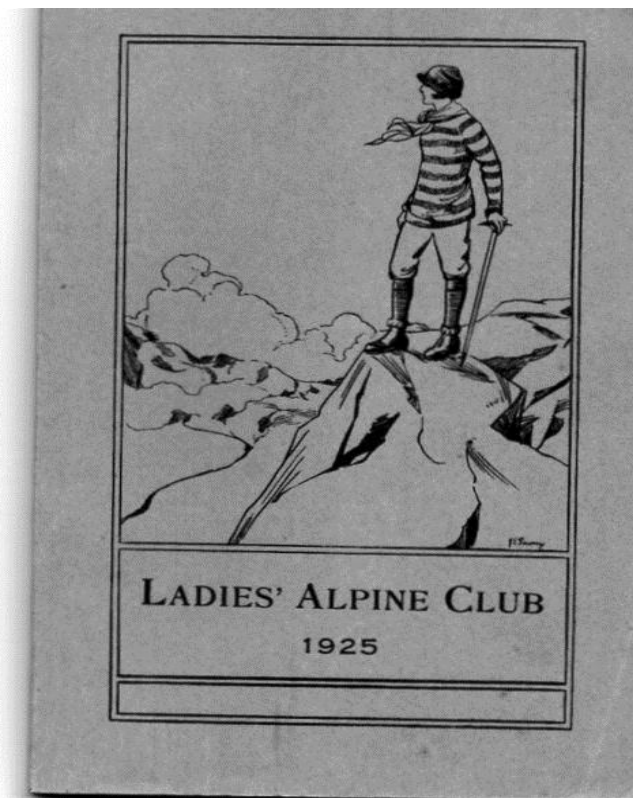


Fig. 12. Illus. Jane Pawsey. Front cover of Ladies' Alpine Club Annual Report (1925).

Jane Goldman has suggested that the “image” is a significant “semantic and structuring unit” (xi) of modernism. The illustration of a women mountaineer is drawn by Jane Pawsey, a member of the Ladies’ Alpine Club, reported in the 1927 Ladies’ Alpine Club Year Book as a notable contributor to exhibitions of mountain paintings and a woman who valued “mountains chiefly for their human associations” (33). The woman mountaineer is standing on a summit, looking towards the horizon, dressed in knee breeches, boots, gaiters and sporting a striped jumper and cap. This image is conversant with the physical image of the modern woman as contrived by illustrators of the period: short hair, boyish looking and casually dressed, aping the photographs of key literary women of the modernist period such as photographs of H.D. and Bryher (Marek 101-112).

Developments in the Ladies’ Alpine Club at this time included the increasingly internationalised nature of women’s mountaineering outside the UK and Europe as members increasingly travelled to alpine ranges around the world. In addition, the membership itself reflected a growing multi-national membership, with members joining from America, Australia, France, Holland, Canada, Italy, New Zealand, Switzerland, India, Tasmania and the Malay States, demonstrating both the extensive, world-wide involvement by women in mountaineering and the links the club had made

to other women's climbing clubs and associations. Articles in the Year Books of the Ladies' Alpine Club throughout the 1930s illustrate the increasing breadth and range of members' mountaineering achievements.

In an article from the 1930 Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book, entitled "Six Weeks Wandering in the Wilderness", Mrs Edith Murray wrote of her experiences of mountain scrambles in Egypt where she startled native women who came to stare in wonder at the "white woman who skips about the mountains like a goat" (10). Miriam O'Brien Underhill, publishing three articles in the 1931 Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book about guided climbs she had undertaken in the Swiss Alps in 1930 and 1929, was mindful about the disapproval of the Ladies' Alpine Club towards manless climbing and made only a brief mention in parentheses of her revolutionary manless climbs completed in the French Alps with Winifred Marples, Nea Morin and Alice Damesme in 1930 (5). She did, however, publish a lengthy article in the August 1934 edition of National Geographic entitled "Manless Alpine Climbing: The First Woman to Scale the Grepon and The Matterhorn", to much acclaim. In the 1932 edition of the Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book, Elizabeth Le Blond wrote a retrospective article entitled "Then and Now", offering some observations of the changes which had occurred in fifty years of her own mountaineering. She emphasised greater ease in transport, the rising costs associated with mountaineering (hut and guide fees, food, clothing, equipment, photography), noting changes in public morals which did not frown so much on women bivouacking with men who were not their husband, brother or father (4-8). In 1932 Kate Gardiner published an article about successful ascents in Canada and New Zealand and Dr Maud Cairney, a doctor working as a government official in the Federated Malay States (now Malaysia), wrote about her climbs with her mother on the island of Java, putting her experiences into the context of a British colonial culture. Dr Cairney's travel to the Javanese mountains caused club members to react with astonishment and horror in that, having the money to travel with leisure and comfort she chose to travel second-class. As she related: "When they heard we were going second-class they, one and all, lifted up their voices and said, 'but you can't do it.' However, we did, and it was great fun" (10).

Dorothy Pilley spent most of the 1930s in China and Japan due to her husband's scholarly and academic commitments. However, they went mountaineering at every available opportunity, exploring little-known ranges in China and Japan and made a great number of first ascents throughout the 1930s. In 1933 Pilley wrote an article for the Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book entitled "Japanese Mountain Impressions", in which

she provided insight on the socio-cultural and gendered role of Japanese women, bringing a rare commentary on women climbing outside of a white, Western European context. Pilley wrote that Japanese women are “frail and butterfly-like” and explained that until recently, “Japanese women have not been welcome in the mountains [...] their presence near the summit being considered an outrage to the spirit of the mountains” (7). In the Japan of the 1930s, what Pilley referred to as a “taboo” on women mountaineers was gradually being lifted. She recorded seeing an increasing number of Japanese women in the mountains in the role of porters, “doing the heaviest of the porter’s work up and down to the huts”, as “schoolgirls in ugly blue serge dresses chattering like sparrows on the way to some of the more accessible rest-houses” (7) or as members of large and noisy family groups following the routes which connected rest-houses. Pilley remarked that “to those who know what the Japanese attitude to women is, this moral triumph will seem much more remarkable” (8). She noted, with some humour, the sight of a woman “holding the head of a prostrate young man whom altitude had entirely overcome” and remembered the “ancient hostility of the mountain god to women” (9), suggesting that the mountain god had recognised the beneficent effect of women on the mountains.¹⁴ It is, however, in the Journal of the Pinnacle Club that the most emphatic manifestation of modernism occurs. The next section explores how the Pinnacle Club Journal manifested some of the characteristics of modernism.

“Not even journalese for the populace”: The Pinnacle Club Journal

Throughout the early 1920s, Dorothy Pilley harnessed her literary skills in producing the first edition of the Pinnacle Club Journal. She and Lilian Bray were nominated to become joint editors and soon found themselves experiencing similar frustrations as they had with the Ladies’ Alpine Club, in terms of persuading members to produce work and securing articles which were of good enough quality to be published. This is a point emphasised in Shirley Angell’s history of the Pinnacle Club, when she writes: “it was very difficult to collect good matter for the journal. Some had been collected but the standard was not good enough” (22). Un-beknown to club members and to Shirley Angell (as the information only emerges in Dorothy Pilley’s unpublished diaries), Ivor Armstrong Richards helped Pilley considerably in terms of providing

¹⁴ Given the highly gendered and culturally restrained role of Japanese women at this time it is worth noting here that Birkett and Peascod’s history of women mountaineers records that the first woman to reach the summit of Everest was the Japanese woman Junko Tabei in 1975, a university educated woman who had formed the women’s section of the Japanese Alpine Club in 1969.

editorial work and advice. His contributions were kept strictly secret by Pilley but it is not surprising that Pilley turned to Richards for editorial help. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, it is clear from her diaries and letters that his literary influence was making a deep impression on her. In a long letter to Richards on 23 September 1924 Pilley had written about books she was reading:

I got a nautical book for myself [...] You had recommended Sailing Alone Around the World. I changed the In Furthest Burma (Kingdom Ward). Do look at it that we may compare notes. I thought it extraordinarily tedious [...] I have gone straight on, leaving other things to a Voyage to India [...] I should like an hour's talk with you – you listen to what I think of books which is strange and nice. (Pilley Letter, 23 September 1924)

Extracts from letters by Pilley addressed to her “Editor in Chief” throughout 1924 show the importance of Richards’ contributions in bringing the first edition of the Pinnacle Club Journal to its eventual successful publication as can be seen, for example, in the following extract from a letter written by Pilley to Richards on 21 November 1924. It is clear from what Pilley writes that she expected the first edition of the journal to be the first and last:

Editor In Chief – Anonymous Dear [...] will you pull together my page of notes, which I haven't been able to rewrite – they end lamely – I want the date of the accident since this volume may be the only one for years and will be for future generations. (Pilley Letter, 21 November 1924)

It is significant that Pilley wanted Richards’ contributions to be secret and anonymous. It is not difficult to imagine the ire of the Pinnacle Club, given its mandate to promote women’s mountaineering independence, if it had become known that a man was helping to edit its journal contents, even a high-profile and respected literary figure like Richards. Her letter of 21 November 1924 also reveals how much Pilley valued Richards’ keen editorial eye:

What do you think of the Mrs Kelly article? I don't think we can publish both on Skye. Do you? Bray has completely given in over printer – we go to Skinner and I am going down for Tuesday night [...] we have settled on illustrations – she wants 10 = £15 and insists on Pyrenees and 64 pages! It will cost us over £50 all right. (Pilley Letter, 21 November 1924)

Bray and Pilley were unhappy about the quality of some of the women's submissions to the journal. Pilley's letter to Richards continues as follows: "Bray has altered the Mrs Young article. She agrees it is shocking but says we ought to have something of the President's in, however dull, I don't agree." On 23 November 1924 in a letter which further illustrates Pilley's feelings about the quality of some of the submissions, she wrote to Richards despairingly: "How can I improve this article? I've rejected one, this is the second Miss Mann has written and Bray's alterations. Isn't it ghastly, not even journalese for the populace! Bray can't get over the climbing record of it! [...] I feel in despair about this Journal – it's such tripe" (Pilley Letter, 23 November 1924).

It would appear that Richards suggested to Pilley that she withdraw from the journal enterprise. She continues: "I agree about the Pinnacle Journal but I must go through with it now. Thanks for sending negatives and material back. The readers won't enjoy ordinary descriptive stuff of people, things and the world – too wide a scope" (Pilley Letter, 23 November 1924). The latter comment also shows the low opinion Pilley had of the members' ability to appreciate articles of "wide scope".

Much to Pilley's relief, the first edition of the Pinnacle Club Journal was sent off to its Manchester printers before Christmas 1924. In her history of the Pinnacle Club, Shirley Angell includes a review of the first edition written by a member of the Lake District-based Fell & Rock Climbing Club (FRCC) which was published in the journal of the FRCC in 1924. The favourable review showed that Pilley's and Bray's fears about the quality of the articles were apparently not shared by the wider mountaineering community. The reviewer wrote:

This first number [...] is more than commendable, it is excellent. From its cover, which is certainly more distinctive than that of any other journal, down to its final article, which contains a description of a crossing of the Col de Boucharou (Pyrenees) in deep snow, worthy to rank high in the pages of mountain literature, the number is one of sustained interest. (qtd. in Angell 22)

By the 1930s the Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book and Pinnacle Club Journal were publishing a wide and eclectic range of mountaineering writing by women, demonstrating that the membership were not only mountaineering and rock-climbing around the world at a level which demanded proficient technical skills and physical prowess, but developing greater articulacy and confidence in writing about their mountaineering. Whilst the women in both clubs were achieving successes in

mountaineering in different ways (the Ladies' Alpine Club continuing to use male guides, the women of the Pinnacle Club developing women-only ropes) the diversity, range and geographical scope of the articles in both journals signify the significant expansion in women's mountaineering throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Articles not only reflected women's growing expertise in mountaineering but showed members' growing concerns about wider social and political issues such as conservation and the rumblings within Europe which would, with the eventual outbreak of the Second World War, lead to a complete cessation of mountaineering in the Alps until 1946. However, one of the most important signature characteristics of women's mountain writing in the 1930s are the narratives which developed around one of the most important developments in women's mountaineering in the period – *les cordées féminines* (or women-only ropes).

*Les cordées féminines*¹⁵

If the mid 1920s were marked by what Dorothy Thompson, a mountaineering contemporary of Dorothy Pilley, referred to in her memoirs of climbing as “the beginning of the end of an era of petticoat restrictions” (13) then women's mountaineering in the 1930s can be defined by the development of what is termed *les cordées féminines* or, variously, “manless climbing”, “women-only ropes”. These initiatives, I argue, were revolutionary developments at a time when the Ladies' Alpine Club disapproved of women climbing without the assistance of male mountaineers or guides. Other clubs, such as the (FRCC) were sympathetic to the ambitions of women climbers wishing to climb guideless. In 1918 the FRCC had published an article in the Journal of the Fell & Rock Climbing Club by Mrs H. M. Waterlow entitled “Climbing for Women” in which Mrs Waterlow emphasised the importance of women learning independence in mountaineering.¹⁶ Mrs Waterlow wrote that “when men and women climb together the men are the leaders [...] If women wish to get the true salt and savour of climbing, to my mind they must do it by themselves. And this, as far as I know, is done very little” (18). She went on to state that the “modern young woman

¹⁵ The expression *les cordées féminines* was named after one of the most famous women-only ropes, comprising the British mountaineer Nea Morin, her sister-in-law, Micheline Morin and their friend Alice Damesme, all well-known French women mountaineers of the inter-war period. Nea married Micheline's brother, Jean Morin who was a renowned French alpinist and member of the elite Grandes Hautes Montages Group (GHMG) arm of the Club Alpin Français, the French Alpine Club.

¹⁶ The Fell and Rock Climbing Club (FRCC) frequently published articles in its journals by women climbers. Members included men and women and it supported the aims and ambition of the Pinnacle Club.

climbs with her young men friends, the older generation climb with their husbands, or if they are husbandless, Alpine veterans, with guides. There is no independence in this, and the very heart of adventure is dimmed". She concluded that "women must do their own spade work and earn their own laurels before they can meet the men on equal terms" (18). Mrs Waterlow's article anticipates the aim of the Pinnacle Club and the ambitions of *les cordées féminines*.

Mrs Dawson's "Editorial" in the 1931 edition of the Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book had also anticipated the development of *les cordées féminines* as the next significant phase in women's mountaineering. She had written that as in previous years many women had "done the Grépon [...] the question today is rather: 'Who will be the next woman to traverse the Grépon alone without guides?'" (3). Equality with male mountaineers, she noted, was still some way off, or "inconceivable" (3) as she termed it, but she hoped that women mountaineers would be judged on their "own merits rather than be over-praised because we are women" (3).

In June 1921, three members of the Pinnacle Club, Dorothy Pilley, Lillian Bray and Annie Wells travelled to the Swiss Alps to undertake one of the first *en cordée féminines* expeditions. As Dorothy Pilley observed in Climbing Days: "In 1921, guideless mountaineering for women, *sans hommes* [sic] had hardly started" (130). Pilley described the women's planning for this expedition:

Lilian Bray, Annie Wells and I discussed a programme of guideless climbing to open the 1921 season [...] we must be unusually careful to incur no legitimate criticism. We felt ourselves to be pioneers. The doctrine that women could and should take full responsibility for climbs within their powers was to be tested. (132-133)

Lilian Bray published her own humorous account of the same expedition entitled "Three Pinnacles in the Alps" in the first edition of the Pinnacle Club Journal in 1924. She wrote that they kept their guideless plans a secret "as it is not usual for ladies to go guideless in the Alps" (25). The women were all acutely aware that their behaviour should attract no derision from critical, cynical and disapproving mountaineers. They were desirous not to offend but they were determined to achieve their aim of climbing guideless. Dorothy Pilley wrote humorously in Climbing Days of their attracting attention from porters and officials as they repacked their rucksacks on the train platform. In Pilley's words, "the entertainment was a frost. Instead of frills and furbelows, out came tins of herrings in tomato sauce, worn corduroys, woolly mufflers,

battered aluminium saucepans and spirit stoves, a box of Keating's and mud-stained leather gloves" (131).

To the women's relief, their plans, once divulged, received support from male mountaineers who entered into the spirit of things by delaying their own start and holding back from offering help or suggestions, enabling the three women to succeed with impunity in accomplishing their "first feminine guideless climb" (132). The themes in Bray's and Pilley's narratives of *les cordées féminines* are threefold; the importance of not doing anything that might bring women mountaineers into disrepute; negotiating approval from others such as fellow mountaineers, porters, guides; being successful at all costs. These themes illustrate the progression of women's mountaineering in the 1930s, a decade in which women mountaineers sought – if not to be as good as men – to adopt men's terms of reference in the way that they climbed. In short, as Mrs Waterlow had argued in 1918, women mountaineers sought equality with men but recognised they had to develop their skills first and *les cordées féminines* would help them achieve this ambition. As women, however, they were under scrutiny in a way that male mountaineers were not – Pilley's reflections on the women's first guideless climb illustrate the tensions the women felt throughout their enterprise, with relief only coming when they had succeeded in their objective.

The three women's achievement became a touchstone for women's mountaineering development throughout the 1930s, with members of the Pinnacle Club blazing trails of *cordées féminines* throughout the Alps throughout the decade whilst the Ladies' Alpine Club stuck firmly to guided expeditions.

Although the manless aspiration of *les cordées féminines* was widely shared among women mountaineers of the Pinnacle Club and sympathetic clubs such as the FRCC, it was not universally accepted within mountaineering fraternities which were still accustoming themselves to women mountaineers as members of a mixed party, as Dorothy Thompson relates in her memoirs. On a trip to the Italian Alps in 1934, when undertaking her first ascent with the renowned guide Joseph Georges ("Le Skieur"), Thompson met a party of two men and a guide who were incredulous over the presence of a woman in a mixed party and exclaimed "et une dame"! (17). It was unlikely that the mountaineering community *per se*, particularly the guides, would fully embrace the movement towards *les cordées féminines*. R. H. Clark, in his book The Early Alpine Guides, discusses the transformation of "unrecorded peasants [...] encouraged by an adventurous spirit" (13), into a highly respected community of experienced, professional guides without whose hard-won expertise, Victorian mountaineers rarely

ventured into the Alps. Whilst not rich, alpine guides relied on their income from guiding to supplement their living as shop-keepers, shepherds, craftsmen. Thus from a commercial view alone, apart from any gendered view they may have held about women mountaineers, it was unlikely they would look with favour on guideless mountaineering. Many mountaineers had their favourite guide: Lucy Walker favoured Melchior Anderegg, who had also been the preferred guide of Leslie Stephen. Dorothy Pilley and Richards used the services of Joseph Georges for many years as did Dorothy Thompson.

Some alpine communities, despite the presence of increasing numbers of cosmopolitan women mountaineers also continued to hold traditional views of a woman's place. Nea Morin recounts in *A Woman's Reach* that in 1953, some years after her first manless climb, she and her daughter Denise, also an experienced alpinist, were climbing in the Italian Alps.¹⁷ They were wearing shorts and received very black looks from the residents, many of whom were still wearing traditional long-skirted, black, alpine dress (131). Some mountaineering husbands of women mountaineers also had difficulty accepting their wives' ambitions to climb *en cordées féminines* without their own influence. Morin writes of the difficulty that she, Micheline Morin and Alice Damesme had in getting permission from their husbands to climb the Meije in the French Dauphiné as a rope of three women in 1933. Morin wrote that at the time it "seemed highly doubtful whether Alice, Micheline and I would ever get Maurice and Jean to consent to our proposed *cordée féminine* on the Meije" (63), adding that one of the husbands was very keen to keep his wife under surveillance. It was only with great persistence that the men were persuaded to go away, having tried very hard to convince the women that they could do a harder climb by seconding the men or following them up a route. In the end, they compromised. The three women set off with "Maurice and three friends" and eventually the men left them to make their first *en cordée féminine*. Morin noted the precedent the Meije ascent afforded them, writing that "the way of the would-be manless climber is fraught with many an obstacle [...] Several times we had been together on a rope, but always with a party of friends near at hand [...] and under such conditions more than half the sense of adventure is lost" (65). On the ascent the women caught up with a guided party and were amused by the solicitous attention the guides paid them; one guide was very surprised when the women declined the suggested help of a rope up the next pitch. Morin wrote that "they were touched by the fatherly eye kept on us by the guides; more than once they offered us aid or tips as to what to do,

¹⁷ As Lady Denise Evans, Denise Morin became the first woman president of the Alpine Club in 1986.

though of course with the condescending masculine amuse-yourselves-as-much-as-you-like-and-we-are-always-at-hand-to-come-to-the-rescue smile” (68). She added, gleefully, that the husbands almost seemed disappointed to find them safely ensconced in the refuge, having successfully completed their climb. By overtly positioning the women in opposition to the masculine culture, Morin’s narrative emphasises the feminist aspirations of the Meije expedition in ways which Pilley’s and Bray’s accounts of their 1921 expedition do not. In Pilley’s narrative the masculine culture is background and almost immaterial but in Morin’s account it is foregrounded.

In Give Me The Hills, Miriam O’Brien Underhill explains why *les cordées féminines* were so important for the development of women’s mountaineering. First, they ensured that women who continually seconded men, gained opportunities to gain technical excellence in leading – one of the main reasons why the Pinnacle Club had been formed. Second, women would not develop an intellectual or physical expertise in mountaineering without taking the responsibility of leading; developing expertise in risk-taking, knowing when to retreat, being able to gauge the competence and confidence of those around them, leadership skills. All these skills would come, it was felt, once women started taking the lead. Underhill asked “why not make it a regular thing, on the usual climbs of the day?” (150). She educated her guides in guide-less climbing by persuading her regular guides to climb second to her while she learnt to be leader on the rope “although it did worry dear old Antonio almost intolerably” (150). In 1928 Underhill completed the first female lead of the Grépon in the French Alps, with her guide seconding her. The next step was to “do the Grépon really manless” (151). In 1930, Alice Damesme and Underhill made the first manless traverse of the Grépon, in the face of disbelief from other mountaineers. “‘Vous deux seules’! [you two alone!] was the incredulous exclamation. They were too courteous to laugh at us outright, but we did intercept quite a lot of sideways glances and barely-concealed smiles” (152). The two women set off, leaving an interested – and sceptical – audience behind at the refuge having made a detour to check the route. As Underhill writes, “we wouldn’t have asked directions of any of those men for the world! We were playing a game and we must abide by the rules: no help from men!” (153). The women arrived triumphant at their goal, notwithstanding being the cause of great surprise to other climbers in the vicinity. After they had climbed one of the extremely technically difficult approach pitches with great aplomb, the “watching crowd broke into enthusiastic cheers” (156), acknowledging the women’s achievement. On their way to the summit they passed a very experienced male alpinist who was being guided and who delivered, according to

Underhill, an “impassioned oration [...] at the indignity suffered by a man, and a man who had considered himself a good climber, at being escorted over the Grépon by a guide” (158). It is illustrative of the attitudes of the day to women climbers that, later on that same day, one of the guides remarked that “‘The Grépon has disappeared [...] Now that it has been done by two women alone, no self-respecting man can undertake it. A pity too, because it used to be a very good climb’” (158).

In the summer of 1931, Miriam O’Brien Underhill set out with a fellow American woman mountaineer, Jessie Whiteread and Alice Damesme to ascend the Matterhorn but bad weather defeated them. They were amused to think of the guides who probably spent each evening betting on whether or not “those girls” (161) would succeed. Underhill’s humorous narrative of the various (unsuccessful) attempts her party made to climb the Matterhorn during July and August 1931 includes a description of a gallant effort by a hut guardian to delay other mountaineers setting off so they could have a head start, showing that he was “sincerely in sympathy with our manless aspirations” (164). In writing about another of their unsuccessful attempts on the Matterhorn that same season, Underhill writes amusedly of the refusal of a party ahead of them on the mountain to turn back before they did in bad weather because “being men, they could not possibly admit defeat until the girls did!” (166). In writing of the women’s desire to be first on a traverse in the French Dauphiné in 1932, she points out their success in persuading a group of men to approach the traverse from the reverse direction, leaving their intended route free for them. Underhill writes:

I inquired if they might not find the traverse more interesting in the reverse direction. They saw through this, grasping my real meaning at once and like the gentlemen they were, gallantly offered to abandon the mountain entirely to us and go and climb elsewhere! [...] Throughout, we have had the most pleasant co-operation from men climbers, guides and amateurs alike, who have sometimes gone out of their way to an extra-ordinary extent to facilitate our manless climbing. (168)

In 1932, Underhill and Alice Damesme succeeded in becoming the first women to climb the Matterhorn manless, prompting their friends to plan “an elaborate reception at the railway station with enormous bunches of flowers, a band and orations in honour of the first women to climb the Matterhorn alone” (169).

Throughout the 1930s, other members of the Pinnacle Club climbed *les cordées féminines*, regularly encountering disbelief as to their manless intentions. In an article entitled “Guideless in Switzerland” in the combined 1935-1938 Pinnacle Club Journal,

Sarah Harper wrote that she and a fellow woman mountaineer were sternly asked where their guide was as they set out, but another guide “seemed impressed” by their intentions (53). Ida Bell, in her article entitled “An Alpine Adventure” in the same edition, writes about a hotel proprietor in Switzerland who was “taken aback when we ordered early breakfast and told him we were going without a guide. I impressed upon him that we were a sound party” (57). Nea Morin suggests in *A Woman’s Reach*, that mainstream climbing and mountaineering literature published in the inter-war period did much to propound the traditional gendered roles of men and women, portraying women as fragile ladies who needed to be kept an eye on because of the dangers inherent to them of overdoing physical activity. Morin also argues that these views represented an underlying misogyny towards women in the mountains which persisted in seeing them as “lonely crows who, aping men, haunt the huts and great mountain faces to ply the harsh tools of the mountains, baring their faces to the winds in ecstasy, and straining to their bosoms the unfeeling rock with the ardour of lovers” (198).

In her article entitled “The Substance and the Shadow” in the 1935-1938 edition of the *Pinnacle Club Journal*, Evelyn Worsley Lowe remarked, with some cynicism, that it was easy for women to become famous as the media was hungry for news of women’s accomplishments, eager for sensationalism and preferring to bring to women mountaineers what she referred to as “lamentable publicity” (13). Lowe noted that women had “become saleable news”, writing that the “enemy” seizes any opportunity to publicise women’s accomplishments, however trivial, causing sometimes “rot to set in” (13). Lowe feared that as women realised their every step was being followed, this would drive them even harder to succeed, lest any failure be seized upon as evidence that women, as the weaker sex, should not aspire to climb mountains. Lowe’s fears were to be realised in 1959, when the deaths of two women members on the 8,000-metre Nepalese Himalayan mountain Cho Oyu, resulted in massive negative publicity for women’s mountaineering. I discuss this in the next chapter.

In many ways, women mountaineers of the 1930s epitomise the potential of modernism, representing iconic ideals of progression and modernism. Thus are the twin impulses of conservatism and progression enacted in inter-war women’s mountaineering, the one seeking to retain a conservative ideal of womanliness in women’s mountaineering which is bound to the home and linked culturally to the values of the Ladies’ Alpine Club, the other seizing and harnessing the mood of modernism to progress women’s mountaineering forwards *sans hommes*. One woman who appeared to apotheosize modernism in women’s mountaineering during the 1930s was the dancer,

film-maker and mountaineer Leni Riefenstahl who brought women's mountaineering, modernism, art, filming and politics together in an explosive and propaganda-informed alliance.

Challenging "Kinder, Kirche und Küche": Leni Riefenstahl

The following discussion draws heavily on Riefenstahl's controversial memoirs published in 1993 and Audrey Salkeld's biography of Riefenstahl. Salkeld's biography, inspired by her interest in mountaineering films, is based on painstaking research of primary sources such as Goebbels' letters and diaries together with letters of close friends and film associates of Riefenstahl. Salkeld attempts to, in her own words, "resolve – in my own mind at least, whether she was player or pawn in the murky world of propaganda politics" (vii). Salkeld's comment illustrates a particular difficulty when writing about Leni Riefenstahl and that is the extent to which it is possible to approach a study of her life separately and objectively from the controversy which still rages about the extent of her consensual involvement in film propaganda relating to the rise of National Socialism in Germany throughout the 1920s and 1930s in which mountain landscapes and mountaineering were frequently used. Leigh Gilmore's discussion of a feminist "autobiographics" provides, however, a helpful framework within which one can read Riefenstahl. Gilmore suggests that "a feminist position [...] looks to women's lives for the framework" (18), going on to suggest that if we dispense with the established principles on which autobiography has been founded – what she refers to as the "principles of identity: ontological, epistemological and more generally, organisational" (18) – and allow ourselves instead, as readers, to "triangulate" the writer of autobiography within specific ideological, historical, cultural and gendered contexts, then we can extrapolate the "material reality" of the subject from the text, in this case, Riefenstahl (23). Although it can be argued that the kind of triangulation Gilmore calls for provides a helpful framework to read all of the life-writings that are included in this thesis, in Riefenstahl's case, such a perspective is particularly helpful because of the specific nature of the political controversy that surrounds her.

In A Memoir, Riefenstahl wrote that her first awareness of mountains in 1924 came through a film in which "the very first images of mountains, clouds, alpine slopes and towering rock, fascinated me. I was experiencing a world that I did not know nor had ever seen such mountains. I knew them only from postcards...here they were alive. Mysterious, and more entrancingly beautiful than I had ever dreamed [...] I had made

up my mind to get to know those mountains.” (41-42). Meeting the director of the film she declared her ambition to be in his next film and he, seeing a well-bred lady responded cynically ““An elegant little lady like you shouldn’t be traipsing around mountains”” but he went ahead and cast her as a dancer in his film “The Holy Mountain” (1926) a role for which she had to learn to ski (43). After the success of this film Riefenstahl became involved in another screenplay “The Great Leap”, in which she played a goat-girl and had to learn to climb the sharp mountains of the Dolomites in bare feet. She notes in A Memoir that she took to mountaineering “with enthusiasm; not only was climbing lots of fun, but I found it very easy, as if I had been doing it for years” (61). Salkeld suggests that one reason for Riefenstahl’s success in the world of films was her appearance. “Living in a man’s world, doing what was generally considered a man’s job, she at the same time exploited all the feminine advantages. She was attractive” (3). Her attractiveness, Salkeld argues, was of a type favoured by Nazi Germany. Salkeld draws on a description of her by an American journalist to illustrate this: “Her beauty is of a type that has a distinctive appeal in Germany. Lithe, spare, and boyish in her figure. Her mouth is wide and suggestive. Collectively, her features radiate youth and verve” (qtd. in Salkeld 3). This description brings to mind Jane Pawsey’s illustration of a woman mountaineer on the front cover on the annual reports of the Ladies’ Alpine Club in the 1920s which reinforces how close the Ladies’ Alpine Club came to associating itself with an overtly modern discourse. In Women and a Changing Civilisation, Winifred Holtby discusses the relatively high visibility of women in Germany in the early 1930s compared to British women. Women in Germany, she noted, “organised trade unions. They took part in international conferences. They explored, with unusual earnestness and deliberation, the social implications of economic independence” (152). They also, she noted:

entered with immense enthusiasm into the new athletic movements. The typical modern girl of post-War Germany was a lean young creature, browned with sun-bathing, muscular, vigorous, who earned her own living. (152)

Riefenstahl embodied this concept of the modern young German woman, but Holtby and Salkeld also note that by the middle of the 1930s, Nationalist Socialist doctrine expected German women to embrace and embody the virtues of “Kinder, Kirche und Kuche” – children, church and kitchen (3). Riefenstahl challenged these three increasingly important cultural cornerstones of 1930s Nazi Germany. Exuding self-confidence and assertion, born into a successful, wealthy business family, she

appears to have been entrepreneurial and intelligent, seeing in films and mountaineering considerable commercial potential which would help ensure her personal success. In her published collection of interviews and discussions with German women who lived in Nazi Germany during the 1930s and 1940s entitled Frauen, Alison Owings notes the pride which Nazi-ism instilled in many German people who celebrated physical prowess in sports such as mountaineering and athletics as symbolic of the supremacy of Aryan culture. Hans Bonde has also argued this, writing in his account Football Under the Foe: Danish Sport Under the Swastika, that the Nazis seized on opportunities to create icons of sporting women who for them, encapsulated the ideal of heroic Aryanism, favouring swimmers, ice-skaters and mountaineers.

Fascinated by the “beautiful, strong and healthy” (Salkeld 13), Riefenstahl went on to make two films of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. Her films of the Nuremberg rally and the Olympic Games, together with their celebration and glorification of Nazi idealism place her as a controversial figure in women’s mountaineering in the 1930s. Given the immense public stature of these two events and their role in fuelling Nazi ideology, Riefenstahl’s films of these events arguably eclipse any of her mountain films in terms of propagandising Nazi symbolism. If we place Riefenstahl within Gilmore’s socio-cultural and political framework then Riefenstahl can either be seen as a canny, intelligent woman, clearly seeing and grasping the opportunities for fame, or as a political pawn in a highly dangerous game of power and politics. Regardless of the theoretical stance readers and writers of biography take in reading and analysing her life, Riefenstahl remains an enigma, albeit one of importance to women’s mountaineering in the 1930s, not just because of the specific role which mountains and mountaineering played in forming her own identity but that of an entire nation during a significant phase in modernism. It is possible to see her as Henriette D’Angeville saw herself almost one hundred years earlier: a woman who was striking a blow for women for whom achieving prominence in her chosen field was more important than anything else. It is also possible to argue that as Riefenstahl immersed herself more and more in her project to make herself one of the foremost figures in German film-making she may not have been fully aware of the realities of the outside world. This is, I think, a view of Riefenstahl which Salkeld is sympathetic to, arguing that Riefenstahl increasingly failed to see the boundary between real life and make-believe, a woman who always made “a point of saying that the everyday, the ordinary held no interest for her” (271).

Riefenstahl was not the only artist to use mountains symbolically for political purposes in the 1930s. In the uneasy period leading up to the Second World War, the

poetry of W.H. Auden and Michael Roberts drew heavily on mountains as symbols of nature's capacity to transcend people's tendency to destroy the environment around them¹⁸. In his 1936 poem "The Secret Springs", the Socialist and mountaineer Roberts juxtaposes the political turmoil of the period with the timelessness and solidity of mountaineering, showing the continuity of mountain landscapes as shown in verse 6 of his 8-verse poem:

Somewhere above the step, the springs of action
 Rise, and the snow falls, and the seracs; and the green
 Glacier-ice
 Moves down like history or like the huge
 Slow movement of a nation's mind. (95-96)

In her recent article on Michael Roberts, "Living at Our Full Compass", Penny Bradshaw writes that he, Auden and others developed a "new mountain-inspired poetics" (229) in the 1930s to bring into sharp focus a different evocation of a response to mountains which, she argues, distinguishes Roberts *et al* from their Romantic predecessors. Bradshaw also writes that Roberts was the main protagonist in a literary movement which sought to bring an overtly political aesthetics to bear on the relationship between literature, politics and mountaineering in the period (229-237).

In his critique of W.H. Auden's poetics, Rainer Emig writes that mountain landscapes were appropriated in the 1930s by regimes keen to exploit them for propagandist reasons. He argues that they were "made to stand for the opposite of civilisation, achieving this role by their association with extremes of belief" (181). This statement puts Roberts' poem into context. Seeing the abuse of his much-loved Alps he was moved to cleanse mountains of the taint of fascist politics through his poetry. "The Secret Springs" is thus Roberts' attempt to restore mountains and mountaineering to a purer state as the final verse seems to suggest:

And sunlight, and the dark, and gravitation,
 These are all: these are the hidden springs, simplicity,
 And darkness is
 The epitome of light, and darkness, and all lonely places. (95-96)

¹⁸ Michael Roberts was the first husband of the mountaineer Janet Adam Smith. His Socialist principles and agnosticism made him an unlikely candidate as a husband for a woman from a Scottish Anglican family but he put aside his agnosticism to become Principal of the College of St Mark and St John in Chelsea, London in 1945. Roberts edited the first edition of the Faber Book of Modern Verse published in 1936.

More prosaically, Dorothy Pilley recorded the growing unease about developments in Europe. On Thursday 16 March, 1939, she wrote that:

Herr Hitler has annexed Bohemia and Bavaria by declaring them a German Protectorate. Prague entered second day of German occupation in a mood of resignation. The spirit of the people appears to be broken. G. has also taken Slovakia 'under her protection'. Misgivings in Poland. Deep alarm in Italy at developments. Hungary established common border with Poland. In Prague Himmler's secret police active - Wed. night 5,000 arrests and many suicides. (Pilley Diary, 16 March 1939)

Pilley had seen the writing on the wall. The rapidly changing political context was to have far-reaching consequences for women's mountaineering, suddenly checking the rapid advances in women's mountaineering which had been made throughout the 1930s. The rise of fascism in Italy throughout the 1920s and 1930s resulted in increasing restrictions being placed on mountaineering within the mountain ranges between France and Italy, leading to far-reaching changes for alpine communities. A large number of Italian alpine guides were recruited to form the "alpini", the elite Italian mountain army. Mountain guides in France, suddenly finding themselves at war with guiding colleagues and friends in Italy, became unwilling participants in mountain warfare. Members of France's elite alpine club the Grandes Hautes Montagnes Group (GHMG) volunteered for service in the French Resistance, forming alpine and intelligence sections of the resistance movement. Other guides disappeared to various corners of a rapidly mobilising Europe. Women mountaineers brought a new narrative into women's mountaineering writing – that of war. Dorothy Thompson recounted, in an article in the 1934 Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book, the loss of one of her guides who was conscripted to fight in Italy's African campaign. Miriam O'Brien Underhill wrote in Give Me the Hills that on one of her trips to the Italian Alps in 1934 she was stopped by zealous members of the "alpini" who remonstrated with her for not having the latest version of the Italian Alpine Club's badge that depicted the fascist symbol, forcing her to exchange her old badge for the new version. Underhill also wrote of a dash through France from Chamonix with her mother in early 1940, reaching the French coast in time to catch one of the last boats leaving France before that country's final occupation. In her article entitled "In the Shadow of Piz Badile", Ursula Corning wrote that on ascending Piz Badile in the Italian Alps she was stopped with her guides by young soldiers of the "alpini" for a passport check. The soldiers denied them the right to

descend the route they had come up on the grounds that they had not “entered Italy legally” (255). In her own words, Corning:

decided to try the feminine touch. To the horror of the guides I gulped audibly and announced in what I hoped was a quavering and pathetic voice that I was dead tired and that if they wished me to go anywhere but the nearest way down they would have to carry me. The soldiers were very slim; they gazed respectfully at my not inconsiderable bulk; they wavered. (255-256)

This chapter has considered ways in which women’s mountaineering progressed in the inter-war period and explored how women mountaineers straddled the competing claims of progression and conservatism, with the influences of modernism uppermost in the Pinnacle Club. The club’s emphasis on teaching women to be independent in mountaineering pioneered early *cordées féminines*, one of the most important manifestations of the “feminine stamp” in mountaineering which shaped women’s mountaineering literature in the period. The chapter has shown how women’s mountaineering literature variously wrote the experiences of women mountaineers, not just in traditional female genres such as memoir and autobiography but in journals, magazines, fiction and films. The early and inauspicious beginnings – as least as Pilley was concerned – of the Pinnacle Club Journal in 1924 enabled women to develop confidence and skills in writing variously about mountaineering such as new cultures, flora and fauna, *les cordées féminines* and by the end of the 1930s, war and politics.

By 1939 all mountaineering activity in the Alps had virtually come to a halt and women mountaineers, just as they had done in the First World War, found themselves engaged in supporting a new war effort. Shirley Angell writes that for the years 1939-1945, “War Work was the order of the day”, noting that members were involved in a variety of work, including ambulance driving, working in the ATS, farming, nursing, doctoring and clerical work (65). The next chapter explores the ways in which women mountaineers responded to the challenges posed to them in the period after the war, during which it seemed that the renewed forces of conservatism, boosted by a post-war political consensus, would once more strive to make women’s locus the hearth and not the mountains.

Chapter 5

“Not steam-rollered into mediocrity”: Women’s Mountaineering 1945-1960

In her writing on the feminine middlebrow novel from the 1920s to the 1950s, Nicola Humble resists viewing the Second World War as a period which effected “a decisive ideological and cultural break” (4) with the cultural politics which had preceded it. Humble instead presents a view of post-war culture which was intent on revisiting and recapturing many of the gendered values of the pre-war era, particularly with regards to a woman’s place. She suggests that a new cult of domesticity emerged during the late 1940s and early 1950s, promulgated by a political imperative which sought to re-locate women at the centre of the home, writing that new domestic technologies created a view of domesticity “as stylish”, making it more and more attractive to women (5-11). In this final chapter I discuss how women mountaineers responded to the new post-war ideology of domesticity (stylish or otherwise) with a mixture of ambivalence and/or outright resistance, exploring how they write a post-war “feminine stamp” into women’s mountaineering.

The legacy left by *les cordées féminines* in the 1930s created a forward impetus in women’s mountaineering which was assisted by the war itself. By the end of the war, the membership of the Pinnacle Club had increased, fed by women returning from war work keen to seek new opportunities for adventurous activities (Angell 72). The club’s membership base broadened, to include more representatives from the lower middle-class, further propelling increasingly ambitious women mountaineers beyond the ranges of the European Alps and in the process, shifting women’s mountaineering away from its early twentieth-century image as an activity for leisured, monied women. This is a view that blurs in the immediate post-war period, one that mountaineering histories appear to accord with (Bonington 1992, Fleming 2000, Band 2006, Thompson 2010). Chris Bonington summarises this change in the following terms: “social changes were to have an even greater effect on every aspect of our lives, leading, in the case of climbing, to its spreading beyond the bounds of the comfortably off middle class” (157). In his history of British climbing, Simon Thompson suggests that the war:

had a marked levelling effect on society, with shared experiences of service, rationing, air raids and evacuation blurring some of the class distinctions that had existed in the 1930s and creating pressure for a more egalitarian society. (191)

However, in their article on women members of the Home Guard, Penny Summerfield and Corinna Peniston-Bird suggest that the Second World War “was one of the most contradictory periods in British history for the boundary between male and female roles” (232). They argue that, in line with pre-war gendered values, women who were called up in Britain were assigned to non-combatant roles and that after the war they returned to a largely supportive role that sought to maintain, as Nicola Humble has written, the pre-war cultural *status quo*. Thus did the twin influences of progression and conservatism manifest themselves in the post-war period, continuing to shape women’s mountaineering throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Nowhere is this clash between tradition and progression more resonant than in the life and writings of Gwen Moffat who is a significant case study within this chapter. I draw on her writings and additional personal correspondence with her to show how she articulates the on-going conflict between progression and tradition in women’s mountaineering, in particular how women climbers challenged the post-war domestic imperative to progress women’s mountaineering to a point which culminated in expeditions to ascend mountains of 8,000 metres (over 26,000 feet). This chapter will specifically draw on Gwen Moffat’s first and second volumes of mountaineering autobiography Space Below My Feet and On My Home Ground together with accounts of women’s international Himalayan expeditions Tents in the Clouds, Mountains and Memsahibs, No Purdah in Padam, A Fatal Obsession: The Women of Cho Oyu, A Reporting Saga and the unpublished 1959 Cho Oyu expedition diary of Eileen Healey.¹⁹ I also draw on wider women’s mountaineering literature from the Ladies’ Alpine Club Year Book and Pinnacle Club Journal.

In the immediate post-war period, women mountaineers returning to the Alps were shocked to find greatly ravaged and altered alpine communities. The 1946 edition of The Ladies’ Alpine Club Year Book published a number of articles which showed women mountaineers writing with an increased political awareness of the role mountain communities played – or had been made to play – in the propaganda of war politics. Nea Morin, whose mountaineering husband, Jean Morin had been killed in 1943, travelled to the Austrian Tyrol in 1946 after having obtained special permission to stay with her sister-in-law and recorded soberly in an article entitled “Tyrol, 1946” that “this was not a climbing holiday” (100). She noted the “intense Nazification” of the area, observing that many of the Tyrol inhabitants:

¹⁹ Throughout 2012 The Alpine Club has been working on the digitisation of Eileen Healey’s diaries from the period 1932 – 1958.

look back to the hey-day of the Nazi regime with a regret they cannot dissimulate, remembering only that is brought them a prosperity they had never known before [...] small wonder then that more than 90 per cent of the population in the Innsbruck area joined the Nazi party and did not question the regime that brought this unaccustomed prosperity in its wake. (12)

Morin noted that much fresh food disappeared into “Austrian stomachs via the local black market” (13) and compared the relative health and robustness of the local population to groups of thin, hungry, French children – orphans of members of the French Resistance, sent to holiday camps in the Tyrol. Not permitted to climb in the French-controlled sector of the Tyrol, Morin travelled to the German-controlled sector and observed the burned out tanks, lorries and cars, noted warnings of the existence of land-mines and tried to forget the war in the beauty of the country, whilst writing that the trip “brought me close up to some of the realities and problems of the present time” (19).

In the same edition of the Ladies’ Alpine Club Year Book in an article entitled “Savoy: Summer 1946”, Janet Roberts provided another example of observations about the war, writing about the Savoy region in the French Alps.²⁰ Roberts wrote of burnt-out villages, rubble and devastated buildings, learnt of the “periodical German comb-outs for Jews and deportees” (21) and of the efforts of the local Resistance. She observed that the alpine refuges, requisitioned by the Resistance or occupying Germans bore signs of vandalism, and that there were signs in the windows of shops and houses stating that the inhabitants had not been responsible or been involved in the deportation of French nationals. Despite severe food rationing, Roberts observed that there appeared to be no shortage of “admirable local meat and cheese” (24). She recorded the huge increase in fees for guiding, noting that “they were fixed by local guides in consultation with the [...] body set up under the Petain government to control and co-ordinate the activities of all the French mountain clubs” (25). She also, noted that everywhere there were signs of rejuvenation – of rebuilding, reconstruction and a sense of optimism. Una Cameron, returning to her holiday home in Courmayeur, Italy, after the war wrote an article for the 1947 edition of the Ladies’ Alpine Club Yearbook, entitled “Courmayeur and the Vallee D’Aoste” in which she noted relative minor damage to the area, writing with satisfaction that the locals with mountaineering inclinations appear to have been able to have continued to mountaineer, using a mixture of discretion and cunning (29).

²⁰ Janet Roberts was formerly Janet Adam Smith.

“Not steam-rolled into mediocrity”: Gwen Moffat

Variouly described by Colin Wells as “a Beatnik before the term was invented”, by Dorothy Pilley in her chapter “Retrospection” as “a brilliant professional woman guide” (xix), by Cicely Williams as “a plucky and rather remarkable pioneer” (160) and by Birkett and Peascod as “an explorer”, Gwen Moffat epitomises the changes in women’s mountaineering in the post-war years not least through challenging the political consensus of the late 1940s which sought to return women to the home. Moffat joined the Land Army in the early 1940s then transferred to the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), the women’s branch of the British army, becoming a motorbike dispatch rider and a military driver. Discovering climbing, she deserted from the ATS in the latter stages of the war, finding that the mountains of North Wales met her need for adventure and an unconventional life-style. In a letter to me dated 1st April 2011, Moffat wrote of the differences the Second World War had made to the typology of the mountaineer.²¹

She observed that:

Before WW2 only professional people had the money and time to climb, and [*original emphasis*] the need for an absorbing leisure activity. The upper classes had their blood sports, the working man [sic] had neither time, money, curiosity and he knew his place. After the war, everyone had known adventure and danger and a number wanted more of it. Ex-servicemen and women were not going to return to factories, offices, domestic service. Spearheaded by former Commandos, eccentrics, the odd rebel, they discovered that their place was in mountains. (Moffat Letter, 1 April 2011)

Born in Brighton in 1924, Moffat craved adventure and travel from an early age. In Space Below My Feet, Moffat writes that as a child:

I knew that only one thing could give me adventure and that was Travel. I was impatient with people who called me a tomboy. I wanted more than trees to climb and apples to rob (although I did these as a matter of course). (100)

A paternal aunt, Elizabeth Goddard (known to her as “Peter”), was an early role model who had undertaken guided climbs in the Himalaya but left no record of her travels or

²¹ Autobiographies by Joe Brown, Don Whillans and Dennis Gray provide the context for cultural change in post-war rock-climbing and mountaineering. In-depth discussion of the importance of these rock climbers in terms of their contribution to a cultural revolution in rock-climbing and mountaineering in the post-war period is outside the parameters for this thesis.

mountaineering. Moffat elaborated on her aunt's early influence on her, writing to me that "Peter":

Fostered the sense of adventure which was focussed initially on explorers; Freya Stark, Ella Maillart, Peter Fleming, Gertrude Bell. Pilley (and Kirkus, Winthrop Young, Bill Murray) came with my personal contact with mountains. She epitomised a goal; climbing great routes in the Alps when I was learning on snow and ice in Scotland.
(Moffat Letter, 1 April 2011)

Moffat found that her Second World War experience as a motorbike dispatch rider and truck-driver in the ATS, as she wrote in On My Home Ground, gave her an opportunity to satisfy a "vague desire to be something different, to live excitingly" and although it was mountaineering which enabled her world to "slip into gear" (10) it was the context within which she started mountaineering which, as she wrote to me, "wet the stimulus" (Moffat Letter, 1 April 2011). In Space, Moffat puts the experience of many women into focus when she writes that in 1945 she was a "typical product of the war; impressionable and frustrated – for with peace declared, all the excitement was over and now there was only the bewildering prospect of demobilisation and beyond that...nothing" (13). Although, as Summerfield and Peniston-Bird have written, support organisations such as the Home Guard and the ATS provided women with opportunities to serve their country, women's roles had been largely limited to supporting "the male military" (232) effort. However, these opportunities, I suggest, enabled women to experience a degree of danger and adventure not available to them otherwise. As Moffat indicated in her correspondence with me, many women were well-fitted for their war work, having been prepared by their upbringing:

My generation had to help [...] in the garden, on the farm. My sister and I pulled ragwort on my aunt's smallholding in the summer holidays before I started school; I had my own garden at nine, could milk cows at 15 and plough at 17, but I was no different from my peers. (Moffat Letter, 1 April 2011)

What marked Moffat out as different from her peers was how that upbringing translated into her mountaineering. Some women, like Moffat, seized on their war experiences and saw them as a stepping stone to adventure and unconventionality, whereas other women, referred to by Moffat in the pages of Space, viewed their war experiences as an interruption to their natural role as wives and mothers. For Moffat, mountaineering filled the gap and hiatus provided by the end of the war.

In common with other women mountaineers, Moffat was introduced to rock-climbing by a man. Hitchhiking to her first mountains with a boyfriend, she found that climbing was something she had been waiting for, writing in *Space* that “I loved the feel of the rock under my hands [...] I loved using the strength of my body to haul myself out of the cracks and chimneys” (16-17). Moffat’s writing illustrates the joy she finds in the physical movements of her body through climbing. It is a feeling echoed by Dorothy Pilley in *Climbing Days* when she writes of an early climbing experience; “It was a journey full of discoveries as to how well the body fits the rocks, how perfectly hand- and foot-holds are apportioned to the climber’s needs” (4).

Physical activity (Moffat had also been a physical training instructor in the ATS) was seen by women like Moffat and post-war feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir as a means through which women could overcome what de Beauvoir refers to in her chapter “The Young Girl” as their “handicap” (356) relative to men – their physical weakness. De Beauvoir calls on the young girl to use sports, including mountain climbing to “assert herself through her body” (357). “Let her”, she writes, “swim, climb mountain peaks, pilot an aeroplane, battle against the elements, take risks, go out for adventure” (357). More recent feminist scholars such as Dianne Chisholm have written specifically – in reference to women and rock-climbing – of the physical benefits which mountaineering and rock-climbing offer women. In writing about the achievements of contemporary extreme women rock-climbers (rock athletes) such as Lynn Hill and Catherine Destiville, Chisholm draws on de Beauvoir to support her view that rock-climbing offers a “supreme case for analysing how women experience and elaborate free movement and existence” (Chisholm 10). Other examples of recent feminist mountaineering writing draw on media such as poetry, fiction and art to depict the physical benefits of mountaineering for women, with feminist creative writing such as Kym Martindale’s poem “Caterina of the Rocks”, focusing on more existential elements of the physical relationship between women and rock-climbing.

Moffat positions domesticity early on in *Space*, as a cosy, safe alternative to the hazards of climbing. After one early climbing experience when she and her partner are descending a mountain in the cold, dark and wet, she conjures an image reminiscent of Nicola Humble’s description of a “stylish” and desirable domesticity in contrast to her current physical discomfort. “In my imagination I saw the interior of that car [...] a soft, warm, dry interior, perhaps two people going to a dance (Chanel No. 5 and Turkish cigarettes)” (18). Nevertheless, Moffat’s ambivalence to domesticity is a recurring theme throughout *Space* and *On My Home Ground*. She alternates between longing for

domesticity with a settled home base and rebelling against it, fearing her loss of independence. In contrast to the members of the Ladies' Alpine Club who had established homes in London and the Home Counties built on Victorian gendered cultural values, Moffat's experience of "home" in 1946 and 1947 is that of an itinerant. She rambles through the landscape of Britain, alternately living in tumbledown cottages, youth hostels, barns and tents as she moves from one range of hills to the next. She uses the word "home" in relation to mountains, writing in *Space* that "now, walking along the plateau between the Glyders, I knew that I had come home" (42). Initially, Moffat revels in not having a settled base but this lack of settlement is eventually construed as an "aimless existence" (44) and she sets out to strike a balance between convention and adventure which would enable her to continue climbing. This compromise is Moffat's way of making sense of what on the one hand she perceives as "The Enemy" (45) – convention - and outright rebellion. Moving from one temporary base to the next, Moffat travels through Britain, accumulating boy-friends and climbing experience, earning money through an eclectic mixture of odd jobs, one of which includes working for the Forestry Commission with a group of other women helping with tree-felling. When writing of this experience in *Space*, she positions herself in direct opposition to what she perceives as the *status quo* for her sex:

There were five other girls – and I was wrong from the start [...] We were as different as chalk from cheese [...] I spent my evenings in a corner of the big kitchen, writing: letters, stories, articles – and that wasn't very popular. At the weekends I went camping and walking with Ian. The girls were not only astonished at my sleeping on the ground in the open but deeply shocked [...] In the bothy the girls read True Romances and knitted. (81)

Moffat creates a stark contrast between mountains and what she refers to as "the hearth" (82). On a bus journey through the Great Glen in Scotland she muses on the contrast between the mountain landscape and the houses she sees in the valley:

Each little world behind its window, quietly going about its business with the occupants sitting by the hearth [...] all aware of the other world – the antithesis of the hearth and the womb and the bed – the cold, empty, inhuman world of snow and rock and space outside. (*Space* 82)

In Dorothy Pilley's review of *Space* in the 1961-1962 edition of the *Pinnacle Club Journal*, she notes how Moffat positions the domestic world as a contrast "against which the mountain ambitions, endeavours and adventures show up" (75). Moffat

continually vacillates towards and away from domesticity. In her autobiographies, domesticity and marriage are frequently shown as embodying notions of warmth and security. When she contemplates marriage to her latest boy-friend in *Space*, marriage is seen as the ultimate expression of what she views as respectability, as it was for Pilley who exhibited the same ambivalence towards it as Moffat. As Moffat writes: “I was leading a normal, respectable life with a pay packet on Fridays, but I hadn’t the one consolation of respectability – I had no home life” (83). Like Dorothy Pilley, Moffat is wary of marriage, feeling that “on marriage, a woman gives up so much more than a man” (83).

When Moffat does eventually marry, her marriage is anything but conventional. Her husband renovates an old boat for them to live on and this becomes her next experience of home. Pregnant, she joins Pinnacle Club members on a rock climb, rediscovering the joy of movement and forgetting for a while, as she writes in *Space*, her “pear-shape”, revelling in “the old elegance” (121) which rock-climbing brings. It is her pregnancy combined with an unhappy marriage and lack of money which brings Moffat’s collision with domesticity to crisis point: “I was embarrassed and ashamed that I should be seen like this – reduced to domesticity, babies, real poverty”. “Poverty”, she writes, “to a woman who has a family is downright squalor” (130). Leaving her husband and a failing marriage because “he was intensely jealous of this passion for mountains, which he knew meant more to me than anything else except Sheena” (129), her baby daughter, she seeks a temporary home with her parents in Brighton, taking a job as stage manager with a theatre company before returning to the mountains with her daughter to work as a youth hostel warden. This return to the mountains brings her a feeling of safety: “To the north lay the sea, and to the south – the outliers of the Carneddau: Pen Gaer, Pen y Gader and Drum, dreaming under the shining sky. Now”, she writes, “I knew with certainty that I was safe” (178). “Safety”, for Moffat is not domesticity or a settled home, but a range of mountains.

Following a recommendation by a mountaineering friend, Moffat makes a decision to train to be Britain’s first woman mountain guide, realising that “with a guide’s certificate behind me I could work full-time at what was, to me, a fabulous salary” (183). Settling her daughter into a boarding school, Moffat gives up what she perceives as home and security “in exchange for a life that would be infinitely precarious and, perhaps, even more dangerous” (188). In making this decision, Moffat establishes a highly significant double-edged discourse which underpins all of her life-writing narratives – her need to live a life of adventure whilst “hankering” after security

(188). Qualifying as a guide, Moffat sets out on her first professional season, feeling, as she writes in Space, that she is “on trial”, as she sets out to meet a personal and professional watershed – to prove that she is “no longer a woman with a reputation, but an instructor with a technique superior” (213) to her clients. The women of Monica Jackson’s mountaineering expedition to the Himalaya, which I discuss later, also write about having similar feelings; of having to prove to a doubting world that women could succeed in climbing in the extreme altitudes and height of the Himalaya.

Moffat’s decision to become a professional guide is significant for two reasons: one, it introduces the theme of professionalism into women’s mountaineering. Two, Moffat’s decision to become a professional woman in mountaineering places her in opposition to hostile, judgmental attitudes held by people inside and outside mountaineering. These individuals – largely depicted by her as male – resent her seeking to compete with men on equal terms, persisting in viewing her as a woman who is unconventional (and therefore available in sexual terms) or as a fragile woman who needs protecting. Moffat refers to this underlying resentment in Space, seeing the “whole climbing world [...] as a hawk-eyed enemy waiting to pounce. I knew that, already, there was hostility towards me in certain quarters, some from men who had been refused guides’ certificates, some from local people who were genuinely mystified concerning my qualifications to guide” (208). Of her first professional course she wrote that her clients “climbed faster than I did, surrounded with an almost visible aura of masculine resentment” (213). On another occasion, Moffat writes that she was “watched with disapproval by an elderly gentleman in a deerstalker, for nowadays I climbed in French shorts and an old and tattered lace blouse. I felt hostile eyes boring into my back as we went through the farmyard.” (217). Moffat upsets and confuses the post-war cultural and political consensus which seeks to return women to the home.

Moffat’s life-writings mark a watershed in women’s mountaineering life-writing for another reason beyond the themes they explore. Her narratives are honest, self-critical and open, introducing a new frankness into women’s mountaineering life-histories. She puts into the public domain previously private themes such as love, marriage, relationships and at the same time publicises her vulnerability, naivety, lack of confidence and uncertainties.

When Space Below My Feet was published in 1961, reviewers from the wider mountaineering community, including women, were ambivalent about the frankness of Moffat’s narrative. Her descriptions of a tramp-like, itinerant existence with its inferences to casual sexual relationships, her unconventional life-style and revelations

of a failing marriage brought a mixed response. An anonymous 1962 reviewer in the Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book noted that: "Whether or not one admires her style unreservedly, [...] the fact that vistas of the author's private life are revealed to us, enables the reader to revel in all the sensation of a really pleasurable gossip [...] this is an unusual book by a courageous woman (56). In her review of Space, Pilley highlighted Moffat's frankness as a merit, construing Space as a "fine frank account of a semi-hobo existence in the post-war years threaded through with an authentic account of falling in love with climbing" (74). Pilley suggested that Moffat epitomised a new kind of woman climber by her writing style, observing that Moffat wrote "freshly, gaily, truly and with no false modesty" (74). This lack of modesty, Pilley writes, is characteristic of the new generation of women mountaineers who do not seek to disguise their achievements or necessarily cloak them in feminine modesty. There is no Sarah Grand-like womanly quality to Moffat's writing – it is an honest account of a woman and her frailties. Space did what Climbing Days was unable to in its day – publicise the innermost, often raw and impassioned feelings of a woman which had hitherto been the private preserve of the diary form. In the process of placing the previously private into a public domain, Moffat took the pre-war construal of a woman mountaineer as a donnish, wealthy, leisured woman and ripped it to shreds, re-defining women mountaineers and the mountaineering world within the cultural and social context of the post-war period.

In his Foreword to Space, the mountaineer Jack Longland wrote of Moffat's "strict sense of honesty":

She writes indeed with a compelling honesty [...] She is honest about her motives, accepting lifts or food and drink when broke; about her friends and lovers, about her convictions and the reasons why she changed them [...] And so you trust her descriptions of her emotions at those times of vision and delight when her world glows brightly round her. (10)

Distinguishing Moffat's writing as "honest" does not, for me, suggest that earlier accounts of mountaineering autobiography and memoirs such as Pilley's Climbing Days are less so. Moffat's narrative is of its time, reflecting a new-found frankness and honesty in social relations in the post-war era. When Pilley writes of Space that it was a "picaresque narrative of astonishing improvisations: from winkle-picking at 25/- a bag to cleaning lavatories as a hotel corridor-maid" (75), she captures something of the contextual differences between Climbing Days and Space.

Gwen Moffat drew my attention to other differences in the post-war era of mountaineering, writing in a letter to me that: “people who would have had neither time nor money before the war, found both even if it meant short commons and living rough. War surplus equipment was cheap, old clothes were begged from relations” (Moffat Letter, 11 February 2011). Of technical changes in mountaineering, Moffat observed how: “technically, equipment had improved: nylon rope after hemp and sisal. Boots had gone from hob nails to Tricounis to Vibram soles. Climbing had become much safer and catering for mountaineers was becoming an industry” (Moffat Letter, 11 February 2011).

As her daughter grew up, Moffat increasingly became aware of a desire to have a home of her own, in a place that would enable her to work in the mountains, provide her daughter with a home base and bring adventure and home together in a harmonious alliance (Space 229). On eventually finding a cottage to rent in North Wales she was “charmed by everything, already looking at the place with a possessive eye” (Space 240). Space ends with Moffat celebrating the coming together of mountains and men/domesticity in a honeymoon trip to Skye to mark her second marriage. In marrying a mountaineer she finds a way of reconciling the constant vacillation between the side of her which hankers for domesticity/security and that which seeks freedom in the mountains. This reconciliation can also, perhaps, be read as a compromise.

As a case study, Gwen Moffat illustrates the dichotomous relationship between one woman and the political impetus for domesticity in the post-war years, showing how one woman manages a dynamic relationship between “home” as a settled, secure base and her need to follow a way of life which is non-conformist. As Moffat explained, “lack of conformity wets the stimulus” (Moffat Letter, 1 April 2011). The challenges and tensions between domesticity and a desire for a non-conformist life is a key thread which runs through Moffat’s life-writings and marks her out as the outstanding case study in women’s mountaineering in the post-war years. Although I have stated in the Introduction to this thesis that I do not consider women’s mountaineering fiction, it is apposite at this point to briefly mention the role of Elizabeth (Lizzie) Coxhead’s 1951 climbing novel One Green Bottle, in term of the contribution it makes to our understanding of the relationship in the post-war years between working-class women and mountaineering. Unlike Gwen Moffat, the novel’s heroine, Cathy Canning, is born into inner-city poverty which is cultural, physical and economic in nature. Her background makes Canning unique as a case-study for women’s mountaineering, albeit a fictional one. Through a boy-friend she stumbles upon mountaineering, grasping fully

the opportunity it gives her to escape at week-ends from the narrow-minded Birkenhead community she lives in. Whilst Moffat's sexuality is largely inferred, Canning's is blatant. Lacking the money to buy climbing boots she sleeps with a boyfriend, taking his sister's boots as payment. As she caustically notes, "You didn't think, did you, that you were getting it for nowt"? (37). The rough diamond character of Cathy Canning is a notable advent in women's post-war mountaineering, emphasising the shift from mountaineering as a genteel, middle-class woman's sport to one which is more democratic, opening the doors for women like Cathy. This change is also reflected in men's biographical climbing writing of the 1950s such as Dennis Gray's Rope Boy. However, Coxhead steps back from a radical conclusion that might have seen Cathy Canning leave Birkenhead for good for the mountains. At the end of the novel, after a brief, intense love affair, Cathy makes the decision to eschew mountaineering for marriage to a long-term boyfriend who is about to come out of prison. In a painful discussion with a friend, Cathy is castigated for this decision. When her friend bitterly cries "I knew you wouldn't be content till you'd sacrificed your life to that boy" (248), Coxhead is putting into words the dichotomy facing women in the post-war years – that respectability and stability for women, whether they be working-class or middle-class could only be achieved through marriage, as Moffat herself had also believed. Lizzie Coxhead sums up the dilemma: "Happiness is not what matters. It's fulfilling your purpose, finding your treasure, passing it on" (254).

In the next part of this chapter I refer to writing from international women's mountaineering expeditions of the 1950s in order to discuss how other women mountaineers managed, challenged and wrote about their relationship to domesticity. I show the extent to which their writing reveals the double-edged nature of the cultural politics of the post-war era, which both freed them to mountaineer whilst producing a discourse which sought to return them to the home. The expeditions also led to a new type of women's mountaineering narratives being brought into the public domain in the form of published expedition accounts within which each expedition members contributed a chapter on an aspect of the expedition. The net effect was to share the workload of writing, in addition to drawing on an existing culture of collaborative writing already in existence in the production of the Ladies' Alpine Club Year Books and the Pinnacle Club Journal, with the expedition leader acting as the final editorial voice.

“Advances in women’s climbing have fulfilled all expectations”: the First Women’s Himalayan Expedition 1955

In her chapter “Retrospection”, Pilley reflected on changes in mountaineering in the intervening thirty year period between the first and second editions of Climbing Days, drawing attention to new developments in women’s mountaineering which enabled women from the Ladies’ Scottish Climbing Club to mount what became known as the First Women’s Himalayan Expedition in 1955. Pilley summarised these developments as follows:

In 1955 came the Ladies’ Scottish Climbing Club’s Expedition to the Himal, and the ascent by Monica Jackson and Betty Stark of an unclimbed 22,000-footer. Next year came the Abinger Expedition to Kulu [...] both in the Alps and in the greater ranges, the advances in women’s climbing have fulfilled all expectations. (xxiv)

By the middle of the 1950s, women’s mountaineering had evolved to an extent which enabled them to undertake expeditions to the high-altitude Himalayan mountain ranges of Asia. There was little chance at the time of women being invited to take part in men’s expeditions as equals due to the underlying misogyny towards women mountaineers within the mountaineering fraternity.

In 1955, a group of members from the Ladies’ Scottish Climbing Club led by Monica Jackson, set off to the Jugal Himalaya, a region featuring a number of unknown and previously unclimbed mountains at over 20,000 feet. The women were pioneers – their expedition the first to be “composed entirely of women to explore and climb in the High Himalaya” (60) as Jackson writes in her article “The Scottish Women’s Himalayan Expedition”. The primary aim of the women’s expedition focused on exploration, with the climbing of mountains as a secondary aim. They were successful, helping to map a relatively un-known region and climbing an unnamed mountain of 22,000 feet. In her article, Jackson wrote of the women’s undertaking in modest tones, describing the women as “obscure mountaineers, with no claim to fame” (60). She stressed that the fact of it being “the first” expedition “composed entirely of women was unpremeditated” but once it became clear to the women they were “creating a precedent” (60) they were quick to make the most of the potential sponsorship opportunities presented to the first international women’s expedition, as Jackson explained in the jointly written book of their expedition, Tents in the Clouds to which

each woman had contributed a chapter, introducing a new multi-authored narrative into women's mountaineering life-writing:

Though we knew we could arouse a certain amount of interest by the very fact that we were the first all-woman expedition to the Himalaya we did not want to become a cheap stunt [...] There was no doubt that our sex was a positive advantage, although we never tried to use it as such nor to get special treatment. (29-31)

There is a parallel here, I suggest, with Marie Paradis' entrepreneurial reasoning which motivated her to ascend Mont Blanc in 1808 (see Chapter 2). However, in addition to perceiving their sex in terms of a possible financial leverage, the women were also aware that this could be a disadvantage in the prevailing conservative cultural politics of the post-war years, which, in a renewed fervour of Victorian cultural politics, perceived that a woman's place should be in the home. Having satisfied themselves of the women's mountaineering experience and competence, the screening committee of the joint Himalayan Committee of the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club recommended them to the necessary authorities in Kathmandu and Nepal, putting their seal of approval on the "first" international women's mountaineering expedition to the Himalaya and thereby establishing them as pioneers. Monica Jackson wrote in the prologue of Tents in the Clouds;

When we realised that we would be pioneering...we were quite pleased, since it seemed to us that this might improve our chances of obtaining financial backing. On the other hand, we thought it would mean that we would have to contend with a good deal of prejudice at first. Both these surmises proved correct. (13)

Another expedition member Betty Stark wrote in her chapter in Tents, that the women "were not very hopeful about our chances of obtaining the Himalayan Committee's recommendation because of our sex, and because we were nowhere near the top flight of British climbers" (27). It was certainly the case that the women would not have been successful in their application to the Mount Everest Foundation without the endorsement from the Himalayan Committee. As it was, they became the first women mountaineers to be given any financial assistance from the Foundation.²²

The public, Jackson wrote, were largely cynical:

²² The Mount Everest Foundation was established in 1953 and is a grant-awarding body which supports exploration of mountains worldwide.

Some thought that we would never reach the mountains at all but be murdered, robbed or raped by brigands on the way. Those who were better informed knew that we could travel with perfect safety among the friendly people of the foothills but thought we should certainly come to grief among the mountains themselves[...] what, it was asked, would we do with a drunken Sherpa? (Tents 28)

Another expedition member, Betty Stark, also emphasised the pressure they were under as women to succeed:

If we slipped up and so got into trouble, there were plenty of people who would say, ‘These women should never have been allowed out in the mountains on their own.’ We did not mean to give them the chance. (Tents 23)

Monica Jackson echoed Stark, writing in “The Scottish Women’s Himalayan Expedition”, that they were careful “to avoid premature publicity, knowing that if we should come to grief we could expect no mercy from our critics, whose general reaction would have been ‘What else can you expect of women?’” (60)

The expedition was made up of three women members of the Ladies’ Scottish Climbing Club – Monica Jackson, Betty Stark and Evelyn Camrass – all of whom were experienced mountaineers with extensive alpine experience. They were aware that despite their experience, there was no universally acknowledged expectation that they would succeed and perhaps because of this realisation, the women worked especially hard on their pre-expedition organisation to ensure that they gave their critics no opportunity for carping or criticism. As Betty Stark commented in Tents, “people were genuinely interested in our venture, or at the very least did not want to be responsible for getting us into difficulties, or to have us on their hands if we did” (31).

Critics of this expedition might emphasise that the women were disingenuous to claim, as they did in their expedition article and book, that it was the first expedition composed “entirely of women” as it was necessary, in common with all Himalayan expeditions, to recruit male Sherpas as Himalayan mountain guides and male porters to carry loads. They did, however, include the 16-year old daughter of one of the Sherpas as an additional Sherpa/ni. “Since she was the only other woman in the party she had a special place in our affections” (Tents 43). However, theirs was the first international mountaineering expedition to be organised and undertaken by a group of women mountaineers. Their proclamation that the expedition was, as the dust-cover of the book claims, “The First Women’s Himalayan Expedition”, is, in these terms, entirely

justified. They were not, however, the first women to climb in the Himalaya. Monica herself had previously done so in 1952 and the American woman mountaineer Fanny Bullock Workman, had, with her husband, undertaken expeditions to the Himalaya in 1898 and 1899, establishing in the process an altitude record for women's mountaineering of 22,500 feet in 1902 in Baltistan (Brown). In the prologue to Tents, Monica Jackson reflected on the women's motivation for undertaking the expedition:

What strange compulsion was it that induced two sensible women to give up their jobs, and a third to part from a beloved family, to subject themselves to extremes of discomfort and possibly to risk their lives, creeping up and down some singularly lonely, alien and desolate wrinkles on the earth's surface? (18)

Her own response was simply: "I think that we, in common with most mountaineers, who go to climb in the Himalaya, went there on a sort of pilgrimage" (19).

The three expedition members were educated, articulate and middle-class women. With the exception of Monica Jackson, who described herself in Tents with humour and self-deprecation as a "Housewife" (32), they were professional women, part of the post-war community of women mountaineers who were increasingly drawn from the middle-class and lower middle-class. Although they eschewed the notion that any of them was the leader, the motivation and drive behind the trip was initiated by Jackson. Well publicised male mountaineering expeditions of the 1950s, such as Maurice Herzog's expedition to Annapurna and the successful British expedition which summited Mount Everest in 1953, had appointed well known, high profile and respected figures from the military and the field of exploration to lead and organise their expeditions. In contrast, the Scottish Ladies' expedition had no leader as such at all, distinguishing the collaborative, exploratory agenda of the Scottish Ladies' expedition. As Monica Jackson explained in Tents: "We had no leader. When decisions had to be taken in the field there was always a casting vote (23).

Despite the authorities' fears about a group of women managing a team of male Sherpas, Betty Stark wrote that none of the Sherpas had any difficulty in taking orders from women "In fact", she writes, "they were rather tickled about the idea." (43). The women also demonstrated an interest in the different ethnic communities they experienced on their travels, noting the existence of purdah through the region, aware of being probably the first white women that some communities had ever seen, reinforcing through these observations the growing political consciousness in women's mountaineering writing which had emerged in the 1930s. They wrote that local

communities “were eager to see all we did and ate, and were quite uninhibited [...] It is quite probable that they had never seen a white woman before, certainly not in their own valleys” (89). Their own sex was one of great speculation, with native people frequently enquiring whether they were men or women: “Evelyn and I are taller than the average Nepali men and we all wore jeans on the march” (57). The expedition members also speculated on the appropriacy of a woman’s physique for climbing at high altitude, with Jackson suggesting that a small woman would “soar at great heights if she is wiry and spirited [...] It is my guess the first woman to stand on the summit of Mount Everest will be small-boned and petite” (115).²³

There are some amusing episodes in Tents in the Clouds which refer to the public’s interest in the women’s ability to retain their femininity on the expedition in terms of their dress and use of make-up. At high altitude the women dispensed with what they refer to as “ablutions” and drily asserted that “In spite of certain popular assertions in the Indian press, we did not wear make-up or lipstick on our climbs, let alone at 22,000 feet” (108). When they returned to India “at a meeting of the British Women’s Association in Bombay, a stranger approached us and, introducing herself as a beauty specialist asked concernedly if she might give us each a free facial” (122). They also heard with glee, as they attempted to climb an unknown 23,000-foot peak that their efforts compare very favourably to “sahibs who had fallen by the wayside” (172).

In their conclusion to Tents, the women wrote modestly of their achievement, separating themselves from any potential claim by the public or media that they had achieved something remarkable for their sex. The fact that they were women, they wrote, was incidental. They:

had not accomplished anything spectacular, but then we had never hoped to do so, with such a small party. We had succeeded in doing what we had set out to do, which was to reach and explore the Jugal Himal... That we had managed to climb an unknown peak of over 21,000 feet was really beside the point – a kind of bonus. We had been fortunate in that nothing at all had gone wrong, and that we had no illnesses or accidents.
(249)

Despite their modest assertions, the three women were aware of having secured a permanent place in mountaineering history but they also believed that they had earned it on merit, firmly stating that: “We had worked extremely hard for nine months to plan

²³ This comment showed great prescience on Jackson’s part. The first woman to ascend Everest was a small, slight, Japanese woman, Junko Tabei, in 1975.

and organise an efficient expedition. We had done so because we wanted our adventure to be a success” (249). If, in doing so, they had also proved that ordinary women were as capable of carrying out such a feat as men then that, for them, was an additional bonus.

The women were very aware of what they stood to lose if they had been unsuccessful or if a tragedy had occurred. As Monica Jackson wrote:

It was just as well that we were successful. For, whereas a disaster in an all-male or mixed party may have passed almost un-remarked and incurred nothing but sympathy, no mercy would have been shown to us if we had failed. The world was waiting to say ‘I told you so. What else can you expect of women?’ Small wonder that we were determined to be well organised. (249)

A small, modest, well-organised group of women had shown what women mountaineers could achieve given ambition and determination. Despite diffident attempts to play down their achievements, they had secured a feminine first as Helen Steven notes in Rising to the Challenge. It was, she writes, “interesting to note that making a ‘first’ for women was never really part of the plan but this was truly a first” (131). In establishing a first for women, the achievement of the Scottish Ladies’ Climbing Club is a natural progression from the successes of *les cordées féminines* of the 1930s and inherits much of the pioneering qualities and aspirations of the first women-only ropes. Like the women of *les cordées féminines* the Scottish Ladies’ progress women’s mountaineering against a socio-cultural backdrop which is still largely hostile, cynical or amused twenty years on. The women’s expedition narratives echo the misogyny experienced by some *les cordées féminines* – the context may have changed but attitudes have not. When they write in Tents of the widespread cynicism felt by a society which expected women to remain in the home and which was waiting, with baited breath to say “what else can you expect of women” (60), the women reproduce the disconcerted reactions of individuals and communities who, in the words of Devine and Forsyth, disapprove of women “transgressing” their feminine role. However, in their expedition writings the women are careful not to write of themselves as radical transgressors, striving to locate themselves as women who are bridging what Sarah Grand would see as the old and new worlds. They write of themselves using a similar discourse employed by women fiction writers of the *fin de siècle* – largely modest, self-deprecating and diffident. Unlike Moffat, who directly transgresses, and publicises her transgressions openly, the Scottish Ladies’ do not. In their eschewment of any ambitions of conquest or peak-bagging and

in an underpinning discourse of diffidence which echoes Sarah Grand, they seemingly separate themselves from a feminist agenda whilst recognising the pioneering nature of their expedition understanding the importance of them succeeding in what they set out to do – to take women’s mountaineering to new heights metaphorically and physically.

“Tied by household tasks and social duties”: The 1956 Abinger Expedition

The achievement of the group of women from the Ladies’ Scottish Climbing Club galvanised other women mountaineers to follow in their footsteps. The year after the Scottish Ladies’ First Women’s Himalayan Expedition, four members of the Pinnacle Club, inspired by the success of their Scottish mountaineering sisters, mooted the idea of another women’s expedition into the Himalaya, which became known as the “Abinger Himalayan Expedition”. The inspiration and motivation came from the expedition leader, Joyce Dunsheath, who revealed in her article “Abinger Himalayan Expedition, 1956”, that she, on hearing that “a small party of Scottish women had climbed in Nepal and reached 22,000 feet, decided to look into the possibility of organising an expedition myself” (43). Subsequently, after a year’s preparation, four women – Dunsheath, Hilda Reid, Eileen Gregory and Frances Delany – travelled by various means to Manali, in the Kulu region of the Himalaya, to explore and survey glaciers and mountains with the additional aim of trying to equal the height which Jackson’s expedition had attained.²⁴

Dunsheath’s aims, as she wrote in the women’s expedition account Mountains and Memsahibs, were twofold: one, to see whether ordinary women could “penetrate these stupendous ranges and climb peaks twice the height of the giants we know in Europe” (2); two, to fulfil for herself the challenge of organising an international women’s expedition. Dunsheath was acutely aware, that “this could not be just a holiday jaunt upon which one set out blithely with a suitcase in one hand and a camera in the other” (2). In recognising this, Dunsheath appears to deliberately separate herself from a tradition of “jaunting” ladies, setting out on a whim to transport and replicate their cultural baggage to distant corners of the earth. Dunsheath was taking up the gauntlet thrown down by the Scottish Ladies’ expedition and perhaps secretly hoping she could mount an expedition which would exceed the achievements of Jackson’s. Whilst Dunsheath and her fellow expeditioners never admitted to any competitive

²⁴ Eileen Gregory became Eileen Healey in 1958.

agenda, given the original manifesto of the Pinnacle Club it would have been seen as a natural progression of the Pinnacle Club's aims for members to expand their mountaineering ambitions to the Himalaya.

Gwen Moffat was instrumental in suggesting the region of Kulu to the Abinger women, writing in *Space Below My Feet* that there "were lots of small mountains of moderate height and difficulty and vast tracts of unexplored country" (251). She had originally been invited by Dunsheath to lead the expedition, but perhaps surprisingly, given her thirst for adventure and new experience, refused. In *Space* she gave her reason as follows, arguing that "as the climbing leader and a professional, I had everything to lose" (251), an explanation which probably alludes to the fact that she had a young daughter to support and could ill afford the bad publicity and resulting loss of income should the women fail or a tragedy occur.

Like the Scottish women, the women of the self-styled "Abinger" expedition (named after the village where Dunsheath lived) were mindful of their responsibilities as a women-only expedition. On 18 February 1956, one of the expedition members, Eileen Gregory, made some observations in her diary which reveal some of the wider concerns held by some sections of the wider community about all-women expeditions. The first observation relates to an instruction given to the Abinger women by Monica Jackson exhorting them not to do anything which might give women a bad name. Gregory writes that Jackson said "they had got on so well with them that she didn't want the second party to give women's parties a bad name amongst Sherpas" (Gregory Diary, 18 February 1956). One can speculate what Jackson may have been referring to. The 1950s were not an era in which white women would have freely consorted with Sherpas in the way that later women's mountaineering expeditions would.²⁵ In the post-war era, it is more likely that Jackson was referring to the importance of treating Sherpas with respect. Gregory also recorded that one of her male mountaineering friends was "disgruntled that the women had gained permission and a small grant from the Mount Everest Foundation", and complained that "while he could afford to go, he couldn't afford to lose his salary for six months – it was alright for a woman, she had no responsibilities" (Gregory Diary, 18 February 1956). Whilst her friend's view of women captures a wider social view of women as home-makers who held no real responsibility, it was insulting to Gregory who was a trained bio-chemist and other professional women who were members of the Pinnacle Club. In Eileen Gregory's chapter in the

²⁵ This is a subject discussed by Arlene Blum in her expedition narrative *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* in which she discusses the 1979 all-women expedition to Annapurna.

book she revealed they had some problems with the Ladakhi porters carrying out their orders. Eileen suggested that the porters' reluctance to take orders from the women were "because we were a party of women", demonstrating that the culturally informed view of a woman's role was as marked in the East as it was in the West (158).

Joyce Dunsheath wrote self-deprecatingly and spiritedly of herself on the opening page of Mountains and Memsahibs as "a woman, fifty-three years of age, tied by household tasks and social duties" (1). In writing of herself in these terms she brings our attention to a defining thread in post-war women's published mountaineering narratives which differentiates the life-writing of the women mountaineers in this chapter to their 1930s predecessors and recalls the distinction that Trev Broughton makes between the public and private aspects of Leslie Stephen's life-writings. Whereas Pilley, Bray and the women of *les cordées féminines* largely restricted their reflections and writings about the domestic sphere to the private world of their diaries and letters, the women in this chapter openly write and publish about their private, domestic lives, bringing topics such as housework, love, sex, marriage, relationships into the public domain. In emphasising their role as housewives, Monica Jackson and Dunsheath also position themselves as ordinary women, demonstrating that women with a desire for adventure and challenge need not let their domestic responsibilities hold them back. Dunsheath echoes this in her narrative, reflecting that "it was possible that the Himalaya were not the fastnesses reserved only for the one per cent of super climbers" (2). She brings mountaineering and adventure into a more common-place domain that wrenches it away from its more rarified, Victorian, upper middle-class roots into the modern present with an emphasis on the adventurous possibilities that the expedition affords for any good woman climber "with a spirit of adventure [...] who was ready to put up with hardships and face altogether new situations" (4). The four women of the Abinger Expedition, like the previous women's expedition, are exponents of a new post-war mountaineering democracy which has potential to transform ordinary lives.

Mountains and Memsahibs is strikingly similar to Tents in the Clouds in terms of its themes within the narratives. The Abinger women write about experiencing similar doubts from the media and the wider mountaineering community about their ability to travel without accident or harassment. In the event, two of them journeyed adventurously by small car from London to Delhi without major mishap, encountering only help from people on the way, thereby negating fears that "two unescorted women with little knowledge of the inside of a car could undertake such an arduous journey"

(5). As with the Scottish Ladies' expedition, the Abinger members were educated, professional and middle-class women. They planned meticulously, also aware, as the Scottish ladies had been, that sceptical eyes were on them, waiting for a group of women to fail. Bolstered by a grant from the Mount Everest Foundation, interest from the press and sponsorship from food and clothing companies, they successfully surmounted scepticism with certainty and confidence. Between them the members had a variety of technical and professional skills in areas which included medicine, geology and surveying which given that one of their major aims was to explore and map a little known region, stood them in good stead. Dunsheath's description of herself as a housewife played down her skills in photography, expedition organisation and languages. She blithely describes going about her "daily household tasks" practising new languages (9) and had little difficulty managing the more technical demands of the expedition. As an expedition team they showed that a group of women could plan and execute an expedition, a point they reinforced in the conclusion to Mountains and Mem-Sahibs. Once in the Kulu Valley the women climbed and explored a little-known region, ascending peaks of around 20,000 feet, demonstrating that the Abinger Himalayan Expedition showed that "women are good Himalayan mountaineers and that they can plan and carry through a serious expedition" (191).

The women's success led to Joyce Dunsheath organising another, albeit smaller two-woman Abinger expedition in 1960 to the Hindu Kush where she and her fellow climber, Eleanor Baillie were successful in climbing up to 15,000 feet. Increasingly, women were demonstrating their abilities to successfully organise and carry out expeditions. Dunsheath and Baillie wrote of their expedition in an article for the Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book of 1961, entitled "Abinger Afghanistan Expedition 1960". In their joint narrative they drew on themes which recall the preceding expedition narratives, for example, the expectation from the wider public that they would have difficulties because they were women. "Many people", they wrote, "tried to dissuade us, convinced that we should be raped and murdered in such a wild country"

(3). Travelling independent of any sponsorship or grant and dissimilar from the previous expeditions due to its size, the two women's account is interesting in its focus on the accidents and minor emergencies which they experienced, including breaking a hand, catching dysentery, abandonment of a climb and a fight among their team of porters (3-6). It is interesting to speculate if they would have so freely publicised the unfortunate aspects of their expedition if they had written a book. Their focus also raises a question about the extent to which the other expedition accounts chose not to publish

minor emergencies which they may have experienced, knowing that it would give the reading public a chance to say, as Jackson, had written, “what do you expect of women”? Asking this question also poses a doubt as to the extent to which the expedition accounts – in recalling Liz Stanley’s scholarship – enable the reader to get at the totality of the women’s experiences.

“Four fed-up wives”: The Women’s Overland Himalayan Expedition, 1958

In 1958, three self-described housewives and officers’ wives, Antonia Deacock, Evelyn Sims and Anne Davies became the Women’s Overland Himalayan Expedition, 1958. The impetus for the Overland expedition had come from the fact that the women’s husbands, all serving officers in the armed services, were undertaking a mountaineering expedition to the Himalaya. One of the husbands had jokingly suggested that the women could catch a bus and join them at their base camp from where they could go trekking. Annoyed at the thought that they would therefore be termed “camp followers”, the women decided, instead, to mount their own, independent journey to a different Himalayan range and try and learn something of the lives and culture of the communities and people as they journeyed.

Deacock, Sims and Davies made no attempt to hide their inexperience of mountaineering and adventure in their single-authored expedition account (with the exception of the Foreword and Introduction) published by Antonia Deacock in 1960 as No Purdah in Padam. The single authorship of No Purdah differentiates this book from the previous collaboratively-written expedition accounts, but Deacock successfully threads quotes and views of the other two women into the narrative which is overwhelmingly light-hearted, leaving the reader with a strong feeling that the tone of the expedition from the outset was one of fun, adventure and exploration. Given the commercial success of No Purdah, one wonders if Deacock had deliberately set out to write an accessible, popular narrative that would be popular with the reading public. The negative aspect of this approach was to lead to accusations from the Press that she had made the whole experience seem like a garden party, a point to which I return later. Jo Gill also makes a similar point in unpublished scholarship on the poetry of the American suburban poet Phyllis McGinley. Gill writes that McGinley turned aside, on the advice of her editors, from writing what Gill refers to as “high” poetry to focus on writing poems which dealt with “ordinary” subjects (4-5). In focusing on what Sylvia Plath condemned as “light verse”, McGinley, awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in

1961, appears to have tapped into an interest in a poetry and literature which dealt with topics of the everyday, making them accessible to a wide readership (4-5). Whilst Betty Friedan emphasised the limitations of the home for American women in the period, McGinley appears to have celebrated its ordinariness whilst stressing what Gill refers to as the “possibilities” which the home afforded for women (7). This dual positioning of the home as an environment of opportunity is arguably reproduced in the philosophy of the Women’s Overland Himalayan Expedition which takes the home into the outdoors, bringing “home” into a harmonious alliance with mountaineering, travel and adventure. This has the effect of making adventure and expeditions appear accessible to everyone, particularly women at home, a point which is emphasised by the fact that a major sponsor of the expedition was Ovaltine. Photographs of the women expedition members in No Purdah appear to deliberately stress the domestic side of the expedition such as washing clothes, washing and setting hair, preparing food.

Anne Davies, who wrote the Introduction to No Purdah, also published her own article entitled “Across the Inner Line” in the 1959-60 edition of the Himalyan Journal which is completely different in emphasis, style and tone, focusing on the mountain climbing element of the expedition. The different narrative styles of Deacock and Davies’ writing demonstrate a shrewd and sophisticated awareness of the different needs and expectations of specific communities of readers.

Unlike the preceding two expeditions, the aim of the Overland Himalayan expedition was not overtly one of mountaineering, even though Davies had stressed this element in her article. Deacock, was, in fact the only expedition member with climbing experience and was a member of the Ladies’ Alpine Club. The dual aim of the women’s expedition, as she wrote in No Purdah, was to explore the remote Tibetan Buddhist Kingdom of Zanskar in the North West Himalaya and study the lives of the peoples inhabiting the region, focusing particularly on the women. The fundamental aim was similar to the Scottish Ladies’ and the Abinger expeditions: to prove, as these expeditions had done, that a team made of women could succeed in an adventurous, collaborative enterprise. This was emphasised by Dame Isobel Cripps, who wrote in the Foreword to No Purdah that “the explorers felt a desire to prove to themselves, and to others, that they could overcome the reputed feminine failure to work as a team, and to show what could be achieved by women, as well as men, in the matter of endurance” (5). The women also, as Cripps added, “wished to bring back information concerning the customs and lives of people of other countries in unexplored regions, observed from a woman’s point of view” (5-6). In “Across the Inner Line”, Anne Davies, whilst

stressing that the major aim of the expedition was to study the lives of women, included a mountaineering objective to more closely fit the remit for publishing in the Himalayan Journal. The women's aims, were, she wrote:

To carry out a survey into the domestic lives of women and children in Zanskar.

To learn as much as possible of the social conditions, way of life, customs, handicrafts and cooking recipes of the women and children in the countries through which we would pass.

To make a film of our experiences.

To climb, if possible, a virgin peak in the region, of 17,000 ft to 18,000 ft. (2)

It is not clear whether, in foregrounding their aim to research women, the expedition members were deliberately playing down any mountaineering intentions given the political sensitivities on the border between India and Tibet. They may have surmised that an expedition made up of women to ostensibly research women would have appeared less threatening to the authorities in India and more acceptable to sceptical audiences at home. Davies hints as much when in her article she writes that Prime Minister Nehru, who they met in Delhi and from whom they had to attain approval to cross the Inner Line between India and Tibet to reach Zanskar, gave his consent with an almost avuncular air, declaring: "Well I can see no objection to you young ladies carrying out your plans to visit Zanskar." (2). Antonia Deacock did harbour a mountaineering ambition for the expedition. A member of the Ladies' Alpine Club, she had intended that a fourth member, Betty Patey, should be included. Patey had a reputation, as Deacock writes in No Purdah, as "the best woman climber in the Cairngorms" (16). Patey would bring more mountaineering expertise to the party should the women decide to explore some of the peaks in the region as Deacock hoped. Patey, however, withdrew after becoming pregnant.

The women's base camp destination, Manali, was the same as the first Abinger expedition. Despite this similarity, the No Purdah expedition was determined to be "a first" as Anne Davies explains in the book's Introduction. "Never before had three women driven alone, in a single vehicle, unescorted, from England to India and back" (No Purdah 11). The women would probably also be, as Davies wrote, "the first unescorted European women to cross Afghanistan" (11). One difference the Overland expedition had from the start compared with the other expeditions was their rueful acceptance and canny management of what Antonia Deacock referred to as a

“gimmick” factor: that they were perceived by the public and media as dis-satisfied wives who were not content to stay at home. Deacock explained the “gimmick” as follows:

The files of [newspaper] cuttings grew. For some reasons we had a ‘gimmick’ that appealed, and we were dubbed with such titles as ‘Four Fed-Up Wives’, ‘The Wives who won’t stay at home’, ‘Mother of Three Leads Trek to the Himalaya’. (20)

Whilst the titles are inventions from the popular press keen to exploit what they perceived as an unusual angle, they have a wider political resonance, capturing (albeit perhaps unintentionally) some of the frustrations of women in the post-war era who, confronted with a political consensus determined to return them to the home, perceived the limitations a return to domesticity would impose on their wider aspirations. Second Wave feminists such as Betty Friedan would capture in her 1963 text The Feminine Mystique, the “frustration of white heterosexual middle-class women without careers” (Humm 252). Friedan herself, in making observations of young American women in the late 1950s, wrote in The Feminine Mystique that they were being besieged by magazines celebrating the attractions of home, arguing that “the only goal a woman is permitted is the pursuit of a man [...] where is the world of thought and ideas, the life of the mind and spirit”? (32). Whilst Friedan’s words suggest a monolithic view of the aspirations of women (many women as I have suggested, like Moffat, took advantage of new post-war opportunities and freedoms in work and leisure), she captures in her case studies the ease with which some women could be seduced into a life which sought to limit their ambition to the home, an aspiration which the women of the Overland expedition were so successful in challenging.

After their initial indignation as being labelled as “fed-up wives”, the women saw that the gimmick had considerable commercial potential. This they harnessed to their full advantage in order to secure permissions and sponsorship and succeeded in gaining sponsorship from transport, equipment and food companies, notably Rover and Ovaltine, the latter of which supplied them with a cine camera.²⁶ The condition of the sponsorship by Ovaltine was that the women had to take a cine camera and film themselves drinking Ovaltine at every possible opportunity. When the rolls of film were reviewed on the women’s return the quality of their filming was deemed to be too

²⁶ In 2008, the dusty boxes of cine film were found in Eve Sims’ attic. The surviving expedition members were persuaded by a film-maker, Martin Salter, to be interviewed for a film he was making about the Zanskar region. He also asked for permission to include edited extracts from their film in his. The publicity led to renewed public interest in the women, resulting in them being interviewed on Radio Four “Women’s Hour” and having an article published about them in the Daily Telegraph.

poor to be used (or else the images of the women drinking Ovaltine dressed in outdoor gear in camps did not resonate with the cosy domestic view of 1950s womanhood), so they filmed the women drinking Ovaltine in smart dresses in a mock sitting room which caused, according to the nephew of Anne Sims, great hilarity among the women (Bob Pilbeam, conversation, 10 May 2012). As part of the sponsorship deal with Rover the women had to be filmed and photographed undergoing Land Rover mechanics training dressed in overalls, tinkering with various parts of the engine which provoked some – mainly good-humoured – ribaldry in the press when the photos were published, much to the women’s amusement. It is a defining characteristic of Deacock’s narrative in No Purdah that the women were amused by the gimmick, wholeheartedly playing along with it. This good-natured laugh at themselves differentiates their narratives from the more serious rhetoric of the other expedition accounts. The downside for this more light-hearted expedition was that the media interest in them did not extend – as Antonia Deacock noted ruefully – to the broadsheets. “The Times”, she wrote, “and other papers with sober intentions and small circulations did not touch on us at all” (20).

Whilst members of the Scottish Ladies’ and the first Abinger expedition had also acknowledged their connections with the domestic sphere in describing themselves as housewives, the emphasis in their expedition narratives is on what women could achieve given opportunities to excel outside the home and eschewed connections with home. Antonia Deacock’s women have a more ambivalent relationship with home, in one way they took home with them, connecting themselves overtly with notions of home and cosy domesticity by their close connections with the Ovaltine drink. In another way, they attempted to dis-connect themselves from the home. One incident explains this. En route, Deacock and another expedition member received a telegram from their husbands, announcing their imminent arrival in Manali. The women were furious according to Deacock, who wrote, angrily, “what right have they to barge in at this moment? [...] Our husbands might be thinking sentimentally about two meek little wives preparing joyously for the reunion. The picture in fact bore more resemblance to two fishwives, arms akimbo and faces implacable” (85).

During their journey through the Zanskar region the women ascended an 18,000 ft mountain which they named Biwi Giri or Wives Peak but, as they said, they “planted no flag”. They firmly disassociated themselves from any imperialistic concept of claiming a peak for their country, Deacock writing that the “idea of three housewives earnestly staking a claim for their homeland on their gentle dome made us giggle” (133). This refutation strikes a different chord to the nationalist fervour associated with

the British ascent of Everest in 1953. The women's mountaineering is written almost as a secondary consideration and is downplayed. In "Across the Inner Line" Davies narrates the women's ascent of Biwi Giri in less than salutary terms, writing that:

The climb up to the 18,100 ft col was a great strain on all of us and we felt limp and tired when we reached the top. However, we had decided to have a go at one of the peaks that lay to the north-east, which is not marked on the map. [...] Early the next morning we struggled up towards the summit of our chosen mountain [...] As we gazed at the grandeur around us, our aching heads and limbs, forgotten, we knew why we had come. (2)

On their return to Delhi the women were subjected to a barrage of publicity, but "ferverently hoped that one report in particular would go no further". This included, as they noted in No Purdah, "such howlers as 'Trekking in the Himalaya is rather like a garden party'" (185). This heading summed up the media's reaction to the women's expedition, but it also, as I indicated earlier, ironically maximised their commercial success by increasing levels of interest in the expedition book, post-expedition lectures and articles. By going along with their label as "fed-up wives" the women arguably demonstrated canny commercial acumen. By deftly managing facetious questions such as "how could three women manage to reach decisions acceptable to all and continue to live in amity?" (139) the women adroitly played the media at their own game. By the end of the expedition they themselves were referring to their expedition as "the expedition of the three wives" (185). Similar to other adventurous and mountaineering women, these women had effectively turned their femininity to their own advantage. They had proved – as the Abinger and Scottish Ladies' women had done – "to ourselves and others that we could undertake to plan and carry out a fairly ambitious expedition." (200).

In terms of women's mountaineering life-writing, the Overland women's decision to adopt a deliberately gendered personae of "wives" in print is arguably no different to preceding women mountaineers who, in placing their experiences in the public domain adopt a specific discourse which is more representative of their times (or what their times demanded of them) than them as individual women. Some of the women whose life-writing provides a particular case study for this thesis – such as Mrs Freshfield, Mrs Cole, Dorothy Pilley – reproduce the characteristics, socio-cultural and political dialogues of their day in the process of transforming private, reflective narrative to public document. We understand more about what Pilley really thinks

through readings of her diaries than Climbing Days, which was a commercial enterprise. If Pilley had felt able to publicly engage in what one reviewer of Moffat called – to paraphrase – “a good gossip”, then Climbing Days would be a different rendition of women’s mountaineering. The women whose life-writing is more honest and forthright – D’Angeville and Gwen Moffat for example – are able to write so either because the contextual and cultural limitations on women’s life-writing (modesty, diffidence, womanliness) have been lifted (in Moffat’s case) or been ignored through natural flamboyance, lack of inhibition and wealth (in D’Angeville’s case). The women of the Overland expedition were responding to a context which provided opportunity but hedged it in with specific commercial conditions. It is interesting to speculate if other women would have responded differently and been less compliant in their acceptance of a particular representation.

The three women’s expeditions of the 1950s explore here are, I suggest, testament to women mountaineers’ different management of the cult of domesticity in the post-war years. As middle-class, educated, articulate, professional women they shared a determination to show a sceptical public that they could succeed both in expedition planning and in achieving new mountaineering objectives. All three expeditions achieved notable successes – whether in climbing new peaks, exploring new mountain ranges or being the first women to penetrate obscure corners of the Himalaya. In terms of the way they write their experiences, the difference is one of emphasis and lies in the extent to which two of the three expeditions more overtly challenge and distant themselves from domesticity whilst the other deliberately courts it.

“The only possible mountain”: Cho Oyu 1959

The major mountaineering ambition which symbolised the pinnacle of the aspirations of women mountaineers in the late 1950s was to be the first woman to reach the summit of one of the world’s 8,000-metre high mountains. 8,000 metres was a talismanic height in the 1950s, such was the fervour and enthusiasm of the mountaineering world to scale mountains of this height and higher. Although men had successfully summited mountains such as Everest and Annapurna in the early 1950s, women mountaineers had still to attain this goal.

Such was the ambition of France’s leading woman mountaineer, Claude Kogan. One mountain has come to symbolise her goal – Cho Oyu, on the border of the Nepalese and Tibetan Himalaya. Red-headed, slim, petite and glamorous, Kogan owned

her own company designing bathing costumes, manufacturing them in a factory she owned near Nice. With her husband Georges Kogan, a leading French alpinist who also had 8,000-metre aspirations, she climbed many mountains in the late 1940s and after her husband's climbing death in 1951 teamed up with other elite mountaineers to advance her ambitions. After an unsuccessful attempt to summit Cho Oyu in 1954 as part of a mixed-sex expedition where she achieved the women's altitude record – reaching 25,400 feet before being turned back by a storm – she made ascending this particular mountain her goal. The second attempt would, she determined, be a women's expedition and for it to be successful she needed to recruit women mountaineers with the necessary expertise and experience in mountains of this magnitude. To this end, Claude Kogan travelled to London in December 1957 to give a lecture to the Ladies' Alpine Club at their 50th anniversary dinner.

A paraphrased account of Kogan's lecture later appeared in French in Paris-Match. Dorothy Pilley was approached by the magazine three years after Kogan's lecture and asked for her views of the occasion, appearing in the article as “Dorothee” in my translation of the version published in the 1960 edition of the Ladies' Alpine Club Yearbook:

Dorothee remembers that famous evening in London, under the chandeliers of the Victorian Ladies' Alpine Club, three years earlier. In the hall, not a man. Very straight and very still, fifty English ladies seated on red velvet, the flower of the British Mountaineering female, listen to a French colleague who has just ascended the rostrum. ‘The Alps’, said Claude Kogan, ‘should not remain the sole objective of the expeditions feminine. They are just a springboard. Our goal now is the Himalaya’. The Ladies' Alpine Club is the epitome of astonishment. ‘Get rid of the outdated idea that prohibits the practice of women in very high mountain. Cho-Oyu, great neighbour of Mount Everest, is the sixth summit of the world. He has been defeated only once by men, a cord of Austrians in 1954. Yet, I almost reach it myself. Ladies, I suggest a female expedition to Cho-Oyu. I am sure you will succeed’. There was a moment of silence, as before the cataclysms. Then fifty cheers, such as alone could push the gorges of British sport, rattled the old chandeliers.

(22)

Notwithstanding that meaning can be lost or distorted in translation, this article was not received well by members of the Ladies' Alpine Club. Pilley was outraged

when she read the original in Paris-Match, reading sarcasm and denigration in the magazine's depiction of 'the flower of the British Mountaineering female'. She also objected to the magazine's insinuation that Claude Kogan was a fanatic feminist and referred to the original article, in a postcard she sent to Tim Healey in January 1958, as "the worse kind of journalese". However, there is a consensus in accounts and reportage of the eventual Cho Oyu expedition from a variety of sources, including diary entries of Cho Oyu expedition members, reportage in the publications of the two sponsors of the expedition Paris-Match and Daily Express and Stephen Harper's book of the expedition A Fatal Obsession: The Women of Cho Oyu, A Reporting Saga, that Kogan was fanatical in her desire to conquer the summit of this particular 8,000-metre mountain, the more so because she had been turned back from the earlier attempt.

Kogan's impassioned rhetoric at the Ladies' Alpine Club dinner inspired some members of her audience. To be a member of the first attempt by a women's mountaineering expedition to reach the summit of a Himalayan mountain over 8,000 metres high was a considerable motivation. Kogan succeeded in recruiting three members of the Ladies' Alpine Club: a recently married Eileen Healey, who as Eileen Gregory had participated in the 1956 Abinger expedition, Countess Dorothea Gravina and Margaret Darvall. Eileen Healey was given a cine camera, rudimentary instruction on its use and asked to be the expedition's film-maker. The three British women joined four other women: Kogan as the expedition leader, Claudine van der Stratten, a Belgian climber and renowned skier, Loulou Boulaz, a leading Swiss climber and a French climber, Jeanne Franco. The two daughters and niece of Sherpa Tensing Norgay also joined the expedition. Other expedition members included a woman doctor and woman photographer, both of whom had substantial mountaineering experience.

The Cho Oyu expedition received generous sponsorship and media coverage from the start. Like the other expeditions which I have earlier discussed there was interest in this attempt by a group of women to show – in the wake of the success of the Hunt expedition to summit Everest in 1953 – that women aspired to reach the highest summits of the world, in the process confounding socio-cultural views of a woman's place. The Daily Express had assigned a reporter, Stephen Harper, to the expedition, who was contracted to travel with the women and report a bird's eye view coverage of the expedition, sending regular reports back to the newspaper. From the start, this was a disaster. Kogan insisted that the expedition was to be women-only (conveniently ignoring the fact that they would have to recruit mainly male Sherpas and porters) and from the outset, Harper, despite the contractual conditions of The Daily Express'

sponsorship, was marginalised and isolated by the women mountaineers, their attitude to him from the outset being icy. In A Fatal Obsession, Harper wrote “the women expected me to cover their story from Kathmandu, basing my despatches on messages they promised to send to me by runner [...] the only men they wanted around them on the mountain were Sherpa high-altitude porters” (3).

This collision of expectations which was magnified in the subsequent expedition narratives and media reportage is, in retrospect, not surprising. Put within the socio-cultural and mountaineering contexts of the time, the women’s attempt at an 8,000-metre “first” was highly significant and in 1959 was perceived as a hugely important watershed in women’s mountaineering. Given this context, it is not surprising that the expedition members felt that the close involvement of a man, with the exception of the Sherpas, would compromise their women-only approach.

In later years Stephen Harper’s relationships with the surviving expedition members mellowed, with Eileen Healey writing the Foreword to A Fatal Obsession. In her Foreword Healey acknowledges that Stephen Harper was not fully integrated into the expedition, writing that:

this was not acceptable to Claude Kogan and to many of the members. It is possible that the leader herself wanted to avoid any accusation that the expedition was relying on men, though in fact this was a difficult thing to sustain in view of the role of Sherpas and porters. In the 1950s so few women had ever climbed in the Himalayas [sic] that this was the only way of ensuring women would have the opportunity. (ix)

Healey goes on to admit (with the benefit of years of hindsight) that the women did not properly realise the possible repercussions of their failure to co-operate fully with Harper, not least because The Daily Express was providing considerable sponsorship on the understanding that Harper would be a full member of the expedition. Harper revealed that the paper threatened a law-suit against the women but this was not taken out due to the later tragedy that occurred.

Stephen Harper knew what Claude Kogan’s expedition philosophy was. He quotes a discussion with her when she made it clear to him that she saw his presence as a distraction, arguing that the women will work better without men about, ensuring “the only important thing will be the mountain” (9). According to Harper, Margaret Darvall believed that the world would belittle their achievement by saying that they had a man available ready to stand by and rescue them in case they got into trouble. If this is so then the women had conveniently forgotten that the male Sherpas who would

accompany them were being paid to do just that. The difference appeared to be that Harper was a white, Western male and therefore represented much of the patriarchal world which inhibited women's achievements, although this is not suggested by Harper in his book. What he does write is that the women had an alternative view of the Sherpas, perceiving them as a necessary adjunct to the expedition in terms of their mountaineering skills. "These tough, resolute women", he writes, knew that "the Sherpas were likely to climb higher than they might be able to, not perhaps because they were male but because they were in their own element" (89).

The particular interest for this thesis is the extent, difference and intensity of the many expedition narratives which exist. The different parties with their varying, competing and opposing perspectives on the expedition provide a rich insight into the culturally informed expectations and values of the period. The process by which the differences evolved into a schism between the traditional views of a woman's place (the Press) and the modern aspirations of the expedition members is many-layered and multiple-authored, providing an exemplar of Gilmore's "autobiographics", in terms of highlighting the role that "resistance and contradiction" hold as "strategies of self-representation" (42).

Harper was clear that the expedition was conceived and organised with one major objective – to put "Madame Claude Kogan on top of a mountain that had beaten her when her companions were men" (10). In this phrase he imbues Kogan with a feminist zeal, seeing her ambition and interpreting it as an impassioned desire to prove that a group of women could achieve something which a mixed-sex party had not. Harper viewed Kogan as the most driven of the participating members and asked her why she felt "impelled to pit her feminine strength against piercing winds, thin air, ice hazards and all the other dangers of trying to conquer one of the sister peaks of Everest" (8). She answered, according to him, "Because I like it" (8). This is a simplistic and disingenuous response given her own self-acknowledged ambition to summit Cho Oyu but suggests that her rationale for summiting Cho Oyu went much deeper than reaching the top, for reasons which perhaps she could not fully articulate, particularly to herself.

Harper suggests that Claude Kogan was the only member of the expedition who was fully committed to reaching the summit. He wrote that she "was clearly in no doubt that she would soon gain the summit record by climbing all the way up Cho Oyu" (9). Dorothea Gravina, in her 50s and the oldest expedition member, was, according to Harper, not willing to go higher than 20,000 feet and her ambition was limited to Base Camp. Loulou Boulaz and Margaret Darvall took little active part in any

mountaineering after an initial climb to 20,000 feet and were carried back to Base Camp suffering from severe altitude sickness where they were obliged to wait for four weeks before the expedition caught up with them again on their way back down. Eileen Healey, Harper thought, was worried about the effects of altitude over 22,000 feet. He did not paint a picture of a united and focused women's expedition.

Eileen Healey's expedition diary faintly hints of discord among the women but on reading her diary account of the expedition I had the feeling her entries were carefully written to minimise the dissension and discord amongst expedition members. Healey would have been aware of the sponsors' interest in the women's expedition accounts and diaries and it is likely that she – and other expedition members – would deliberately not have written about anything that would put members in a negative light for fear they would become public. This not only recalls Monica Jackson's desire to avoid anything (or at least omit writing about it) which might draw critical attention to her own Scottish Ladies' expedition, but raises a moral issue here to do with the extent to which the two sponsors of the Cho Oyu expedition felt that they, rather than the women owned the women's narratives. It also puts into focus a moment in life-writing when forms of private, contemplative writing become public and the extent to which this knowingly changes the nuances and meanings in the writing. Whilst on the surface this may cause difficulties for readings of life-writing, it emphasises the importance of the reader of life-writing being aware of these changes and different layers of meaning which affect, shift and inform life-writing discourse. I once again refer to Gilmore's recognition of the rich complexities in life-writing which she, Timothy Dow Adams and others recognise in their post-modern critiques of life-writing. A closer study of the diaries of Eileen Healey provides a case-study for a post-modern analysis of her life-writing.

Eileen Healey's diaries and her Cho Oyu expedition film: notes from conversations with Tim Healey²⁷

Eileen Healey's role in two of these three major international women's expeditions stands out. She was born Eileen Gregory in 1920 to adventurous parents and was one of the new breed of professional women able to take advantage of developments in women's education, work and leisure after the Second World War. A member of the

²⁷ I refer, in parentheses, to Healey's diaries written before her 1958 marriage as (Gregory, Diary), reverting to (Healey, Diary), for diaries written after this date.

Ladies' Alpine Club, the Manchester-based Polaris Club and Pinnacle Club, Healey epitomised the woman climber in the 1940s and 1950s; educated, determined, independent and adventurous in outlook. She firstly worked in the pharmaceutical industry and then as a teacher, moving from job to job to fit in with opportunities to further her mountaineering experience. As a member of two international women's mountaineering expeditions to the Himalaya in the 1950s, she won acclaim and repute for her role in these well-publicised attempts by women to undertake their own mountaineering expeditions and climb independently of men. Eileen wrote meticulous accounts of her climbing from 1943-1959 in 13 diaries, which describe her location and technical character of the climbs in detail. Her diaries are labelled according to the geographical location and year of her climbs, for example, "Wales August 1955", "Langdale Sept 1955", "Glencoe Sept 1955", "Borrowdale New Year 1956". This is the main point of difference between hers and Dorothy Pilley's diaries – Eileen favoured brevity and facts over reflective narrative and rarely, in consequence, do we have an insight into her values, feelings and mountaineering philosophy. The factual nature of her diary writing suggests a woman who was practical, down-to-earth, and very committed to mountaineering.

Healey did not allow the Second World War to interfere with her climbing, preferring to hitch-hike – an alternative and cheap method of travel in war-time but inconceivable as a method of transport for women mountaineers a generation before Healey – or tackle the war-time vagaries of public transport than forego her climbing. In August 1945 she hitch-hiked with her friend Barbara, to North Wales as she wrote in her diary: "At that time of afternoon, there seemed no traffic our way, no lorry's [*sic*] with drain-pipes going to Stoke, which we had been told to look out for" (Gregory Diary, 24 August 1945). At Shrewsbury the women "had some tea in the town and left about 6 and started along the Holyhead road. We had hardly left the town before we got a lift on a milk lorry, we were enjoying it among the churns" (Gregory Diary, 24 August 1945).

From Brighton, where she lived and worked, Healey frequently travelled to the mountains of the north of England and Wales, as the following diary entry dated Friday 4 September 1945 illustrates, when she writes about taking a train crowded with servicemen and sailors en route to Windermere in the Lake District: "I looked at the floor, remembering Stella's advise [*sic*] but it looked so hard, and then I noticed that one of the racks was empty, so I got up there. I dosed [*sic*] a fair amount" (Gregory Diary, 4 September 1945).

In her husband Tim Healey's words, Eileen was not a "banner-waving feminist", climbing equally happily with men and women. He stressed in conversation with me in February 2011 that Eileen "just loved climbing, she didn't mind who she climbed with, it was climbing that was everything to her" (Tim Healey conversation, 10 February 2011). Tim and Eileen had not long been married when Eileen received the invitation to join the Cho Oyu expedition. She was initially reluctant to go but Tim insisted, arguing that she would regret passing up such an opportunity. Her major contribution to the Cho Oyu expedition was that of film-maker as I have previously mentioned. The only lessons that Eileen had in film-making were the ones that Tim gave her just before she set off. Eileen's film of the Cho Oyu expedition, shot in colour, is hugely important to the history of mountaineering *per se*, as it captures a world which has all but vanished. It is also important as a post-modern form of life-writing, providing a visual alternative to the limitations of traditional written auto/biography discussed by scholars of life-writing in the 1980s such as James Olney and – even earlier – Virginia Woolf. More contemporary scholars such as Timothy Dow Adams, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson offer new insights into the possibilities offered to life-writing scholarship by visual and artistic media. Scholars of geography have also recognised the importance of Healey's film, In their article "Geography, film and exploration: women and amateur film-making in the Himalayas [sic]", Katherine Brickell and Bradley Garrett argue that Healey's film is a vital contribution to the history of expedition film-making in that its amateurish quality offers an alternative insight to an expedition, as opposed to the more formal record filmed for the purposes of fulfilling the requirements of sponsoring organisations. They argue that:

Amateur recordings such as Healey's remain an under-utilised archival research and teaching resource for uncovering the unofficial endeavours and voices of those often neglected in the history of exploration. (3)

Brickell and Garrett make a crucial point here about the significance of women's life-writings to inter-disciplinary scholarship in terms of what they reveal about the largely hidden and more informal aspects of women's experiences. Their argument parallels the timeliness of this thesis in its uncovering of previously un-researched, un-read women's mountaineering life-writings. The visual and written life-writings of women mountaineers contribute to our understanding and readings of mountaineering, offering new voices and perspectives on the relationship of women to mountaineering. This point is also important when considering the role of Eileen Healey's film as a different iteration of women's mountaineering.

Eileen's filming eye rests on naïve, unspoilt communities and villages in 1959, communities then eking out a subsistence living through farming, spinning, weaving, milking and cheese-making but now devoted to mass Himalayan tourism and trekking. These remote communities would not have seen Western women before, let alone women mountaineers. Her filming of the approach trek to Base Camp, a tortuous and winding route strewn with stone chortens, shrines and prayer wheels, not only captures the essence of mountain expeditions in this era such as porters carrying massive loads with bare feet and inadequate clothing, but the gaiety and optimism of expedition members. Eileen's film includes previously little-seen glimpses of the mundane activities of the every-day aspects of expedition life, including pitching camp, the building of stone walls for shelter from snow and wind, cooking and eating. She also captures the ordinary, daily regime of the women such as washing and cutting hair, filming domestic trivia taking place in a colourful local landscape with bright flowers and rare butterflies. Cultural relations are also made visible and explicit, with scenes of the women pitching their tents on the lawn after being refused rooms in a monastery because they are women. The film contains a poignant and last known image of the petite Claude Kogan setting off up the climb wearing a wide-brimmed, floppy straw hat, huge dark snow-glasses and looking smaller than usual against the Himalayan mountains.

On her return, Eileen showed the canisters of film she had taken to the BBC, who pronounced it as amateurish and poor quality, lacking, they felt, sufficient footage of interest for it to be shown. Poor Eileen, thoroughly demoralised, packed the boxes of cine film away and consigned them to the attic until they saw the light of day in the fiftieth anniversary year of the expedition in 2009. At her sons' and Tim's insistence, she agreed to them digitising the film and herself supplied the narration. The film received its proper public appreciation at the Kendal Mountain Festival in November 2009 and is a remarkable visual record of women's mountaineering in the middle of the twentieth century. Although too ill to attend the Festival, Eileen was much amused that Saga magazine, prompted by the anniversary publicity of the expedition, chose to publish an article in November 2009 entitled The Women of Cho Oyu, which included a renewed appreciation of the role that she had played in progressing women's mountaineering (66-71).

“She must have pressed things too far”: the tragedy of the Cho Oyu Expedition

The women’s Cho Oyu expedition set out in early 1959, named by Paris-Match as “1959 Expedition Feminine au Nepal”. The magazine’s focus on the women’s appearance was overtly sexual, emphasising the women’s appearance in their trekking outfits of “figure-clinging, sky-blue slacks and pink sweaters” (Harper 14), an outfit designed by Claude Kogan. Tim Healey, in his discussions with me, remembered that Eileen, who – muscular, fit and well proportioned – hardly fitted Paris-Match’s image of frail femininity, had told him that she could not get the slacks over her hips and had to visit the hotel tailor to adapt them to her more generous form! (Tim Healey, conversation 10 February 2011).

In the event, tragedy came to the women of Cho Oyu. During the push to the summit, Claude Kogan and Claudine van der Stratten along with two Sherpas were swept away in an avalanche after leaving Camp IV high on the mountain. Eileen Healey wrote in a long diary entry of 5 October 1959 that the women “were under no illusions as to how he’d [Harper] write up the tragedy” (Healey Diary, 5 October 1959). Harper’s reporting of the deaths of the four mountaineers, notwithstanding the fact that he shared a world exclusive, was compassionate as far as he was able to be, given the ensuing thirst for gory details and sensationalism from The Daily Express and Paris-Match which was splashed over the pages of the two publications in the following days and weeks

Dorothy Pilley felt that the sensationalist reportage of the tragedy did great damage to women’s mountaineering and some women mountaineers blamed Claude’s ambition for the loss of life. Every woman mountaineer knew the stakes were high in this case. Eileen Healey noted in her diary entry of 5 October that the Cho Oyu women had even thought about subterfuge, to try and repress details of the deaths if possible:

We had the thought of keeping quiet about Camp IV, however, [sic] we thought it would be a week before were [sic] down again and the rumours all went though Ang Norbu’s village and there was no hope, so we wrote telegrams that they were lost in a storm and all hope abandoned. (Healey Diary, 5 October 1959)

Eileen’s diary recording of the realisation of the loss of the two women is factual and calm. Her measured style is problematic as it raises questions about the extent to which she sacrificed genuine spontaneity for a blander reportage, knowing the sponsors’ interests in the women’s diaries. However, her narrative does reveal one important reaction to the tragedy not subsequently mentioned in post-expedition accounts

published by the surviving expedition members in a variety of journals – the women’s thought to “keep quiet” about the deaths which has an instinctive quality. The other accounts, written with the benefits of retrospective reflection and hindsight are more guarded and contain little of the women’s immediate reactions and discussions which must have occurred on learning of the deaths. These accounts are also particularly reticent in their iterations of the ambitions of Claude Kogan. I return to these accounts later.

Eileen was lower down the mountain at Camp 2 where she had helped to establish a camp and stores and writes:

the first day the sherpas had gone up they had found Camp III depot ok but the site of 3 [sic] was completely covered by an avalanche. Phu Dorje had stayed at 3 but the others had gone on and found Wangdi’s sack and the end of rope but had found that Chewang was much further in the avalanche than Wangdi and had been carried much further down. It would have been impossible to do anything for him. This time the sherpas had reached the site of [Camp] IV but found no trace of a tent, the whole site had been swept by an avalanche. (Healey Diary, 5 October 1959)

Even in the midst of tragedy, Eileen noted how pleased Dorothea Gravina and Jeanne Franco were to have reached Camp III – an “unusual height for women” (Healey Diary, 5 October 1959).

Dorothy Pilley commented briefly on events in her diary entry of Sunday 18 October 1959, writing that the “Cho Oyu disaster is a bad business.” Her diary entry included a press cutting with the heading “Two women die on Nepal Peak.” According to the cutting they “died in a blizzard while making the first attempt by women to conquer a Himalayan peak” (Pilley Diary, 18 October 1959). She further commented two days later, paraphrasing some of the reportage of Paris-Match. “So tragedy has come to the women of five nations who set out in sky-blue figure-hugging trousers and pink sweaters to show that they can climb to the high places of the earth.” She further observed that “I can’t help feeling, judging from extracts from C.K. [Claude Kogan] that she must have pressed things too far” (Pilley Diary, 20 October 1959). On Tuesday 27th October 1959 Pilley wrote an excoriation of the press’ reporting of the women’s deaths in her diary:

We were haunted by the sense that ambition to get to the summit had overshadowed every consideration. It’s all too easy to understand this

human weakness but it's hard, when it involved others, not to be aghast. The way the Press have a field day when it's women who are involved makes an old feminist like me furious. Nonetheless, they had their opportunity this time to have obsessed women etc. on headlines. They make me wish it were not necessary to take financing from newspapers whose main aim is vulgar publicity. [Original emphases] (Pilley Diary, 27 October 1959)

Pilley's revelation that she believed the ambition of Claude Kogan had overridden concerns of safety is interesting. Articles written by the expedition members on their return were careful not to include narratives which may have led to inferences that the women's practice and resulting decisions were unsafe. In the joint article which Margaret Darvall, Eileen Healey and Dorothea Gravina, published in the 1960 edition of the Ladies' Alpine Club Year Book the women acknowledged that "for Claude, Cho Oyu was the only possible mountain" (11) but made no references to whether her ambition was "fanatical" in its implementation. Eileen Healey emphasised the women-only nature of the expedition writing how, on acclimatisation climbs between Camps 1 and 2, Claude Kogan had refused help from Sherpas on technical sections saying "This is our business, this is a women's expedition" (15-16). Healey reinforced that there was nothing the women could do once they realised that huge avalanches had swept away Kogan, van der Stratten and their Sherpas. Her narrative is measured, careful, unemotional. The women's narratives focus on the trek up to Base Camp, the establishing of the high camps and their continuing evaluation of the conditions, evidencing their awareness of the importance of moving rapidly but safely to secure a successful ascent to complete the job they had come to do. Gravina's narrative is more revelatory, she writes that despite her anxiety "my job was to clear the camp to make room for the top party to move in, and above all to get the three girls down to safety as rapidly as possible" (20). Her narrative is dispassionate: "Avalanches continued all night, there could be no question of going up in those conditions [...] there was nothing we could do; either they were in safety [...] or else they were already beyond help" (21). On their trek back to Kathmandu, Gravina focuses on the mundane, using domestic chores to create a sense of stability: "We camped once more on our old camp-site above the village and had a terrific re-packing and a WASH [original emphasis]: this was quite an event" (22). This use of domesticity to create a scene of comfort is, I think, done deliberately, to try to bring a sense of normality to events of tragedy. Domesticity is

imbued here with comforting familiarity to separate and cushion the surviving members from the harshness of death.

An obituary of Kogan written by Micheline Morin was muted. Morin suggested that Claude possessed “an inflexible will, and, in the depths of her cool grey eyes burned the pure flame of enthusiasm” (51). The Editor’s notes in the same journal recorded that members of the Ladies’ Alpine Club “felt strongly that the Cho-Oyu expedition was, in spite of disaster, successful in [...] being a really strong and capable women’s team which under less unpredictable weather and snow conditions might well have reached the summit” (36).

Privately, Pilley felt that Kogan bore a large share of the blame for the four deaths, a belief she revealed in her letters and diary. In her diary entry of 27 October 1959 she copied two letters she sent to Margaret Darvall and Dorothea Gravina. These letters are important in that they reveal something of Dorothy Pilley’s mountaineering philosophy which was different to Kogan’s – not to over-stretch or allow oneself to be overtaken by personal ambition. She did not share or understand Claude Kogan’s overriding aspiration to achieve the summit of Cho Oyu. To Margaret Darvall, Pilley wrote that “from the first, one guessed the fanatic reason and it’s awfully sad that judgement should have been overlooked in the desire for the summit” (Pilley Letter, 27 October 1959). Pilley attributed heroic status to Dorothy Gravina, writing to her:

We are all in imagination with you, see so clearly how you used your moral persuasion to stop the final stages of this disaster which was like Fate in its inexorableness. The temptation to press on in bad weather, must be great for such personalities but its [sic] terrible when it involves others and the price must be paid. Say as little as possible to the newspapers. They blow up everything which privately would be reasonable and make a front page ghoulish headline to sell to the sensation-hungry multitude. (Pilley Letter, 27 October 1959).

It is interesting that Pilley felt able to express her disapproval of Kogan in these private letters – an approach which she clearly sees “reasonable” – whilst urging Gravina not to reveal anything to the press which might further bring public opprobrium to women’s mountaineering. This evidences the way in which women mountaineers powerfully managed the dichotomy between public/private history after the expedition, using the medium of writing to make public a specific and muted rendition of the tragedy in what can be construed as a closing of the ranks to protect the public image of women’s mountaineering. In the weeks following the return of the expedition, reportage in other

media combined scientific knowledge with elements of sensationalism to clear Kogan of any blame, using knowledge of the causes of avalanche to explain the deaths. For example, in an article for the 23 November 1959 edition of the American weekly publication Sports Illustrated, illustrated with a photograph of Dorothy Gravina against a sensationalist headline entitled “But I was alone” (referring to a mis-placed view that Gravina had been left alone on the mountain after the women’s deaths), the reporter stressed that “failure was due not so much to a lack of skills as to a warm wind that loosened heavy accumulations of snow [...] and sent an avalanche sweeping down on the climbers” (46).

To Eileen and Tim Healey, Pilley sent a postcard on 5 November 1959, expressing her relief at Eileen’s safe return and congratulating them on “getting through this awful Cho Oyu ordeal safely” (Pilley postcard, 5 November 1959). Pilley also urged the Healeys to buy a copy of that week’s edition of Paris-Match, where predictably sensationalist reportage of the expedition with many photographs was plastered all over the pages, illustrating what Pilley had referred to in her earlier pre-expedition postcard as the “limits of journalese”. The women were powerless to prevent the reporting, given that they had accepted sponsorship from Paris-Match and had agreed that the magazine would share publishing rights with The Daily Express. Original copies of the Paris-Match edition of 31 October 1959 in Eileen’s papers, include headlines such as “Photos de l’assault tragique”, [photos of the tragic assault] “les derniers photos de ‘expedition Kogan” [the last photos of the Kogan expedition], photographs of the cairn built to mark the women’s deaths and an article with photographs of Claude and her husband in their early climbing days proclaiming “Elle poursuit un amour perdu” [she follows her lost love]. The Daily Express did little better, with headlines proclaiming the “White Hell of Cho Oyu” blazed across very similar photographs (Harper photo, between pages 84-84). Harper himself penned a lead article for the Daily Express questioning the wisdom of women climbing high mountains. For this, the women were unable to forgive him. He did, however, hold back from writing and publishing his book of the expedition until 2007. When I asked Tim Healey why Stephen Harper had waited so long to publish his book, Tim replied that he had not wanted to be seen to profit from the tragedy and had come to understand some of the women’s “obsession” with the mountain. Tim also said that Eileen in later years had come to regret the women’s treatment of Harper and that her writing of the Foreword to his book was her way of trying to make amends (Tim Healey conversation, 10 February 2011).

The reaction to the deaths of two women and two Sherpas on Cho Oyu in the resultant public outcry which followed the Press' demonising of them is not surprising given the socio-cultural and political contexts of the day. In the 1950s, although the rigidity of Victorian gendered relations had relaxed, a woman's place was still widely perceived to be in the home, not on the icy and remote Himalayan mountains. Whilst late 1950s society recognised and tolerated the existence of women mountaineers as long as they mountaineered with the feminine grace attributed to their Victorian forebears, it also possessed the means to express disapprobation publicly and censoriously in print and picture. There is a parallel between crude Victorian Punch cartoons, the exclusion of women from membership of alpine and mountaineering clubs, the difficulties experienced by women in publishing articles on their mountaineering and the reaction which greeted the women's tragedy of Cho Oyu. Given these culturally-defined and gendered views of women, women's life-writing becomes all the more important as a means of inscribing the feminine experience or "feminine stamp" of mountaineering.

In 1959, the power of the new media was used to its fullest, most powerful and devastating effect to the cost of the Cho Oyu women and women's mountaineering, a power which has been put to use repeatedly in the ensuing decades to bring debates around a "woman's place" into the public domain.²⁸ It is doubtful in retrospect whether the women of Cho Oyu were as fully aware of what the cost would be to women's mountaineering should they fail as the other women's expeditions in the 1950s had done. Monica Jackson had worked very hard to forecast and minimise any disaster, knowing how merciless their critics would be if they failed. The women of Cho Oyu did not or chose not to acknowledge the price of failure, carried away by the lure of gaining the 8,000-metre prize. There is another parallel here with the successive attempts and failures of mountaineers to summit Everest before the Hunt expedition's success in 1953. Why should women mountaineers not also strive similarly for a reward which men had already won? Who else, under those circumstances, would not have been tempted to push just a little bit further to attain the recognition that would have been accorded to them had they succeeded? The women of Cho Oyu had much to potentially gain if they had been successful as the first women's mountaineering expedition to climb a major 8,000-metre Himalayan peak. As it was, they also had much to lose and their immediate intention to hide the tragedy from the press is, in retrospect, understandable.

²⁸ The reporting of the death of the mountaineer Alison Hargreaves on K2 in 1995 is one example.

When George Mallory and Sandy Irvine were lost on Everest in June 1924, much of the press coverage at the time put their loss in the context of men losing their lives for the more glorious opportunity of gaining the summit.²⁹ The consensus was that the men had suffered from bad luck, or, as the Illustrated London News of 28 June 1924 conjectured, bad weather, given that Mallory had retreated from an earlier attempt for that very reason. A public showing of Captain Noel Odell's film of the 1924 Everest expedition, "The Epic of Everest", was reported in the Illustrated London News on 27 December 1924 as a film which depicted a "noble sacrifice", the climax of which was a "gallant attack of Mallory and Irvine on the very peak" (1276). Little consideration was given to whether there had been a loss of judgement by the men or whether their ambition had been a contributory factor in their deaths. The women of Cho Oyu were not so lucky, becoming victims of a newly powerful media with a thirst for sensation, ready to show that a woman's place was in the home, not in the ice and snow of the Himalaya. Only in recent revisionist analyses of Mallory's and Irvine's deaths as, for example, in Tom Holzel's and Audrey Salkeld's account, has personal mis-judgement been mooted as a possible reason for the loss of the two men.

The 1950s can be seen as a decade in which the sophistication and complexity of women's mountaineering markedly increased, revealing a multiplicity of layers in their life-writing which highlight a growing diversification in voice, audience, meaning and intention. Whilst post-modern discourse has enriched life-writing scholarship – enabling a panoply of approaches to the reading of experience to be iterated, in the process broadening the reach of life-writing and its rationale – what is of central importance in the narratives within this chapter in terms of this thesis is the contribution made to our understanding of the lives, motivations and ambitions of women's mountaineers. The varying nuances and modes of exposition in the variety of life-writings in this chapter mark the post-war period as one which not only brings into sharp focus the ambitions of women's mountaineers to climb to the highest summits in the world, but showcases a rapidly developing field of life-writing which continues to evolve from the Stephen-esque view and possibilities of biography.

²⁹ The tenor of press reportage of the disappearance and deaths of Mallory and Irvine can additionally be seen in two separate articles entitled "Everest the Merciless and Still Unconquered" The Illustrated London News, Saturday 28 June 1924 and "Mr Mallory's Career". The Times, Saturday 21 June 1924.

Conclusions

Julie Rak declares in her article “Social Climbing on Annapurna”, that women’s mountaineering narratives have “much to tell us [...] about the ways in which mountaineering is narrated” and specifically, how these accounts represent and interpret what she refers to as “gendered struggles” (111). The “feminine stamp” in mountaineering literature in the period 1808-1968 variously inscribes the nature of these “struggles”, particularly writing the competing claims of home, domesticity and mountains into histories of mountaineering. This thesis has explored the tenacity of women who were audacious enough to assume that they could transcend the cultural and physical limits of gender. As Margaret Clennett writes in her introduction to Presumptuous Pinnacle Ladies, women mountaineers presumed to challenge a highly gendered cultural politics in order to find “their own feet on the rock, and in the process, they found their own voice in the climbing community” (1). The women also aspired, in Henriette D’Angeville’s encouraging words, to: “write as the spirit moves you, avoiding above all any pretensions, any falsity, for then you will be true to yourself” (xxiv). D’Angeville’s exhortation to “be true to yourself” helps mitigate against any claim that the experiences of the women featured in this thesis are essentialist. The women mountaineers in this thesis evolved an existing tradition of women’s life-writings into a mountaineering literature which is rich in its diversity of genre and narrative style, ranging from D’Angeville’s triumphant and self-congratulatory narrative to Gwen Moffat’s ultimate and frank exposition of mountaineering in the 1940s and 1950s to create what I term here – in paraphrasing Leigh Gilmore – as an “autobiographics” of women’s mountaineering.

“Autobiographics”, as Gilmore reminds us, is “concerned with interruptions and eruptions, with resistance and contradiction as strategies of self-representation” (42). In order to reflect here on the exemplification of resistance and contradiction in women’s mountaineering life-writings, I have taken an historical approach, commencing with Marie Paradis, who confounded and resisted the cultural values of her country, class and era to climb a mountain for financial reward, arguably presaging the commercial development of mountaineering later in the nineteenth century. Henriette D’Angeville’s energetic, uncompromising approach to her mountaineering and her writing showed what a woman with determination, money and self-belief could achieve, writing in the process the definitive account of women’s mountaineering in the 1830s. The illustration of the Zermatt Club Room, which depicts Lucy Walker as the only woman mountaineer

within this senior mountaineering fraternity, can be read as a specific act of resistance, particularly in the way she turns a full gaze on the artist. Here was a young, middle-class woman who counfounded Victorian England's expectations of womanhood by adroitly showing how the two worlds of home and mountains could come together in an alliance by transferring the manners of the drawing room to the hills. Gertrude Bell, the New Woman of mountaineering, who believed that her sex was no barrier to achieving mountaineering excellence, balanced the old and new worlds of the *fin de siècle*, maintaining a delicate balance between old world femininity and new world aspirations in women's mountaineering. My thesis has illustrated the various ways in which the twin narratives of conservatism and modernism are played out and represented in the mountaineering of these women and in their writing.

This thesis seeks a resolution between the dichotomous elements in women's mountaineering but, ultimately, this is partial, resulting in compromise. Arguably, the woman mountaineer who best exemplifies and iterates the seeming intractability between home/conservatism and mountains/modernism is Dorothy Pilley, who in the pages of her diaries explores the private, hitherto unrevealed, intimate aspects of the tensions between the two spheres. Pilley is finally able, triumphantly, to free herself through her mountaineering and writing from the gendered values which seek to bind her to the home, in the process ironically establishing a balance between home and mountaineering. If she initially, helped by the powerful lens of Elsie McNaught's sketches, uses her diaries to explore and comment on her own relationship to home and mountaineering, she also uses her diaries to show us a (partial) resolution. Like Lucy Walker, Pilley seeks a solution for this conflict and finds it in two ways: first, through her marriage with I A Richards which enables her to combine home and mountaineering; second, through the cosy, communal evolution of women's mountaineering in domestic settings such as the Ladies' Alpine Club room in the Grand Hotel, Marylebone, then through "At Homes" and ultimately in huts, refuges, hotels, finding its ultimate expression in the Pinnacle Club's hut in North Wales.

Further exemplifications of Gilmore's contradictions are represented in the different approaches to women's mountaineering in the Ladies' Alpine Club and Pinnacle Club, the differences finding expression in the writing within the two "little magazines" of women's mountaineering, with the transgressive ambitions of *les cordées féminines* demonstrating the revolutionary aspirations of the Pinnacle Club. The idea that women's mountaineering could only meaningfully progress if women developed skills in mountaineering which would enable them to climb unsupported by

men, progressed further after the the Second World War as women refused to obey a post-war political consensus which sought to return them to the home – the international women’s expeditions of the 1950s together with Gwen Moffat’s itinerancy and frank rendering of her experiences being examples of the more radical forms of resistance.

My thesis has also revealed diversity and richness in the range of genres employed in women’s mountaineering life-writings and wider women’s mountaineering literature. Whilst the thesis has focused on the lives of specific women as case study exemplars, these women’s writings are representative of an increasingly myriad approach to women writing about mountaineering. In my published article entitled “It went down into the very form and fabric of myself”, I argued that unpublished life-writings are particularly vital as a means of uncovering and understanding the hidden or private renditions of women’s gazes on mountaineering, offering views and perspectives which are not in the public domain (24). In this thesis I have particularly emphasised the importance of Dorothy Pilley’s and Eileen Healey’s unresearched and unpublished diaries in revealing the more intimate and dialogic relationship between women and mountains and written about how their wider lives – relationships, work, marriage – have been informed by and through their mountaineering. These private writings contradict, reinforce and add claims to those already in the public domain.³⁰ Journals, letters, prose, fiction, short stories, poetry, but most of all unpublished life-writings thus present us with a kaleidoscopic set of references for women’s mountaineering, presenting mountaineering as an activity underpinned by multiple facets of meaning.

The implications for women’s mountaineering writing can be seen in contemporary women’s mountaineering literature which has diversified beyond the forms captured in this thesis whilst continuing to encompass them. Women’s literary mountain circles such as “Women, Mountains, Words”, the mountain fiction of Anne Sauvy and Elizabeth Coxhead, the poetry of Kim Martindale and others, the mountain painting of Rowan Huntley, are all modern evocations of contemporary women’s mountaineering. There is still much to be written about the evolution of the “feminine stamp” after the period with which this thesis is concerned. The last thirty years have seen an explosion of women’s mountaineering writing which continues to expand the genre and develop our understanding of the relationship between women, gender and mountaineering and the ways in which this relationship is inscribed. There is also much

³⁰ The ongoing digitisation of Eileen Healey’s diaries by the Alpine Club will bring these private diaries into the public gaze, enabling future researchers to interrogate previously private writing.

of interest in the way that men's mountaineering literature in the post-war years has embraced the feminine tradition of memoir writing as can be seen in the plethora of auto/biographies about Dennis Gray, Joe Brown, Don Whillans and more recently in the work of Joe Simpson and Jim Curran. As a body this work reveals the intelligent, funny, tragic, comic, complex, myriad, tantalising elements of mountaineering life-writing and builds on the legacy left by the women who appear in this thesis.

However, the long-standing "struggles" which Rak refers to, are still present and never far away, finding recent expression in the furore which surrounded the death of Alison Hargreaves on K2 in 1995. My own reading of Rose and Douglas' biography of Alison Hargreaves has brought me a renewed appreciation that mountaineering is not a simple choice for women (or men) and represents far more than a means to end, additionally being represented in a complex building up of many layers which encompass home, family, duty, mountaineering, profession, identity, independence, money. Pilley is right when she writes that mountaineering "goes down into the form and fabric of myself" – for the women in these pages it defined their lifestyle and identity and gave them metaphors for their lives, as can be seen in Dorothy Pilley's gypsy scarf and her mountaineering persona, "Pilley".

The "feminine stamp" takes diverse forms. In writing, fiction, art, it depicts a complex journey through which the women evolve as mountaineers and as women, learning new things about themselves, about their own capacity for physical effort, endurance, danger, along the way achieving remarkable successes in mountaineering and transcending the limitations which gender seeks to impose. With immense foresight, Elsie McNaught captured the essence of this journey in a sketch which first appeared in Dorothy Pilley's diary on Friday 4 August 1916. Captioned "Period Triptych", it appears in the 1959-60 edition of the Pinnacle Club Journal. This thesis therefore ends with McNaught's sketch in Figure 13, which brings history and the present together in its evocation of the "struggle" between women, home and mountaineering which women mountaineers sought to challenge and resolve through their mountaineering and in their writing.



Fig. 13. "Period Triptych". Illus. Elsie McNaught. Pinnacle Club Journal (1959-1960): 8

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