
THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH


# The figure of the flirt in American fiction from 1868 - 1928.

Juliet Conway

PhD in English Literature
The University of Edinburgh
2020

**Abstract:**

This thesis examines depictions of the flirt figure in American fiction from 1868-1928, a period where flirtatious femininity was increasingly becoming a subject of social concern. The flirt has often been ignored in literary criticism or else she has been amalgamated with other female types such as the 'fallen woman' or 'coquette'. My thesis argues for the flirt to be read as a specific character with a distinct literary lineage who represents a particular set of challenges in turn-of-the-century America. Positioned between traditional models of 'good' and 'bad' femininity, the flirt is a transgressive and socially disruptive figure. Often ambiguous, evasive and interpretatively unstable, she represents a type of femininity which is difficult to categorise and therefore control. As a result, flirtatious heroines in this period must pay a price for this rebellion. Whether through social ostracisation, loss of reputation, or even death, the flirt's controversial nature is revealed in the harsh punishment imposed on her.

By foregrounding the figure of the flirt, I highlight how her ambiguous morality and innocence was imagined to be so disruptive that she is treated even more harshly than traditionally 'bad' female characters. Furthermore, I argue that her liminal position outside the dichotomy of pure and sexualised womanhood allows her to disrupt, subvert and undermine gender politics and cultural mythologies. Given that so little critical work has been done on this subject, this thesis covers works by a wide range of authors: Henry James, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Louisa May Alcott, Susan Coolidge, Edith Wharton, Booth Tarkington, Elizabeth Weston Timlow, Anita Loos and Ernest Hemingway. Through close readings of these authors' approaches to this slippery literary figure, I suggest that the flirt's treatment across this sixty-year period reflects a deep-rooted fear of transgressive femininity.

**Lay Summary:**

The flirt was a subject of increasing social concern in American society in the late nineteenth century. Presented as a threat to traditional gender roles and family structures, her willingness to play at romance without fulfilling it was read as deliberately manipulative behaviour and produced anxieties about the possibility of female deception and the subversion of traditional power structures. This thesis is about how women who are deemed to be flirts are represented in American literature from 1868-1928. More specifically, it is about the wider questions that the demonisation of the flirt figure poses: questions of power, gender politics, expressions of female sexuality and ambiguous innocence which underlie the suspicion of women who hint at romantic attraction without acting on it.

Using works by authors including Henry James, Edith Wharton, Booth Tarkington, Louisa May Alcott and Ernest Hemingway, I argue that the flirt illustrates a specific female resistance to the strict social rules that governed women's behaviour in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century America. By deferring decisions concerning marriage and having children, flirtatious heroines are able to extend the brief period of autonomy afforded to women in the space between childhood and wifehood. Yet, as I will also discuss, this freedom is not without cost. As is demonstrated by the punishments imposed on flirtatious heroines, the interpretative instability of the flirt's ambiguous behaviour is often characterised more harshly than transparently 'bad' behaviour which at least might be swiftly categorised and therefore contained.

**Acknowledgements**

I want to thank my primary supervisor Dr Allyson Stack for all her support, expertise and advice throughout this process. I also want to thank my second supervisor, Dr Andrew Taylor and all the other members of the department who have offered me help and suggestions during my research period.

I would also like to acknowledge my gratitude to The Scottish Graduate School, first for granting me the funding to undertake the project and also for all the additional opportunities for academic development they've offered me. Thank you also to Kluge Centre at The Library of Congress for hosting me in order to research my second thesis chapter.

## Contents

## Introduction

> 'She certainly has the wisdom of the serpent, if nature has denied her the innocence of the dove . . . To draw men away from other women is her great triumph, and she is in her glory when partners eagerly vie with each other in claiming her for a waltz and gallop'
>
> ('Flirts and Flirtation' 609)

In late nineteenth century America the 'flirt' was not a popular figure. Not as obviously corrupt as the prostitute or fallen woman, she was nevertheless regarded as a social menace. Her willingness to play at romance without fulfilling it was read as deliberately manipulative behaviour and her ambiguous intent produced anxieties about the possibility of female deception and subversion of traditional power structures. In 2003, Marty Gould published an article addressing the depiction of flirting and the figure of the 'flirt' in Victorian periodicals, pointing out that the numerous articles on the subject mark 'non-consummative sexual desire as a significant nineteenth-century preoccupation' (274-275). The opening quote from *Every Saturday* (1874) is only one example of negative rhetoric surrounding the flirt. *Lippincott's Magazine* (1874) described her as a 'social Modoc, delighting in her cruel achievements' (Dembry 629), while *Harper's Bazaar* (1876) declared her a dangerous figure who 'counts her offers of marriage as the Pawnee counts his scalps' ('The Flirt' 594). These examples, of which there are many more, present the flirt as a figure intent on causing chaos and indifferent to the harm she wrecks on the men she toys with, the women she steals them from or wider society, which suffers for her rejection of traditional values based on wifedom and motherhood. Gould writes that, despite contributors attempts to neutralise the social threat the flirt posed, the nineteenth-century periodical was 'unable to contain the flirt's dangerous

sexuality or separate flirtation's civilized social elements from its more savage sexual impulses' (275). An apparently frivolous or girlish figure, the flirt was nevertheless regarded as an insidious threat to socially approved notions of gender, marriage and family.

This thesis is about how women who are deemed to be flirts are represented in American literature in a period where flirtatious femininity was a subject of social concern, even hysteria. More specifically, it is about the wider questions that the demonisation of the flirt figure poses: questions of power, gender politics, expressions of female sexuality and ambiguous innocence which underlie the suspicion of women who hint at romantic attraction without acting on it. Since what is defined as 'flirtatious' is always to some extent subjective, as well as being a study of the women in literature who come to be labelled and punished as 'flirts', this is necessarily also a discussion of the societies, and specifically of the male characters who label her as such. In the chapters that follow, I argue for the link between social concern about the flirt and the threat of social subversion and disruption she represents.

The flirt is an atypical romantic heroine. Where romance is based in the search for a happy ending, the flirt interrupts this. In her essay, 'Three Terrors of Flirtation' (2015), Barbara Natalie Nagel writes that flirting is socially disruptive because it is 'endless', uncertain and inverts power hierarchies (102). She argues that 'nothing is more threatening than the suspension of authority, if only for a moment. It is precisely this suspension, however, that flirtation triggers because it does not show the same infatuation with authority that dominates the discourse of seduction' (101-102). This thesis will focus on the flirt as a disruptive heroine, outlining how her liminal position between acceptable and transgressive femininity exposes the fallacies of gender politics and national mythologies in American literature approaching the twentieth century. As Nagel describes, flirtatiousness lends itself to undermining accepted cultural certainties. Where the traditional romantic heroine works towards an end goal of marriage, the flirt is the anarchic alternative. Though this thesis will

discuss a wide range of flirtatious heroines, all of whom function in their own specific way within their novels, they all represent ambiguous transgressive femininity, which becomes the subject of deep cultural anxiety in American society during this period.

My focus on the flirt as a female character is predicated on the fact that across fictional and non-fictional sources, flirts are almost ubiquitously depicted as women. As a *Godey's Lady's Book* article published in 1832 describes, flirting is regarded as a 'woman's philosophy' ( 'Proposals for Female Clubs' 77). It is a phenomenon which Adam Phillips comments on in *On Flirtation* (1994), one of the key theoretical texts written on the subject. Phillips writes that 'it is one of the many and curious things about flirtation that, despite the impossibility of flirting by yourself, flirts are traditionally considered to be women' (xvii). Though, as Phillips suggests, it takes two to flirt, in American literature of this period indiscreet flirtations are always blamed on the female party. This is true even when the male character is involved in an adulterous relationship elsewhere as for Frederick Winterbourne in Henry James' *Daisy Miller* (1878), or Lawrence Selden in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905), both of whom judge the novels' heroines, Daisy Miller and Lily Bart, as lacking in moral value for flirting while engaging in worse behaviour themselves. While it is the male characters who are involved in extramarital affairs, it is Daisy and Lily who are judged and ostracised for their flirtations with these men, while the men are positioned as passive victims of female capriciousness. Similarly, in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), while Theodore Laurence, or 'Laurie' as he is nicknamed, is repeatedly said to enjoy flirting too much, it is only the girls, Amy and Meg March, who are in danger of becoming labelled as 'flirts', though they flirt far less frequently than their male neighbour. While male characters in the novels I examine engage in flirtation, it is never the man who is labelled a 'flirt', this socially undesirable label is reserved only for women.

The flirt is a figure who has been neglected in literary criticism. This is partly because of a lack of clarity about what delineates the flirt from other popular anti-heroines such as the femme fatale, the prostitute, or the coquette, who, contrary to popular opinion, cannot be considered synonymous with the flirt. As I address in detail in my first chapter, scholars have mainly approached the flirtatious heroines this thesis addresses from two angles: viewing them as passive victims of the male gaze or labelling them manipulative tricksters. Through close readings of the texts this thesis scrutinises (*Little Women, What Katy Did at School, A Nest of Girls, Daisy Miller, A Fair Barbarian, The House of Mirth, Alice Adams, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes* and *The Sun Also Rises*), I hope to correct this binary reading, exploring the richness of the flirt figure. She encapsulates elements of both victim and manipulator, undermining the very notion of categorising 'good' femininity, from 'bad' femininity, and thus subverting the expectations that female characters can be simplistically read.

As so little research has been produced on the flirt as a distinct literary figure, I have chosen to cover a range of authors and texts across a broad historical period. This breadth allows me to establish the flirt's distinct literary lineage, while also exploring how the flirt is able to challenge and destabilise ideas and mythologies distinct to a specific period of American history. The earliest text I address is Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) and the latest works are Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and Anita Loos' *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* duology (1927). Given that this sixty-year period has been widely recognised as a transformative period for gender politics in American history, one might expect to see a clear teleological progression towards a more liberal response to female flirtatiousness. Yet, as I discuss in my final chapter, even in literature produced in the decade of flapper culture and societal proclamations of female emancipation and liberalism, the flirt figure is still far from being 'free'. Though Lorelei Lee of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is

superficially afforded much more leeway to flirt without consequence than the flirtatious heroines of many of my earlier texts, she is still subject to public scrutiny and judgement about whether her behaviour can be situated within a structure of appropriate female conduct.

While the nature of this project requires me to place limits on which works I can include, I could still go back further, beginning my study with Hannah W. Foster's *The Coquette* written in 1797. Though *The Coquette* ultimately becomes a fallen woman narrative when the heroine, Eliza Wharton, succumbs to seduction, has an illegitimate pregnancy and dies in childbirth, the seduction sequence does not drive the narrative but is restricted to the final few chapters. Thus, though it is remembered as a fallen woman tale, Eliza might better be considered as a precursor to the flirt figure rather than the fallen woman. Eliza's story is not a typical seduction plot because it is her lack of decisiveness rather than her decision to sin which prompts her fall. As Cathy Davidson explains, Eliza 'vacillates indecisively' (x), 'keeping her options open' (xvi) between two potential suitors (Sandford and Boyer) until it is too late to marry either, because she naively believes that there is a viable alternative to either marriage or sexless spinsterhood. Like many of the heroines I discuss in this thesis, Eliza is aware of the power she is afforded in flirtation. She writes enthusiastically that she is 'certainly very much the taste of the other sex' (12), and boasts of being '[f]ollowed, flattered, and caressed, I have cards and compliments in profusion' (12). While she naively believes she can continue to flirt without damage to her reputation, she finds herself in trouble when her value is tarnished by the words of a scorned suitor who writes that her 'conduct has proved her unworthy of my regard; insensible to love, gratitude, and honor' (81). From the moment she is accused of flirting, her reputation is sullied in the eyes of her society, and her ostracism as a 'flirt' acts as a catalyst for her seduction, pregnancy and ultimate sinner's death.

Written almost a century apart, there are many echoes of Eliza in the flirtatious heroines this thesis will interrogate. Although none of the heroines I address succumb to Eliza's fate, all the heroines I have characterised as 'flirts' occupy this space of the vacillating woman, spending too long choosing between suitors, often because they do not want to choose at all. The idea that Eliza must be made to 'pay' for her flirtatious behaviour is replicated in how flirts are treated throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Though I have chosen to end my study with literature from the nineteen-twenties, it is worth noting that even decades later, flirtatious American heroines are made to 'pay' in some way for their behaviour. Curley's wife in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (1937), for example, is blamed for her own death when she flirts with Lennie Small, who accidentally breaks her neck when she allows him to stroke her hair. Even women only accused of flirting can be made to pay for it. For example, in Willa Cather's *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940), when Sapphira Colbert becomes jealous of her beautiful slave, Nancy, she invites her notorious nephew, Mr. Martin, to stay in the hope that he will rape and therefore ruin Nancy. Though Nancy is described as an innocent girl who would do 'nothin' free nor unbecomin' (190), she knows that if she were to be raped, Sapphira would blame her for having invited it by acting flirtatiously with Mr. Martin: '[i]f I hollered, the Mistress would put it all on me; she'd say I done somethin' to make him think I was a bad girl' (214). As seen in these texts, the ambiguity of flirting leaves open the possibility that women can be blamed for the crimes committed against them. It is indicative of the flirt figure's potential for misinterpretation that debates about what is considered acceptable and unacceptable flirtatious behaviour continues in American literature well into the twentieth century.

In selecting the texts on which to focus, I have tried to find a balance between representing male and female authors while also examining both critically acclaimed works and those which have slipped out of the canon. While some of the biggest names in American

literature—Henry James, Edith Wharton and Ernest Hemingway—are included, I have brought them into conversation with lesser-known authors. While Anita Loos' *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is well known because of the 1953 film adaptation, the novels have been undervalued in literary study of this period. Frances Hodgson Burnett, though a household name because of her children's fiction, is almost never mentioned in reference to her extensive collection of adult literature. Booth Tarkington is barely remembered at all. When visiting Princeton University to conduct archival research, I noticed that his bronze bust in Firestone library is the subject of much speculation. Even at his own alma mater nobody knows him. While Tarkington's corpus is admittedly patchy, his 1921 novel *Alice Adams* certainly deserves a place in this thesis.

The structure of this thesis is based around five chapters. Chapter One provides my methodology and theoretical framework for this project. Because the figure of the flirt has been so rarely explored in literary criticism, I provide a brief summary of the groundwork which has been done so far, identifying the critical texts which, while not referring specifically to the flirt figure, offer close readings of transgressive female characters in this period of American literature. I use this chapter to establish my terms—namely how we might separate the 'flirt' from other archetypes like the 'ingenue', 'fallen woman', 'jilt' or 'coquette'—and to pose the questions that frame my research: why is the flirt worthy of critical attention? What does she reveal about social attitudes towards womanhood and sexual disobedience? How do authors use her moral ambiguity to interrupt pre-existing binaries when thinking about American identity? By drawing on sources including newspapers and magazines, I provide an overview of the social rhetoric concerning the flirt in nineteenth and early-twentieth-century America, highlighting the strange disparity between the defence and demonisation of potentially flirtatious figures. I also provide a condensed survey of the primary discussions that my research will draw on: the construction of new models of

femininity, the collapse of traditional constructs of masculinity and the weakening of certain American mythologies. This will introduce the multifaceted cultural anxieties that the flirt figure taps into, which will then be revisited throughout my discussion.

The next four chapters are focused on close readings of two or three texts. Chapter Two examines how texts themselves contribute to the negative rhetoric surrounding the flirt in late-nineteenth-century America, exploring how authors in this period use the flirt figure to warn readers against engaging in flirtatious behaviour. Though this didactic aspect was noted on publication of several of the texts I will be looking at, the best examples of warnings to female readers against becoming flirts can be found in children's literature. In this chapter, I therefore use close readings of three girls' novels, *Little Women* (1868), *What Katy Did at School* (1873) and *A Nest of Girls* (1901), to draw attention to how these works direct young female readers away from behaviour which is seen as flirtatious, warn them about the perils of becoming known as a 'flirt' and offer them alternative models of female behaviour, which the novels promise will prove more fruitful and rewarding.

Too often, children's literature is given scholarly attention only within its own field and suffers from a degree of academic snobbishness. Yet, as Gail Schmunk Murray explains, children's literature 'uncovers the values that society hopes to transmit to its children. Children's books often tell us much more about the image of the ideal child that society would like to produce than they do about real children' (xv). The simplistic moral messages of girls' books from this period illustrate the social anxieties concerning female flirtatiousness which I argue for throughout this thesis: the fear of girls approaching womanhood; the tension between American freedom and the need to preserve a facade of perfect innocence; the anxiety that flirtatious woman will wield too much power over men and the fear that women who flirt promote a dangerous rebellion against traditional values of wifedom and motherhood. Didactic girls' fiction tries to manage these anxieties by promoting

an ideal vision of the American girl who learns to avoid the temptation of flirtatious behaviour and grows up into a morally stable and unthreatening woman: the ideal woman, in other words, to raise the values of the next generation.

The next three chapters address questions of how the flirt figure unsettles structures of power, gender and innocence ingrained in the American social psyche. Moving chronologically, I begin in Chapter Three with Henry James' *Daisy Miller* (1878) and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Fair Barbarian* (1881), exploring how the flirt figure undermines American innocence mythology. Using the examples of James' Daisy and Burnett's Octavia, both immature, flirtatious but unworldly heroines, I draw attention to how the childlike naivety which leads them to flirt without fear of any social consequences exposes the problem with how 'innocence' is defined by their communities. While proclaiming to be a nation obsessed with innocence, in the pursuit of protecting America from a second fall, the authentic innocence of these girls is sacrificed on the pyre of false, judgemental and performative innocence. Chapter Four addresses the question of the invisible rules women are expected to navigate between flirting too little and flirting too much. Using the examples of Lily Bart in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) and Alice Adams in Booth Tarkington's *Alice Adams* (1921), I discuss how the fates of both heroines are sealed when they cross the invisible lines constructed by society which deems that their flirtatious behaviour has moved from socially approved husband hunting to the sordid work of a manipulative flirt. Finally, Chapter Five moves into the nineteen-twenties with Anita Loos' duology *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925) and *But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes* (1927), and Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), exploring the disjunction between how nineteen-twenties America is imagined and how it is actually experienced by single women. Centred on three flirtatious heroines—Lorelei Lee, Dorothy Shaw and Lady Brett Ashley—this chapter concentrates on the question of whether women are truly free to flirt in this

decade of proclaimed female liberation, or whether these heroines must still be made to pay for their capricious behaviour.

To return to one of the articles I opened with, 'The Flirt' from *Harper's Bazaar*, the writer condemns flirts as a plague of sorts to moral society: '[t]he flirt is ubiquitous. There is no nation and no habitable spot of terra firma under the sun where she does not spread her snares and weave her spells' (594). In this thesis I address both sides of this hysteria surrounding flirtatious female characters. On one hand, I explore why the flirt was perceived as such a dangerous figure. On the other I seek to show that although other characters in the novels often treat the flirt as a social threat who uses her 'snares' to cause harm and chaos in her society, often the flirt is just as vulnerable to the snares society sets for her.

CHAPTER ONE

## Theorising Flirtation

Adam Phillips' *On Flirtation* (1994), one of the few major theoretical texts dedicated to flirtatious behaviour, argues that flirting's inherent ambiguity renders it a chaotic social behaviour because the meaning of flirting lies in 'the (consciously or unconsciously) calculated production of uncertainty' (xvii). According to Phillips, flirting is intrinsically opaque and disordered, undermining humans' desire for order and predictability and forcing participants in a flirtation to 'acknowledge the contingency of our lives' (xvii). Compared to other forms of amorous interaction, flirtation does not subscribe to traditional notions of authority but remains non-committal and guarded in order to allow participants to extend the game of faux seduction. It is the shadowy sister of courtship; a quasi-romance in which deferral becomes its own end, rather than a means to a secure relationship.

While academics across various disciplines have posited many different definitions of flirting, most of them can only define it in so far as admitting it can never be precisely defined. Liana B. Koeppel's 'Friendly? Flirting? Wrong?' (1993) describes flirting as a nonverbal romantic language where participants are required to 'make certain inferences concerning seductiveness and promiscuity' (15). Carrie Jenkin's *The Philosophy of Flirting* (2011) observes that defining flirting is almost impossible because it lacks a clear set of rules and markers (18). *Accurately Detecting Flirting* (2015), by Jeffrey Hall et al., describes flirting as 'a form of communication that directly or indirectly signals attraction' (939). Each study struggles to define flirting when trying to delineate a set of behaviours which are inherently flirtatious from those which are not. David Dryden Henningsen's 'Flirting with Meaning' (2004), explains the impossibility of such definition, suggesting that the difference

between seduction and flirting 'appears to lie not in flirting behaviors per se but rather in the motivations that generate those behaviors' (481). Flirtatious actions cannot always be separated from non-flirtatious ones because the same behaviour might be perceived as either flirtatious or not flirtatious depending on who is doing the interpreting. By extension, someone who is interpreted as a 'flirt' by one person might not be by another.

Several other cross disciplinary studies of flirting have, like Phillips' *On Flirtation,* drawn links between flirtation, ambiguity and social disorder. *Flirtations: Rhetoric and Aesthetics this side of Seduction* (2015), an edited collection of essays, attempts to address the lacuna in romance theory which has tended to categorise flirtation as a subset of seduction, rather than studying it in its own right (1). The contributors offer a range of definitions of 'flirting', drawing attention to the specific notions of power, deferral and plausible deniability that separate flirtation from other forms of romance. Paul Fleming reads flirtation as a gestural language which 'hides in order to draw attention' (25), while Lauren Shizuko Stone describes flirting as a prolonged power game where the aim is to toy with but never 'fully enrapture the other' (62). Other essayists point out that flirting exists in a liminal space where the suspension of romantic desire produces more complex structures of power than fulfilled desire. Arne Hocker posits that flirting 'defines a transitional space' (56), where the flirt shows a desire to 'make permanent the suspenseful moment on the threshold of an event' (52). Barbara Vinken meanwhile describes flirting as 'an endless detour not directed at a fixed aim' (84). All point out that flirtation is inherently threatening to traditional power structures and rests on principles of deferral and ambiguity which undermine expectations of how romance will progress.

Flirting relies on uncertainty, where one moment might hint at progress towards a romantic end, and the next at a retreat from it. Emily Langan uses the metaphor of dancing to describe the disordered to-and-fro of a flirtatious interaction, describing flirtation as a

'confusing tango of mixed messages, unclear intents and ambiguous interactions' (20). Comparisons of flirting to a dance are reiterated across other fictional and nonfictional sources. Wharton's Lily Bart describes flirting as 'an intricate dance' (*The House of Mirth* 75) and 'The Song of the Flirt', a poem published in *The Washington Post* in 1887, as a 'dance and whirl' (2). Flirting can be random and spontaneous and does not follow any preconceived pattern, nor can it be straightforwardly analysed as not even the people involved in the flirtation can see the complete picture of what is occurring. In the chain of possible deferrals, flirtation exists in a strange, atemporal space which often lacks a precise goal. Whereas courtship or seduction build towards a preconceived outcome—for example a marriage, or economic benefit—flirting does not necessarily have a defined end. If we imagine flirting as a 'dance', then the aim of the flirt may be to continue dancing indefinitely. It is this anxiety that flirting will never end which informs much of the consternation surrounding the flirt figure in late-nineteenth-century America. While a woman might be allowed to flirt in order to secure a stable relationship, for her to remain in the indefinite, suspended state of 'flirting' for too long is to challenge fundamental ideas about women's place and purpose in society.

While hinting at hypothetical romantic futures which may or may not be realised, flirting exists in a liminal space where everything and nothing is possible. Alison Bartlett et al. describe flirting as 'deliberately and undeniably liminal' (31), because flirting lies 'betwixt and between different possibilities: that this communication ends in a sexual or romantic liaison, or that it simply ends' (31). Victor Turner, a leading voice in the field of liminal theory, describes liminality as a product of transitions. In a transition an individual must first 'separate' from 'a set of cultural conditions' or 'state' and later will be 'reincorporated' into another social structure with 'certain customary norms' ('Betwixt and Between' 5). In between lies the 'intervening liminal period' ('Betwixt and Between' 5), which is unstable,

ambiguous and without the clear social structures of the first and third phase.[1] While Turner primarily focuses on examples of transitions within tribal societies (for example initiation rituals and puberty rites), Sue Bridwell Beckham builds on Turner's examples of liminal spaces, writing that '[t]wo comparatively modern female liminal states are experienced by women who have declared their availability for marriage but who have not yet been claimed (debutantes, for example) and engaged women – both betwixt and between the protection of their parents and that of their husbands' (88). To this list, we can also add flirting.[2] A flirtatious interaction signals the possibility of a serious romantic future but by its nature could also prove to be nothing. The flirt, by extension, becomes an example of what Turner describes as 'liminal personae', who 'are at once no longer classified and not yet classified' ('Betwixt and Between' 6). The flirt exists in an unstable state between various social codes where she can neither be read as a childlike innocent (because she displays herself as a potential marriageable entity), nor a sexually ready woman (for there is still the chance she will not follow through with her hints of romantic availability). Furthermore, the ambiguity of her interactions, where her flirting may be signifying a serious attempt to find a husband or may mean nothing, means that she cannot be easily read or categorised.

As I will go on to discuss in more detail, because flirting creates a liminal space where many possibilities are hinted at but the end result is uncertain, the flirt is often a figure caught between several binaries. While flirting, she can temporarily flit between boundaries of class, gender and nationality as well as between the more obvious dichotomies of purity and impurity or marriage and singleness. If flirting exists in the space between 'separation'

[1] Turner builds on Arnold van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* (1909) which describes rites of transition as having three phases. Turner summarises these stages as: 'separation, margin (or *limen),* and aggregation' ('Betwixt and Between' 5).

[2] Fiction about flirtation would also be an appropriate addition to the list of subgenres of fiction most closely associated with liminality studies that Jochen Achilles and Ina Bergman suggest in their edited collection *Liminality and the Short Story* (2014). The list of subgenres which they argue naturally evoke questions of liminality includes children's fiction, gothic fiction, travel literature, science fiction and fiction about aging (4).

from and ‘reincorporation’ into social structures, then in this liminal space there is the possibility that the ‘reincorporation’ might involve crossing into a new social group (Turner ‘Betwixt and Between’ 5). For example, a woman flirting with a man in a social class above her own keeps open the possibility for a return to her own class or the possibility that she might move to the higher social class should her flirtation develop into an offer of marriage. Flirting in many novels from this period is imagined as a space of fluidity where women are able to try out different social identities before they are brought back into static social roles. However, as Molly Ball writes, with the freedom that flirting allows comes a real danger, for ‘to stand outside social structures may be liberating, but it also involves abandoning the protections they might offer’ (62). The texts discussed in this thesis illustrate the tension between the rewards that might be gained from flirting and the dangers of being labelled a woman who has flirted too much. Flirting offers the possibility of social elevation if it is done well, but if it is managed poorly, the flirt risks a different type of social ‘reincorporation’ where she is cast into an unfavourable role by her society. While flirting is to some extent perceived as a socially sanctioned liminal space, to be cast as a ‘flirt’ is another way in which this freedom to explore is curtailed. Women are expected to cross through this liminal space relatively quickly, to remain in it too long is to risk a bad reputation which can prevent a successful ‘reincorporation’ into moral society.

Although libraries are stacked with volumes depicting other forms of romance in literature, the subject of flirting—and by extension the figure of the flirt—has been left largely unexplored. The exception to this is Richard Kaye’s *The Flirt’s Tragedy* (2002), the only literary monograph dedicated to the subject. Kaye identifies the flirt as a complex but often sidelined figure in European and American fiction, focusing on her ability to discreetly break taboos and complicate otherwise straightforward romance narratives (5). As necessary for such an unexplored literary field, Kaye’s research has a wide scope, both in terms of the

long period he covers and his attempt to address works from both sides of the Atlantic, beginning with a discussion of the aristocratic coquette in the nineteenth century and culminating in a discussion of flirtation as a discreet way of expressing homosexual desire in the works of Wilde, Lawrence and Forster. Kaye argues convincingly that flirtation should be recognised as a 'distinct realm of experience' (4), yet with such a wide scope, many of his ideas, though rich in potential, are left somewhat embryonic. Unquestionably, the critical gap he identifies simply cannot be plugged by a single work.

Though the title of Kaye's book suggests his focus is solely on the character of the flirt, he prioritises a discussion of the function of 'flirting' in literature rather than the flirt figure herself. While I have provided a brief survey of flirting as a behaviour, my approach will differ from Kaye's insofar as I emphasise the character of the 'flirt', specifically how she comes to be labelled as such, rather than representations of flirtation more generally. Interestingly Kaye chooses not to question whether the female characters he scrutinises self-identify as flirts or not, or how conscious they are of the effects of their behaviour. Rather, he assumes that other characters' readings of the flirtatious characters are indisputable. This is at times problematic. Because flirtation is a coded and discreet behaviour, there is always the possibility for it to be misinterpreted. Significantly, it is possible for a character to be labelled a 'flirt' without being aware of this, which we can only examine if we are to differentiate between 'flirting' as an activity and the 'flirt' as a label applied by others and therefore shaped by outsiders' perceptions of a behaviour. Where Kaye's work might be summarised as a discussion of how flirting is used to advance a narrative, my research will focus more on how female characters are constructed as 'flirts' in the first place.

This distinction is particularly relevant given my focus on the American flirt, rather than on her transatlantic sister. While Kaye's work focuses on British fiction, chapter four of *The Flirt's Tragedy,* 'Deadly Deferrals', analyses American texts including *Daisy Miller* and

*The House of Mirth*. Kaye quickly identifies certain tendencies for the American flirt that are different from those of her European sister. In American fiction the flirt is more elusive, characterised more harshly, and her behaviour, which in British fiction is often humorously received, is 'shorn of much of its comic resonance' (152).[3] Yet, though Kaye gestures towards some distinctions between the American and British iterations of the flirt figure, he cannot fully address this transatlantic dynamic in a single monograph, something which reviewer James Najarian notes when he identifies the change of tone in this chapter (230). Indubitably, the question of how and why a girl is labelled a 'flirt' is relevant to many of the American heroines I discuss. While the British flirt figures Kaye discusses like Isabella Thorpe, Lady Susan, Sue Brideshead and Becky Sharp tend to be clearly aware of their own behaviour, my readings of the texts in this thesis align with his observation that 'the issue of unconscious motivation that was so often only tacit in Victorian fiction . . . is the commanding matter of public debate in *Daisy Miller*' and other American texts (152). Though Kaye's chapter offers a promising start to looking at this specifically American tendency to focus on flirtation's ambiguity as a cause for social concern, its brevity leaves much unsaid.

[3] A notable exception to this rule is Lucy Westenra in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) who Kaye chooses not to discuss other than in a brief reference. Unlike other British flirt figures like Isabella Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey*, Cynthia Kirkpatrick in *Wives and Daughters* or Lydia Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice*, Lucy receives a harsh punishment for her flirtatious behaviour which is more similar to the judgement received by American heroines. While her chaste and pure friend Mina is able to escape Dracula's clutches, Lucy succumbs because she fails to deny her own sexual desires. Though Lucy never engages in sexual immorality, and is not therefore a fallen woman, she is a self-confessed 'horrid flirt' (92). She revels in the attention of three men, writing to Mina that she cannot 'help feeling a sort of exultation' in gaining new suitors (92). Though she knows she should commit to one of them, she is reluctant to do so for '[w]hy can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save her all this trouble?' (93). Sally Ledger writes that '[i]n wanting to marry three men and in escaping at midnight to seek the dubious attentions of Count Dracula, Lucy Westenra transgresses the boundaries laid down by Victorian gender codes in a pretty thorough going way' (101). It is illustrative of the point Kaye makes about the American flirt being written in a different tone to her British counterpart that the harsh punishments often experienced by flirtatious women in American realist fiction are mainly reserved for gothic novels in British literature.

Though Kaye's *The Flirt's Tragedy* is the only full length study of flirtation in literature, there are several other literary critics who have observed the relationship between flirtation and social disruption. Rishona Zimring describes flirtatiousness as lending 'freedom, power and creativity' to female characters in her study of Katherine Mansfield's post-war stories (81). Kate Thomas elaborates on the idea that flirtation is socially anarchical, describing it as a means of 'stylizing the sexual self that can sometimes, through its performativity, reimagine one's relationship to sex and gender limitations' (91). Flirting can create a temporary collapse of social structures, as Lynn Wardley argues in her essay on *Daisy Miller*, where she observes that flirting affords the heroine the 'possibility of affiliation across the constructed borders of race, ethnicity, gender and class, with or without the relaxation of bodily boundaries' (250). Similarly, Marty Gould's study of Victorian periodicals observes that flirtation provides the opportunity for destabilising societal norms, describing the flirt as a 'sexually playful, problematically popular figure' with 'disruptive sexual potential' (277). Each writer links the cultural anxiety surrounding flirtatiousness to societal concern about power structures and the nature of interpretation and identifies flirtation's potential to defy expectations of gender and authority through subversion, uncertainty and deferral. Keeping these dynamics in mind, we might begin to examine the figure who embodies this chaotic and elusive behaviour by answering a question: what makes a flirt?

**Defining the 'flirt'**

Throughout this thesis I argue that the 'flirt' is a unique figure in American fiction from this period, that she is distinct from other popular American female character types in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and that she represents a specific iteration of transgressive femininity in an era of shifting gender politics. Adam Phillips' work supports my claim that the figure of the 'flirt' is not synonymous with a 'person who flirts'. He

suggests that in a society which favours order and predictability, flirtation is 'acceptable only as a means to a predictable end; flirting is fine, but to be a flirt is not' (xvii). While the Oxford English Dictionary offers several meanings for the word 'flirt' as a verb, as a noun, there is only a single definition. A 'flirt' is 'a person who habitually flirts' (670). But what does this really tell us? According to the OED definition, the distinction between a person who flirts and a person who is a flirt is situated in the frequency. While anyone might engage in a flirtation occasionally in order to achieve a clear relationship goal, or as Phillips describes 'a predictable end', a flirt is someone who flirts habitually, and often without a goal of marriage or even a relationship in mind. But this leaves ample possibility for ambiguity. Who judges what is habitual? Furthermore, how does this habitual flirting translate into a woman being deemed a 'flirt', often without her consent?

In selecting which literary texts to examine, I had to make a series of choices of which characters to include and exclude. One challenge was finding a definition of the flirt which is both precise enough to distinguish her from the many other female characters who could be described as flirting, yet not as *being flirts*, yet also capacious enough to encapsulate her many different iterations. For a character to fit the definition of a 'flirt' in my research she must meet three conditions: she must express an awareness that she is engaging in flirtatious behaviour (even if she is unaware of the potential consequences of doing so), she must be recognised as a 'flirt' by other members of her community and crucially she must favour flirtation as its own end rather than only using flirtation as a means of obtaining a social or economic goal. This has allowed me to include a diverse range of heroines—Daisy Miller is a very different kind of flirt than Alice Adams for example—while making sure that my definition is precise enough to prove a distinct history of this literary figure. According to my three conditions I have omitted several heroines who might have featured in a more general study of transgressive femininity. Carrie Meeber in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900)

and Undine Spragg in Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country* (1913) have been excluded because they better fit the category of coquettes than flirts given their transparent economic motivation for flirting. Wharton's Sophy Viner in *The Reef* (1912) was dropped in favour of Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth*, for while Viner would make an interesting study in this area, the question of if she ever means to flirt or if she purely falls in love with Darrow is never resolved, thus we cannot claim with confidence that she ever means to flirt. Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby* (1925) is another significant omission. While I refer to her in passing, I have chosen three other heroines in the nineteen-twenties because Daisy is never punished within the novel in the same way as Brett Ashley, Lorelei Lee or Dorothy Shaw are and thus whether she is seen as socially transgressive is debatable. The list of heroines I have selected is by no means exhaustive, but I hope opens up the potential for further research in this area.

The definitions I have outlined above are important, because they recognise that the flirt is not unquestionably pure (for she does show an interest in male attention), nor does she *only* use flirting as a means of procuring a predetermined social or economic benefit. Yet even within these definitions there is room for ambiguity, specifically around questions of the flirt's intent. Is the flirt always conscious of her own behaviour? When she flirts, does she mean to be intentionally sexual or is her flirting more innocent than that? Can she switch between calculated and aimless flirting and still be considered a flirt rather than a coquette? These are questions I will revisit throughout this thesis. The flirt is an example of Turner's 'liminal personae', individuals who 'elude or slip through the network of classifications' (*The Ritual Process* 95). In the liminal period between girlhood and marriage, the flirt's motivation becomes a subject of public concern in many turn-of-the-century American novels. As my chapter on children's fiction will explore, girls in their early adolescence who flirt are assumed not to have sexual intent. While their behaviour may be criticised, it is not

usually a source of serious moral anxiety. Similarly, as I will discuss in my reading of *The House of Mirth*, married women can be afforded some freedom to act flirtatiously because the presence of their husbands stops it from being taken too seriously. Unprotected by either classification, the unmarried flirt risks being misinterpreted by her society. Even playful flirtatiousness might be read as serious sexual intent, a calculated move to gain power over men or an attempt to cause social chaos. Often, a flirtatious heroine will have little power to interrupt these misreadings and might even be unaware that her behaviour could be read this way at all.

All of the heroines this thesis discusses are, to some extent, conscious of their flirtatious behaviour, but this does not mean that the question of intent is always straightforward or even consistent. Some of the heroines I discuss are described as 'naturally' flirtatious. Daisy Miller, for example, is called 'naturally indelicate' (82), and Octavia Bassett is described as accepting male attention 'as if it were the most natural thing in the world' (115). Other heroines carefully practice their flirtatious craft. Alice Adams spends hours in front of her bedroom mirror practicing flirtatious poses (9), while Lorelei Lee carefully cultivates a public persona which she knows will charm men. Some heroines flit between conscious and unconscious flirting, like Lily Bart, who sometimes carefully deploys her flirtatious charms and at others seems to be read as a flirt regardless of whether she is intending to act flirtatiously or not. We have glimpses of her conscious decisions to flirt, sometimes even her reluctant resignation to the fact that she must flirt in order to secure her social status. Yet there are also many moments where her 'flirting' is passive. For example, Selden interprets Lily as flirting even when all she does is smile at him: '[s]he paused before him with a smile which seemed at once designed to admit him to her familiarity, and to remind him of the restrictions it imposed' (17). She is as effective a flirt when she does

nothing as when she acts deliberately, perhaps even more so as her silence gives him space in which to imagine what she might be thinking.

The flirt figures addressed in this thesis fall on a spectrum where some draw closer to the ingenue figure and others to the manipulative coquette. What unites them is that none of them can be completely aligned with one or the other. While there are clearly variations between heroines like Daisy Miller and Lorelei Lee, even in these extreme examples, these heroines cannot be neatly categorised as either entirely unconscious or deliberate flirts. Daisy Miller might seem to flirt unconsciously much of the time, but she is not completely ignorant of the impact of her behaviour. For example, she tells Winterbourne that she desires to create 'a little fuss' (157). On the other end of the spectrum, Lorelei Lee might seem to come close to the Undine Spragg figure as she certainly does use flirting to gain material goods, specifically jewellery for which she has a passion. Yet while this explains specific instances of her flirtatious behaviour, as I will discuss in detail in Chapter Five, Lorelei's flirtatiousness often lacks this economic goal. She flirts to distract herself from her depression, for self-protection and to defer marriage, which she believes will rob her of her independence. Unlike Undine, who wants to secure an advantageous marriage as quickly as possible, Lorelei would rather stay in the liminal space of flirting for as long as she can. Further complicating the question of intent is the fact that her flirtatious behaviour is developed through trauma and she is told to act this way by a male judge after she is put on trial for shooting a man who abused her. To some extent her flirtatious behaviour is not something that she chooses at all, but something that she is forced to do to survive in a society stacked against women. Just as Daisy is not oblivious to her flirtatious behaviour, Lorelei is not in total control of hers. The liminal status of the flirt means that she might switch between flirting consciously or unconsciously, with or without a clear goal in mind, and for a variety of different reasons, many of which have nothing to do with pursuing a sexual or romantic end.

The flirt is a difficult figure to reconcile with traditional ideas of female morality and innocence mythology because she evades the classifications which divide female characters into pure and sexual women. David Forgacs' examination of girls' school narratives touches on this epistemological uncertainty, describing the flirt as existing 'in a liminal world on the edge of adulthood [where] it is not clear whether the girl's apparent offering of herself is intentionally sexual' (154). The flirt may intend to flirt for all sorts of reasons: for enjoyment, to retain her autonomy, to avoid the constrictions of marriage or for the sake of practicing her charms. Imperatively, however, although her behaviour raises questions about her awareness of herself as a sexual object, as Forgacs points out, there is the possibility that the flirtatious woman can hint at sexual availability without ever intending for her actions to be read as sexual. This complicates the notion of reading female characters as either purely moral or immoral and deviates from the static emblems of purity and impurity common to nineteenth-century American literature.

By identifying the flirt figure as a distinct character, it becomes clear how she differs from other popular female figures in American literature in this era. Leslie Fiedler's much cited monograph *Love and Death in the American novel* (1965) – where he famously asks *'*[w]here is our *Madame Bovary*, or *Anna Karenina*, our *Pride and Prejudice* or *Vanity Fair'* (xx) – outlines the strange absence of fully fledged American heroines in nineteenth-century fiction. Instead of the colourful heroines of these European texts Fiedler refers to, female characters in nineteenth-century American literature tend to fall into two categories: fallen women and angelic ingenues, or, in Fiedler's words 'monsters of virtue or bitchery' (24). Joyce Warren describes these stock figures as 'nonpersons' (8), elaborating that 'American female fictional characters are not people; they have no individuality, no entity that says, "I am myself, this person and no other"' (11). Joanna Russ adds that most nineteenth-century heroines 'do not exist at all – at their best they are depictions of the social roles women are

supposed to play, and often do play' (5). The flirt, in her moral ambiguity, occupies this liminal space between the static images of women as symbols of either purity or depravity.

The fallen woman is one of the most pervasive female characters in nineteenth-century fiction on both sides of the Atlantic and casts a heavy shadow over the flirt figure. What separates them is a sexual misdeed which is considered irreversible. For a woman to be classed as 'fallen' she must irreversibly transgress by having sex outside of marriage. Often she then bears an illegitimate child as a sign of her sins.[4] To be a fallen woman in nineteenth-century America is to be excluded from proper, 'moral' society and many fallen woman narratives are used as cautionary tales of girls who have gone wrong, with the transgressive woman dying at the end of her story as a penance for her crime. The flirt on the other hand cannot be so clearly condemned. With the exception of Lady Brett Ashley, Dorothy Shaw and Lorelei Lee, who I discuss in my final chapter (who given the time period subscribe to different social expectations), the flirt is distinct from the fallen woman figure because while the fallen woman's identity is always pinned on a physical sexual act, the flirt's hinges on the absence of this. She hints towards the possibility of it but does not consummate it.

Similarly, the flirt figure cannot be aligned with the implausibly virtuous ingenue figure because in engaging with the world and hinting toward sexual knowledge, even if she does not act on it, her innocence is compromised. Susan Gorsky describes the ingenue as an 'innocent, uninformed and naive' girl, who, in fear of contamination from the world is kept away from it (38). Her role in her novel is often a passive one, where her purity and innocence are guarded first by a father and then perhaps later by a husband. She is a figure who aligns neatly with Edenic mythology, for she is portrayed as consciously innocent and actively avoids any life experience which would awaken her to post-lapsarian truths. To

[4] The classic American example of the fallen woman genre is Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter (1850),* who follows this pattern of seduction and illegitimate pregnancy.

retain her ingenue status, she must remain, as Gorsky points out, not only innocent but ignorant. Even knowledge of impurity would draw her too close to resembling a post-lapsarian Eve. Thus famous American ingenue figures are either like Beth March in Alcott's *Little Women*, who dies before she has the chance to grow into an adult and perhaps discover sexuality, or Hilda in Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*, who is so preoccupied with retaining her ignorance of all things impure that she denounces her best friend. Even when flirtation is never converted into seduction, the flirt cannot be neatly categorised as totally innocent because her behaviour hints at sexual knowledge.

Neither a symbol of sexual sin or ignorant innocence, the flirt figure subverts the expectation that female characters will either be purely good or purely bad. She is, of course, not the only character to disrupt this binary, though, as I argue she does so in a unique way. In a compelling study of the prostitute figure *Girls Who Went Wrong: Prostitutes in American Fiction, 1885-1917* (1989), Laura Hapke argues that the prostitute character challenges the binary by being sexually fallen but 'de-sexualised', so that she becomes strangely unaware of her own sexual behaviour (3). Similarly, Jennifer Hedgecock's study of the femme fatale, *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature* (2008), argues that this figure plays with expectations that virtuous and unvirtuous femininity will always articulate itself according to set stereotypes. The femme fatale is powerful, Hedgecock suggests, because since she does 'not always bear a sexuality that is blatantly predatory' she can 'convincingly blend into mainstream society' (6). Hedgecock describes her as 'a kind of receptacle, internalizing the values and beliefs of society . . . in order to render her scheming successful' (208). By mimicking Victorian ideals of perfect femininity, the femme fatal can manipulate men by pretending to be the ideal woman.

To some extent my aim in this study is similar to Hapke's and Hedgecock's, and certainly the flirt figure shares similarities with the femme fatale, and to a lesser extent, the

prostitute. Like Hapke and Hedgecock, I wish to address how the transgressive heroine subverts and challenges cultural concerns and stock images of womanhood. Yet what makes the flirt figure unique is that rather than redeeming herself by ridding herself of sexuality, or hiding her wickedness by masquerading as an ingenue, the flirt subverts the binary by exposing the impossibility of the very notion of epistemological certainty. While, for example, Hapke's prostitute falls at one side of the binary and must be recast on the other, the flirt figure does not have to transform in order to challenge the inadequacies of this dichotomy, for she never falls on one side in the first place, but exists in the liminal space between them. Her flirtatious behaviour hints at sexual knowledge which prevents her from being imagined as an innocent angel, yet she is not 'bad' enough to be a fallen woman. While Hedgecock's femme fatale firmly aligns herself with the virtuous woman in order to be a bad one, the flirt disrupts expectations of simplicity by flitting back and forth between the two sides of the virtuous-fallen woman dichotomy. She is transgressive without causing scandal, which allows her to remain in society, while still threatening to undermine its values with her knowledge of sexuality. As one *Washington Post* journalist, Ella Wheeler, writes in her article 'The Fettered Flirts' (1893), the flirt 'takes the perfume from the rose of danger but avoids the thorn' (18). While she is flirting, the flirt can momentarily gain the liberation of the fallen woman without the harsh social punishment. While the angel and fallen woman binary is usually implicit in early-nineteenth-century American novels, the flirt moves this discussion into the text itself, revealing the mental turmoil of other characters trying to solve the riddle of a woman who seems to align with neither side of the moral dichotomy.

If it is fairly straightforward to differentiate the flirt figure from either the fallen woman or American ingenue then what is more difficult is differentiating her from the ostensibly similar character type: the coquette. Preventing the flirt's homogenisation with the 'coquette' is difficult at times because the 'coquette', like the 'flirt' plays at courtship without

always fulfilling it. Barbara Vinken describes flirting as 'a synonym for coquetterie' as both mean 'to behave in a way that makes another person think you are attracted to them' (85). Though I would agree that they are labels which will always have some degree of overlap, if we look at how the terms are dealt with in both fiction and non-fiction from nineteenth-century America, it is apparent that there is a distinction between them that Vinken does not account for.[5]

Unlike the flirt, the figure of the coquette has received some critical attention. Shelley King and Yael Schlick's *Refiguring the Coquette* (2008) and Theresa Braunschneider's *Our Coquettes* (2009), both help delineate the flirt from the coquette. Both works support the idea that a woman who is a 'coquette' is sufficiently detached from romantic love that she can use hints at seduction to manipulate suitors for her own ends. King and Schlick explain that 'the coquette must guard against succumbing to the feelings she arouses in others' (114). In order to use her charms to her greatest advantage, she must be in no danger of falling in love herself. This certainly applies to popular coquette figures in this period such as Wharton's Undine Spragg (*The Custom of the Country)* and Dreiser's Carrie Meeber (*Sister Carrie)*, both who think nothing of compromising their ethical standards to trick men into giving them things, and once they have done so, discard them with little concern. They would certainly not fall for the men they manipulate. However, if this is a mark of the coquette, then the heroines I address fail to reach this degree of detachment. Without exception, the female figures I examine are proven to be susceptible to falling in love; indeed it is often true heartbreak which sparks their flirtatious behaviour in the first place (as in Brett Ashley's loss

[5] Richard Kaye in *The Flirt's Tragedy* also uses the terms 'flirt' and 'coquette' synonymously. I have chosen to focus on Vinken's example because Kaye's assertion is less absolute and he does provide the concession that the term 'coquette' might carry more connotations of intent (24). Using the two terms interchangeably works for Kaye's research because his primary focus is on the impact on flirting on plot rather than how the term 'flirt' is used to label characters. In comparison, given that much of my argument is situated in the possibility that the flirtatious heroine often flirts without serious intent, or that she is even unaware of how her behaviour is being received, it is necessary that my terminology strongly differentiates these two different female labels.

of her true love during the war in *The Sun Also Rises*). Though the heroines this thesis addresses might act in ways that might allow them to be accused of coquetry, the category of 'flirts' suit them better because they lack the detachment of the coquette figure. Instead of always using flirtation in a precise and premeditated manner to achieve distinct economic or social goals, the flirt often flirts without an end in mind.

A useful illustration of this difference is seen in the contrast between Kaye's description of flirts as figures who thrive on 'desire without end' (1) and Braunschneider's description of the coquette as 'a figure of immediate self-satisfaction' (19). Take for example the difference between two of Wharton's heroines, Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* and Undine Spragg in *The Custom of the Country*. While superficially engaging in the same flirtatious behaviour—using their beauty and charms to attract the attention of eligible and prosperous men—they cannot be said to be of the same type. It is not flirting that differentiates Lily and Undine, but their motivations for doing so. As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Four, Lily flirts mainly to defer relinquishing her independence. Though she claims to be on the 'hunt for a rich husband' (41), she forgoes every opportunity to marry, preferring the freedom afforded by the liminal space of flirtation to the idea of marriage to men she does not love. Similarly, though she has the reputation for being a gold-digger, when she does use her flirtatious charms to gain economic advantage, she regrets this and repays the loan she flirted for. Lily's primary interest is to flirt for as long as she can, without a distinct outcome. Undine, on the other hand, flirts for calculated advantages. She thinks nothing of compromising her morals or integrity so long as she gets what she wants. Where Lily's flirtation is founded on deferral, Undine's is driven by her desire to climb the social ladder. Wendy DuBow summarises this distinction: 'Undine considers her social enterprising a viable career, well worth all her attention, while Lily partly disdains hers' (11). Though Undine and Lily might engage in similar behaviour, their motivation for doing so are

sufficiently different that we could name Undine a 'coquette' and Lily only a 'flirt'. While the flirtatious heroine often wants to remain in the liminal stage of flirtation for as long as possible, the coquette engages in flirtation primarily for the sake of social elevation.

By separating the 'flirt' from who she is not (fallen woman, ingenue and coquette) it is clear that the flirt figure represents a distinct model of womanhood. Though at times she may seem to resemble each of these other three figures, she cannot be categorised as any of them. She shows too much awareness of sexuality to be an ingenue. She cannot be a fallen woman because she has no sexual fall and unlike the coquette she does not only flirt as a calculated act to gain economic or social advantage. Her failure to align with these popular nineteenth-century literary figures, highlights how the flirt inhabits the unstable boundary between 'good' and 'bad' womanhood. She is transgressive in that she actively participates in her world and demonstrates an awareness of female sexuality, yet she is not transgressive enough that she may be simply banished from her society. In a liminal space between purity and impurity, she enters American literature as a challenge to the conventions which have female characters frozen into easily categorised archetypes.

In addition to occupying this liminal zone between sexuality and innocence, the flirt is often caught between other binaries. One of these binaries is the space between childhood and adulthood. This is an idea which will be explored in depth in Chapter Two, where I will discuss how nineteenth-century girls' fiction directs female readers away from flirtatious behaviour. In these texts it is apparent that girls' authors envisage adolescence as a liminal space between childhood innocence and adult responsibility. In this in-between state, girls can experiment with different identities and try out bad behaviour, like flirting, without lasting moral consequence. However, if this bad behaviour goes on for too long, then a girl risks becoming an adult 'flirt', at which point her flirtatiousness will be judged and punished much more severely.

This idea of adolescence as a temporary space of freedom between the limitations of childhood and the strict rules for how adult women should behave is seen particularly strongly in children's fiction. However, the idea of flirting as a transitional stage before young women settle down into traditional female roles of wives and mothers is also apparent in many of the other novels this thesis discusses. In *Alice Adams* and *The House of Mirth*, the age of the heroines, Alice Adams and Lily Bart, is a point of anxiety. While it may be acceptable for them to flirt as teenagers, their behaviour is viewed less favourably the older they get. This holds true even for the later works this thesis discusses. Patricia Raub suggests that the apparent threat posed by the flapper, popularised in the nineteen-twenties, was minimised by the social rhetoric that being a flapper was: 'only a matter of going through a "phase", negotiating a brief period of life between childhood and adulthood when a young woman was at liberty to act out a rebellion against the traditional values which she in fact never really abandoned' (127). If, as Raub suggests, a girl's flirtatious behaviour is contained to a fleeting 'phase' then her temporary transgressions can often be excused. If, on the other hand, she remains in this liminal space for too long and it seems as if she may never settle down into the conventional womanly roles she is expected to adopt, she is regarded as a greater social threat and punished accordingly.

In addition to occupying these liminal spaces—between sexuality and innocence; between childhood and adulthood—the flirt figure is also often caught between class boundaries. For several of the heroines in this thesis—Lily Bart, Alice Adams and Amy March—flirting positions them between classes. On the one hand there is the background they have come from, and on the other, the class they aspire to, which they might occupy should they flirt successfully. Robert Tally Jr's description of liminality as 'an in-between space of potentiality' (xi) is true of these flirtatious heroines, not only in terms of their potential to marry or not marry, but also in their potential either to elevate their social status

or fail to do so. Applying Turner's idea of 'separation' and 'reincorporation' to her participation in the marriage market, the flirt holds the potential to separate from her family's social status and be reincorporated into a higher class, or into a family with more stable wealth ('Betwixt and Between' 5).

All three of these heroines (Amy, Lily and Alice) have experienced a decline in social status. The March family in *Little Women* were wealthy before their father lost their money 'trying to help an unfortunate friend' (34). Lily Bart is determined to win back the money her father lost and is encouraged by her mother who tells her that her beauty will secure her a new fortune: 'you'll get it all back—you'll get it all back, with your face' (25). In *Alice Adams*, Alice's family is divided by their attitudes towards their declining wealth and social status. As Adam Sorkin writes: '[h]er unambitious father looks up to the rich, idolizes them; her doting, determined mother bitterly envies them; her weak brother resents them . . . Alice wants to be just like them' (195). As a lower-middle class family, whose income becomes increasingly precarious throughout the novel, whether they cross the boundary into a higher or lower class depends on the behaviour of the children. Her brother Walter seems ready to cross the boundary into a lower class, expressed through his association with the black community which becomes a source of shame for the family. Alice, on the other hand, seeks to reaffirm her family's middle-class status by marrying up. Alice, Lily and Amy all share the opportunity to re-discover the wealth and status they have experienced in the past through marriage. While flirting with men above their own social class, they exist in a strange, malleable class space where they play within the social structures of the wealthy and then retreat to their relative poverty. Just as in this moment the flirt represents the potentiality for either marriage or singleness, so too she represents the possibility that she may or may not lift her family's class status.

Other liminal spaces—between private and public; between male and female notions of power; between Old World Europe and New World America—are often occupied by the flirt figure. It is no coincidence that half of the heroines this thesis discusses are travelling away from home. Lynn Wardley describes the European tour as a 'rite de passage' for American girls of a certain class in the late nineteenth century which acted as an 'initiation into adult womanhood' (239). For Amy March and Octavia Bassett, their trips to Europe function as this 'initiation', as both girls experience the freedom to flirt and test out their independence in Europe before returning to America as married women. Brett Ashley and Lorelei Lee also travel around Europe, emphasising their lack of social stability. Again, for Lorelei, it takes a marriage to settle her back in America. Nor is it surprising that for several of the flirtatious heroines, many of their important interactions happen in half-way spaces between public and private life. For example, many of Lily Bart's and Alice Adams' important interactions happen on steps, in doorways or in other threshold spaces, which mirrors their unprotected status; they lack the shelter of their families but have not yet gained the protection of a husband. Finally, many of the heroines adopt ambiguous gendered behaviours while flirting: Daisy Miller's confident chatter places Winterbourne in a feminised role of a listener while she dominates their conversation; Lily Bart and Alice Adams play the roles of choosers in the marriage market rather than passive women waiting patiently to be chosen; Brett Ashley with 'her hair brushed back like a boy's' (19), is an example of androgynous beauty, which mirrors the way in which she destabilises boundaries of masculine and feminine behaviours in various aspects of her life. In all of these ways, the flirt's undecided future allows her to play with social boundaries and flit between different spaces and states.

The flirt is a naturally liminal figure who flirts not only with men, but with cultural boundaries, social dichotomies and classifications. Critical misreadings of flirtatious heroines

have often occurred because critics, like characters within the novels, have tried too hard to align these ambiguous heroines within static categories when in fact they exist somewhere in-between. For all the texts there is some critical debate around ideas of the flirtatious heroines' morality and intent. Does Daisy Miller use flirting as a form of social rebellion or is she ignorant of the wider impact of her behaviour? Does Lily Bart have autonomy over her own representation or not? Should we read Lorelei Lee's and Brett Ashley's flirtatiousness as a sign that they are manipulative and powerful or are they still victims of a wider gendered social discourse? These are all debates that I shall explore in depth in subsequent chapters, but they are questions which highlight the ambiguous nature of the flirt figure. In order to read her behaviour more accurately we must be willing to accept that there is more than one way that she can be read.

While occupying this liminal space between entering the marriage market and securing a partner (or failing to do so), the flirt can enjoy the temporary freedom to try out different identities, whether this is playing with ideas of national identity, class identity or even experiencing power traditionally given to men. However, this is also a dangerous period for a woman, for while she may be allowed to briefly cross through this liminal space in order to choose a husband and thus reinforce social norms of marriage, any attempt to extend this period might be read as threatening to social order. Whether she means to or not, the flirt's desire to extend the liminal period where she is not constrained by the rules of marriage and motherhood calls into question the idea of marriage as a woman's only purpose and threatens to unsettle traditional social hierarchies. While there are many reasons a heroine may wish to continue flirting, her society is usually keen to resolve her liminal status as quickly as possible. As this thesis concludes, the flirt is never allowed to remain in this in-between state indefinitely.

**Analysing the Flirt**

Of the heroines I discuss in this thesis, some self-identify as 'flirts', others do not. Yet, even the heroines who do not see themselves this way, are still named 'flirts' by their communities. This exposes the implicit ambiguity of the term itself. While the term 'fallen woman' has a clear definition, 'flirt' is a comparatively unstable term. What one person views as flirting, another may not. Flirting might be read as harmless play or declared a serious moral threat depending on who is doing the reading. For example, in *Daisy Miller*, Daisy proudly declares to Winterbourne that she is 'a fearful, frightful flirt! Did you ever hear of a nice girl that was not?' (178). Yet while Daisy equates being a 'flirt' with being a 'nice girl', Winterbourne thinks the opposite. In his eyes, flirting is not something to be celebrated, but implies a lack of feminine purity. When he gravely informs her that 'I am afraid your habits are those of a flirt', he clearly implies that to be regarded as a 'flirt' is always an undesirable label (178). It is this interpretative instability which makes the flirt figure such a compelling study. Unlike the more static female types outlined above, who are clearly marked as moral or immoral, whether the flirtatious heroine is cast as an innocent tease or a manipulative heartbreaker depends on how her behaviour is read. As I will demonstrate in this study, often the difference between women who are labelled as 'flirts' and women who are not, lies not in their actual behaviour, but how gossip, speculation and arbitrary social codes come to understand their actions.

On the publication of the novels I will look at, the contemporary responses tend to reflect strong moral judgements, often trying to rid the flirtatious heroines of any moral ambiguity by declaring the flirt either a thoroughly wicked character or too innocent to understand her own behaviour. While twenty-first-century critics have tended to take a much softer view of the nineteenth-century heroines, harsh moral judgements are still common in readings of some of the later heroines I will discuss in this thesis. There has been a tendency

even in recent criticism for flirtatious heroines to be read harshly because critics focus on the harm they cause to male characters rather than examining the social constructs which inform her behaviour and how this behaviour is read by other (usually male) characters. In her celebrated article 'Toward a Feminist Poetics' (1979), Elaine Showalter argues that too often critical discourse perpetuates a male-orientated canon on both a textual and critical level and omits female responses to texts which may offer different interpretations. The example she gives involves the opening of Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), where the impoverished and bitter Michael Henchard is able to begin a new life by ridding himself of his wife and child by selling them, which illustrates the problem of excluding the female critical voice. Using Irving Howe's observation that this is a scene 'insidiously attractive to the male fantasy'(84), Showalter argues that what may be read by male critics as a triumph, is 'horrifying' to a female reader whose sympathies are more likely to lie with the tyrannised wife than the liberated husband (147). Showalter's observation that the text might be read entirely differently depending on the gendered experiences of the critic is pertinent to reading flirtatious heroines, who might be read differently depending on whether we focus on the heroine's motivations for flirting or the pain she causes to the men she spurns.

An extreme example of how Showalter's ideas can be applied to reading the flirt figure is found in the contemporary reviews of Booth Tarkington's 1913 novel *The Flirt*. The heroine of the novel, a teenage girl called Cora Madison, is renowned in her town as a terrible and uncontrollable flirt. Beautiful and charming, Cora moves her attention from man to man, leaving distraught suitors in her wake. The reviews of the novel predominantly depict Cora as an inherently wicked figure, whose flirting is a sign of her love for causing emotional pain to men. For example, in *The Dial* in 1913, one reviewer describes Cora as 'a person of such hardened selfishness and instinctive depravity, that her conduct takes toll of human lives' ('Recent Fiction' 462). This is despite the fact that at many points in the novel Tarkington

casts doubt on Cora's absolute power. For example, she is angered by a suitor's accusation that she jilted him, claiming that she never promised him anything but that he has simply labelled her a 'jilt' because he wrongly assumed that she would return his affections: '[a]ll the wild boys that a girl can't make herself like are "jilted," aren't they?' (80). While there is certainly textual evidence to read Cora harshly or sympathetically, the way in which Cora was read by reviewers reflected a strongly gendered judgement similar to Howe's reading of Hardy.

This is demonstrated most starkly in the reading of Cora's younger brother, Hedrick. Hedrick was praised by most reviewers as the moral centre of the novel because he alone works tirelessly to condemn and punish his sister for the emotional pain her flirting causes to her discarded suitors. In 1913 a reviewer in *Outlook* magazine calls Hedrick 'a good, bad boy' ('Review 1' 779), Robert Cortes Holliday describes him as 'the chorus, the critical eye, necessary to reveal the monstrous nature of his sister' (162), while Asa Don Dickinson summarises the novel as the 'study of a heartless coquette, and of the young boy who understood her' (31). Yet in stark contrast to these reviews, Hedrick is no hero but a monstrous character himself. He repeatedly tells Cora that he wishes he was her father so that he could beat the flirtatious behaviour out of her: '"She ought to be my daughter," he said, the sinister implication all too plain;— "just about five minutes!"' (32). All it would take to break Cora's transgressive behaviour, Hedrick believes, is five minutes of pain, which he would be happy to inflict on her. When Cora does something Hedrick perceives as flirtatious, his response is so aggressive it seems feral. When Cora describes a new man as '[f]oreign and distinguished', Hedrick lunges at her 'with a leap as of some wild animal under a lash' (22). He 'exploded', he 'writhed', he 'collapsed', he 'screamed, and began to jump up and down, tossing his arms frantically', he 'cast himself convulsively upon the floor' (23): his hatred for his sister rises so strongly that he is made crazed by it, losing all sense of dignity in his

visceral loathing of Cora's flirtatious behaviour. These wild outbursts are juxtaposed with the often minor nature of Cora's transgressions. [6] It is indicative of the bias in favour of masculine authority being protected that in the rush to condemn Cora, early critics of the novel fail to notice the almost demonic behaviour of her brother. Where the male reader might read the opening of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as a victory for the re-invented man, the female reader might well see it as a horrifying crime against wife and daughter. Likewise, perhaps the male reviewers of *The Flirt* are too quick to forgive Hedrick's cruelty in their satisfaction that Cora, who emasculates her male suitors, is receiving the brunt of his aggression.

One would hope that were *The Flirt* to gain critical attention in the twenty-first-century, no readers would be inclined to declare Hedrick a hero. Yet the omission of Hedrick's flaws in the rush to condemn his sister is echoed in criticism of flirtatious heroines in some of the later works this thesis discusses. Though the early reviews which name

[6] Hedrick also experiences accusations of flirting when the mentally disturbed Lolita, a girl of around his own age, causes him social humiliation when she asks him repeatedly to kiss her (120). Despite his adamant belief that he is immune to female charms, his resolve wavers and he kisses her. Horrified by what he has done, he tries to make her leave, but she refuses: '"[k]iss me some more, darling little boy!" She flung herself at him, and with a yell of terror he turned and ran at top-speed' (121). Though Hedrick likes to imagine himself as superior to the women in his family, when confronted with Lolita's demand for kisses, he is left powerless and runs away, 'bellowing' (121). When Laura finds them and helps take Lolita back to her mother she scolds Hedrick, explaining that Lolita is 'weak mentally' (123) and that 'really, you shouldn't have flirted with her' (127), to which Hedrick responds with explosive indignation. There is a strong hypocrisy in the fact that Hedrick imagines himself as a completely innocent victim in this situation, even though he kisses Lolita, while he is hasty to name Cora a horrific coquette for leading on various men. Hedrick is labelled a 'flirt' by Laura and Cora, just as Cora is labelled a 'flirt' by Hedrick. Yet this incident is revealing of the divide between how flirtatious men are punished compared to flirtatious women. Although the Lolita incident causes Hedrick deep embarrassment, both at home and at school, he is not at risk of lasting social ruin. In the context of Cora's suitors, who are presented as helplessly under her spell, it seems likely that had Lolita and Hedrick both been older, or had Lolita not been 'weak mentally', all of the blame might have been placed with Lolita and none with Hedrick. Arguably Hedrick's position as an adolescent allows him to temporarily experience some of the judgement of the adult female flirt. Yet while he is blamed, gossiped about and mocked for the incident, his 'flirting' is framed as foolishness and immaturity rather than anything worse. In contrast, Cora's flirting is taken more seriously, both by critics and by characters in the novel. Though only a few years older than Hedrick, her flirtatiousness is read as a sign that she is inherently wicked (one of her suitor's mothers even compares her to a devil). While flirting for a woman is an issue of morality, Hedrick illustrates that for men it is mainly just their pride which is at risk.

heroines like Daisy Miller as wicked have been discredited, even some criticism written in the past twenty years continues to be overly critical of twentieth-century flirtatious heroines, especially if they are read as negatively influencing male characters. This is a discussion I will expand on in Chapter Five, particularly in my reading of Brett Asley in *The Sun Also Rises.* Even today, many critics still read Brett as a 'bitch' figure, interpreting her careless treatment of her male suitors as a sign of her innate cruelty without considering the social factors which produce her flirtatious behaviour in the first place. Meanwhile, few pause to consider if the male characters' responses to Brett's behaviour are justifiable or appropriate.

Labelling a woman an innocent or manipulative flirt is always, to some extent, a subjective judgement, both for characters and for critics. While the more famous heroines this thesis examines have often been misread because any ambiguity is rid from them, it is precisely the flirt's embodiment of interpretative anxiety that makes her such an interesting study in this period of American literature. Because flirting is never regarded ubiquitously as a bad thing, it is not so simple that a woman is condemned because she flirts. Indeed, even with the hysteria about flirtatiousness as a wicked female behaviour, there is a counter narrative in many texts from this period which suggests that women must flirt to a certain extent in order to secure a good husband. Even in the early nineteenth century there is evidence of flirtation being promoted as a necessary and desirable part of femininity, as seen in an article in *Godey's Lady's Book* where an author writes that '[f]lirting is the natural impulse of the female will' and criticises those 'prudes' who refuse to engage in it ('Proposals for Female Clubs' 77). Again, we must return to the distinction between *flirting* and *being a flirt*. Why is flirting socially acceptable, while being labelled a 'flirt' is disastrous for a woman's reputation? And how does our awareness of the subjectivity of the 'flirt' label, inform our readings of those heroines who are defined as such?

As quickly becomes apparent from critical readings of the novels, even for the few heroines who confess to being flirts, what constitutes a 'flirt' is always bound up in social constructions of femininity. How a woman is read, or whether she is condemned or redeemed, speaks less of her behaviour than of how her behaviour is interpreted by her fictional community. Examining the flirt over a relatively long period exposes the tendency for the 'old fashioned girl' to be held up as a better example of femininity than the 'modern girl', yet what constitutes 'old fashioned' and 'modern' is always culturally contingent. What might be considered shockingly flirtatious in the 1870s, would be unremarkable in the 1900s, and downright prudish by the 1920s. As an article in *The Literary Digest* in 1921 speculates:

> Is the "old fashioned girl", with all that she stands for in sweetness, modesty, and innocence, in danger of becoming extinct? Or was she really no better nor worse than the "up to date" girl, who in turn will become the "old fashioned girl" to a later generation? Is it even possible as a small, but impressive, minority would have us believe that the girl of today has certain new virtues of "frankness, sincerity, seriousness of purpose", lives on a "higher level of morality" and is on the whole "more clean minded and clean lived" than her predecessors? ('Is the Younger Generation in Peril' 9)

The writer identifies the tendency for society to celebrate womanhood from the past while fearing its future iterations and ignoring the fact that these girls who are now considered 'old fashioned' were the modern girls of their times. Thus the modern girl in *Daisy Miller* becomes an old fashioned one in the context of *The House of Mirth*, or the behaviour which shocks in *A Fair Barbarian* would not register compared to the much more flagrant flirtation in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* or *The Sun Also Rises*. What a young woman may or not be allowed to do before becoming known as a flirt might alter as time moves on, but what does

not change is the fact that it is how society responds to female behaviour which decides whether a woman will be forgiven or condemned for her actions.

The most drastic shift in attitudes concerning appropriate female conduct during the period this thesis addresses occurs at the onset of the nineteen-twenties, a decade characterised by social change, specifically regarding the roles of men and women. This shift is apparent from literature produced in this period; the social world experienced by the March sisters in *Little Women,* for example, differs dramatically from that of the heroines of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *The Sun Also Rises.* James Nagel writes that '[t]he culture of the 1920s was something new, embracing the first generation of women to smoke, drink, and use divorce as a solution to a bad marriage' (92). These social changes were mirrored politically when the ratification of the nineteenth amendment in 1920 finally granted American women the right to vote. Socially, economically and politically, it was a decade where women experienced many new freedoms for the first time. Yet there is one new freedom women gained in this period which is particularly pertinent to this thesis: the freedom to engage in pre-marital sex.

Critics and historians have suggested a wide range of factors to explain the sexual revolution in nineteen-twenties America. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman argue that the infiltration of women into traditionally male work and public spaces during wartime meant that '[b]y 1920 the separate spheres so critical in the construction of nineteenth-century middle-class sexual mores had collapsed' (233). Not only did this allow for more unchaperoned interaction between men and women, it also diminished the myth of the perfectly innocent woman and allowed for the increasing visibility of romance and sex in popular culture (D'Emilio and Freedman 233). James Ciment cites the trend for young women to live outside their parents' home before marriage as a key factor in increasing public acceptance of sex outside of marriage (469). He also notes the popularisation of

Freud's theory that sexual repression was dangerous for people of both genders and that 'many people viewed this as a license for letting down their inhibitions and indulging in sexual activity' (Ciment 469).[7] William Leuchtenburg describes women's new-found sexual freedoms in nineteen-twenties America as 'merely the most sensational aspect of the altering status of women' (158). It is, however, a notable shift in the development of the flirt figure. What ensures that my earlier heroines never cross the line from flirts to fallen woman is that while they may hint at sexual knowledge, they never cross this boundary by actually having sex. In contrast, all three of the heroines discussed in my final chapter are not only flirtatious but sexually active. This presents a rich opportunity for comparison with my earlier heroines. The flirt in nineteen-twenties fiction is afforded many new freedoms, yet she still shares many similarities with earlier flirt figures.

Though heroines like Lorelei Lee and Brett Ashley might not gain the same punishment for sexual behaviour as their literary predecessors, their flirtatiousness is still the subject of concern and often anger. As many critics have pointed out, traditional ideas about good femininity do not simply disappear in this decade, something which these texts reveal. Jonathan Silverman points to the tension in nineteen-twenties America between women's emerging freedoms and the expectations still held by men for how women should behave. While he writes that the popularisation of flapper culture in this decade demonstrated that 'women were questioning the myths and beliefs that bound them' (548), he points out that '[n]onetheless, men expected women to undertake the same roles of wife and mother as women of previous generations' (547). As I will go on to discuss in relation to Brett Ashley, this sense of male expectation complicates the flirt's new-found freedoms. Brett is able to

[7] Freud's theory of sexual repression is discussed in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* when Lorelei has an appointment with Freud after a breakdown. As she always does in her diary, she only talks about sex euphemistically: 'it seems everyone seems to have these things called inhibitions, which is when you want to do a thing and you do not do it' (88).

flirt with men, even to sleep with them without lasting moral consequence, but this does not prevent the men she flirts with from trying to push her into a more traditional role. Much of the conflict in the novel results from Brett's attempts to disassociate flirting from love, and the men's attempts to force her into a traditional romance narrative. The fact that the men end up reading her as a 'Circe' figure, deliberately using her charms to control and harm them, illustrates that while the social context may have changed, female flirtatiousness is still regarded as problematic because of how it subverts traditional power structures.

What makes heroines like Brett and Lorelei more suited to a discussion of the flirt figure than another female type is that despite being sexually active, it is their unrealised hints towards sexuality which cause the most social chaos in the novel. Lorelei, Dorothy and Brett all still meet the criteria I established for defining the flirt figure. They all engage in flirtatious behaviour which is not converted into seduction. They are all named 'flirts' by their communities and are often criticised more for 'playing games' and denying sex more often than they are chastised for offering it. They all seem to favour flirting over realised sexual relationships in one way or another. Though my discussion will naturally refer to the times that flirtation crosses the line into sexual consummation, it is right that these figures are included within this thesis on the development of the American flirt figure.

My readings of the novels in the following chapters revolve around two key concerns. The first is based in how the label of 'flirt' is applied. Why do some female characters who flirt become known as 'flirts' while others who engage in similar flirtatious behaviour do not? Why is it that girls who are deemed 'flirts' are judged even more harshly than women who are openly engaging in 'bad' behaviour? And what does the flirt figure therefore tell us about those who scrutinise and condemn her behaviour? The second concern is how the flirt figure is used to expose the fallacies and anxieties of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century American society. How does she interrupt the static images of womanhood that dominate

nineteenth-century American fiction? What does the flirt's judgement reveal about the male gaze and traditional notions of masculine authority? How might she revise conceptions of Edenic and innocence mythology? And why is the flirt figure, whose identity lies in hypothetical transgressions more often than realised ones, so often harshly punished?

As the flirt's identity rests on social constructs of acceptable female behaviour, the flirt figure often mirrors the concerns of those who try to interpret her. Therefore, while examination of the flirt would appear to be a study in a certain type of femininity, she is equally disruptive to wider concerns, anxieties and mythologies of her culture. Providing a condensed survey of each of these discussions—the construction of new models of femininity, the collapse of traditional constructs of masculinity and the weakening of certain American mythologies—will provide an introduction to the multifaceted cultural anxieties that the flirt figure awakens, which will then be revisited throughout my discussion.

**The flirt as a challenge to models of femininity**

In *Flirting with Danger* (2000), Lynn Phillips observes that there is always a power struggle between the parties in a flirtatious interaction. Though she suggests that women are often in a position of less power than men, she suggests that flirting is an interaction that reverses this hierarchy. Since flirting is often perceived as a female led activity, Phillips suggests that many women find authority in 'the power of walking away' (99), that is choosing to refuse a sexual advance, or temporarily denying it in order to delay the process of 'giving in' (85). It is an idea hinted at in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* when Henry Tilney observes that '[m]an has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal' (47). When flirting, this power is extended, while in marriage this power is given up. As humourist and journalist Helen Rowland wryly remarks in her weekly newspaper column *Reflections of a Bachelor*

*Girl* (1909), 'when a girl marries, she exchanges the attentions of all the other men of her acquaintance for the inattention of just one' (5).

Though many literary texts from this period depict female characters who become model wives, it is with the occasional concession that to give up the flirtatious power of refusal is to accept a powerless social role. Meg March in Alcott's *Little Women* offers an example of this. Though Meg experiments with flirtatious behaviour and enjoys the sense of power it affords her, it is made clear that flirting is a bad behaviour which she should learn to temper. After lessons learned through humiliation and a dressing down from Marmee, Meg is cured of the vice of flirtatiousness and becomes an angelic wife and mother. However, the novel hints at the social injustice of preventing girls from flirting and yet ignoring them once they are married, for, while 'in France the young girls have a dull time of it till they are married' (336), Alcott writes that American girls are 'virtually put upon the shelf as soon as the wedding excitement is over, and most of them might exclaim, as did a very pretty woman the other day, "I'm as handsome as ever, but no one takes any notice of me because I'm married"' (336). Though, as I will discuss in much greater depth, to gain too much notice as a flirt makes a girl vulnerable to social judgement, equally to gain no notice is to lose any semblance of power left to a woman in a strictly patriarchal society. As Meg discovers, flirting includes her in society while marriage excludes her from it.

David Dryden Henningsen divides flirting into two categories: 'sexually motivated flirting behaviours are courtship initiating; behaviours with no sexual intent are quasi-courtship' (481). His differentiation is useful in understanding how many of the flirt figures I address are misread by those they flirt with. While flirt figures in this period are often assumed to have serious intent, whether to trick a man into marrying her or to harm him in some way, Henningsen's term of 'quasi-courtship' is helpful. Misunderstandings come from the flirt being blamed for using 'courtship initiating' flirting, when in fact she often only

engages in ‘quasi-courtship’. A heroine who engages in quasi-courtship may flirt to boost her ego, to lend her autonomy or for pleasure, but without serious intent, for she declares quite freely that she might not want to be married at all. Daisy Miller is horrified by Winterbourne’s suggestion that she is in love with Giovannelli, calling it ‘very disagreeable’ (179). Octavia Bassett in *A Fair Barbarian* declares to her aunt that she has not decided ‘whether I mean to be married, or not’ (32) and Lily Bart regards marriage as a dreary future where a woman must work and work to secure a man ‘who will have the honour of boring her for life’ (23).

By flirting, female characters can find a space between two powerless roles available to women in turn-of-the-century America: the single woman and the wife. Rishona Zimring describes the period where a young woman is free to flirt as her ‘narrow window of opportunity for independence’ (82) when she is neither subject to father nor husband. Like Meg in *Little Women,* who loses all her power and social position once she is taken off the marriage market, the single woman is also given little or no importance unless she is seen as a desirable object (in other words, unless she flirts). Though flirts are regarded with fear and disdain in late-nineteenth-century American discourse, flirtatious behaviour is often misread as cruel or manipulative when the heartbreaks caused are often only incidental to a woman’s main aim and purpose for flirting: retaining power over her own life. The problem lies in her ‘quasi-courtship’ being read as ‘courtship’. Though Henningsen's paper refers to a contemporary sociological study, his terminology lends clarity to the mistranslation of many of these heroines’ flirting, so that gestures they intend as self-contained flirting are received by her suitors as serious attempts at seduction. Given the limited options available to women in their society, many of these heroines’ desire to remain a ‘flirt’ is understandable, allowing them a temporary escape from the dreary life offered to women who are either deemed unmarriageable or trapped in a marriage.

The flirt figure might therefore be read as an early iteration of the New Woman figure. Though the flirt figures this thesis addresses are usually condemned by their fictional societies under the guise of their deviant sexuality, often this sexual fickleness is only one aspect of the flirt's social protest. One thing that all the heroines I shall examine share is their desire for agency over their own lives. This is often expressed in their refusal to settle with one man. As a result, their flirtatiousness is merely an expression of their general desire to escape the restrictions of socially policed femininity and to live life on their own terms. Though critics have often failed to recognise the flirt as a distinct figure, many have still correctly identified that these progressive heroines might be read as precursors to the later literary heroines who consciously fight against the societal rules they find themselves trapped within. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg describes Daisy Miller as a New Woman of the 'first generation', listing her 'rejection of convention' and 'her desire to act on her own' as evidence of this (274). Meanwhile Sally Ledger writes that Bram Stoker's flirtatious heroine Lucy Westenra in *Dracula*, who at first appears to be 'an archetype of Victorian femininity: blonde, demure and waiting for the right man', proves to have a voracious sexual appetite, and in her pursuit of her sexual desires becomes an early example of the 'sexually decadent New Woman' (101). The flirt's awareness of sexuality, her enjoyment of her power over men and her desire not to curtail her freedom in marriage marks her as socially progressive.

The reason I hesitate to conflate the flirt with the New Woman label is that, while most critics' readings of the New Woman figure base her identity on a conscious rebellion against restrictive gender rules, the flirt's awareness of this rebellion is often left ambiguous. While, for example, Smith-Rosenberg reads Daisy Miller as a New Woman for her deliberate social disobedience, the text leaves Daisy's motivation more ambiguous than Smith-Rosenberg's reading suggests (274). We cannot say with certainty that Daisy is aware of the impact of her social dissent, nor can we say that she is not, because she is always focalised

through Winterbourne. The issue of whether the flirt means to be subversive or not is echoed in the critical discourse surrounding many of the more famous heroines this thesis addresses. Are figures like Lily Bart, Brett Ashley and Lorelei Lee subtle social anarchists or is the disruption they cause the accidental product of their capricious desires? While I argue that flirtatious heroines are used to unsettle social hierarchies and challenge the limitations placed on women, whether the heroines themselves are aware of the broader impact of their flirtatious behaviour is often left ambiguous.[8] This does have some advantages. Given her social context the flirtatious heroine can be a progressive character without incurring censorship. To some extent her social rebellion becomes acceptable because she may not be aware of what she is doing. None of the works I will go on to discuss were censored on publication, whereas works from the same period featuring a more vocal New Woman figure were. For example, many critics have retrospectively read Daisy Miller and Lily Bart's deaths as their conscious defiance of society. Yet, the ambiguity of whether they means to shock with their behaviour allowed them to escape moral censor, unlike more vocal heroines like Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* (1899), whose sexual immorality caused outcry and destroyed Chopin's career.[9] Whereas Daisy and Lily can be excused on the basis that they did not know any better, Chopin's heroine is a vocal New Woman who articulates her desire to rebel and thus cannot be read as 'innocent'.

Instead of vocally or openly challenging the social paradigm she is caught in, the flirt subtly subverts it by failing to neatly align with preconceived definitions of good or bad

[8] This debate about whether we should read heroines like Daisy Miller and Lily Bart as either insistently protesting social norms or being genuinely oblivious to the subversive nature of their actions is another example of the flirt's liminal status. While critical readings of the flirt figure often attempt to position her as either a determined protester or a passive victim, in fact, these heroines might be better read as a mixture – somewhat aware of their desire to challenge the limitations placed on them without necessarily having a goal of influencing wider change.

[9] Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), which depicts an adulterous love affair and its heroine, Edna, abandoning her husband and children, was met with an angry outcry on publication and widely censored, effectively ruining Chopin's writing career (Jung 224).

womanhood and by deferring a woman's 'natural' trajectory through courtship, marriage and motherhood. Though the flirt figure in this period rarely meets a happy ending, for the brief period in which she flirts freely, she dares, if only temporarily, to imagine for herself a future where she might freely enjoy interactions with men of her choosing, refuse marriage for the sake of social propriety and shake off the arbitrary rules which she is told define her purity and innocence – all while enjoying the independence and freedom of holding power over her own life.

**The flirt as a product of masculine anxiety**

The word 'flirt' is almost exclusively applied to women in this period, across both fiction and nonfiction texts. Yet, though the flirt is almost always female, she often reveals more about masculinity than she does about femininity. [10] The flirt is villainised and feared by her society, not because she is threatening in isolation, but because she is made powerful through her relationships with men. What does it mean for patriarchal hierarchy when a woman can influence or even manipulate the power balance with empty gestures mimicking seduction?

In British fiction through the nineteenth century, as I have discussed in relation to Kaye's work, the flirt is more often figured as a comic distraction than a moral threat. By extension, the men who fall for her pernicious charms are mostly regarded as fools. It is their gullibility which is the source of concern, not the inherent wickedness of the 'silly' girls they fall for. See, for example Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice.* When Elizabeth Bennet is

[10] The occasional times where men are described as flirts it is with particular scorn. While the vast majority of sources depict the flirt as exclusively female, the few descriptions of a male flirt suggest that he cannot be classed in the same category because by inhabiting such a feminine role he shows himself to be egotistical and effeminate, as well as conniving and manipulative to a much greater extent than the female flirt. As *The New York Times* reports in an article penned in 1875, those rare men we might deem 'male flirts, they are men who, like Narcissus, have fallen in love with their own selves' ('An Apology for Flirts' 5). Even here, however, the writer appears hesitant to apply the term 'flirt' to a man, as if only for want of a better word.

concerned that the flirtatious reputation of her younger sister, Lydia, will prevent the other sisters from gaining the respect of men, her father only laughs:

> "If you were aware," said Elizabeth, "of the very great disadvantage to us all which must arise from the public notice of Lydia's unguarded and imprudent manner—nay, which has already arisen from it, I am sure you would judge differently in the affair."
>
> "Already arisen?" repeated Mr. Bennet. "What, has she frightened away some of your lovers? Poor little Lizzy! But do not be cast down. Such squeamish youths as cannot bear to be connected with a little absurdity are not worth a regret. Come, let me see the list of pitiful fellows who have been kept aloof by Lydia's folly." (266)

Lydia Bennet, though a much more blatant flirt than, say, Daisy Miller, is not regarded by her father as a great threat to herself, her family or the men she might try to charm. Her father minimises her flirting as 'folly' and 'a little absurdity', criticising instead the men who would react so melodramatically as to cease interaction with her sisters. The 'pitiful fellows' that Mr. Bennet mocks are plentiful in the texts I will examine. While the flirt figure would at first glance seem concerned with changing conceptions of femininity, the hysterical reaction about the threat that she seemingly poses to American men indicates that she can also be approached as an illustration of a crisis of masculinity in turn-of-the-century America.

In order to best approach the flirt figure, we need to adopt a critical framework that gives weight not only to the objects of public speculation but also the social world and characters producing these speculations. The flirt's appearance is problematic for masculine ideologies which like to place women in static and easily defined categories because she destabilises such a simplistic approach to understanding gender. Guy Reynolds envisages fiction from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as the writing of 'male discomfort' (52), with authors representing a time of increasingly unstable gender roles where 'Victorian certainties (of class and marriage, of the role of women) were being

dissolved by a rapidly changing economic order' (39). The flirt embodies these specifically masculine anxieties. Her supposed ability to hoodwink a man with her deliberate imitations of seduction undermines patriarchal power, her slippery definition interrupts the power of the male gaze and, in undermining innocence mythologies, she threatens to expose the New World Adam as an infantile self-deceiver.

The flirt is often misread because of other characters' simplistic expectations of women, and their belief that girls are easily transformed into male commodities. Flirtatious heroines are surrounded, in other words, by the 'pitiful men' Mr. Bennett mocks. Almost every flirt figure I examine in this thesis is judged by an unreliable and often unlikeable male character, who is horrified that the woman he claims to love might have eyes not only for him. With the enigmatic, headstrong Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* comes the weak-willed, easily influenced Selden. With the vivacious Daisy Miller comes the placid and small-minded Winterbourne and the independent, strong-willed Lady Brett Ashley is perceived only through the disappointment of emasculated Jake Barnes. It is a list which could easily be extended. While at some point each man is angered at the thought that he has been tricked by the audacious flirt, and present themselves as the victim of female insincerity, they were never tricked by the girl in the first place, but by their own simplistic understanding of femininity. As Nick Carraway describes in *The Great Gatsby*, there are inevitably going to be moments where Gatsby will be disappointed with the real Daisy, rather than his imagined vision of her, 'not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusions' (95). The flirtatious girl often needs to do very little to gain a man's attention, for these men are ready to idealise women based on a vision of her constructed through the male gaze. Equally, the flirt need do nothing at all to fall short in the eyes of her observer. Since the girl they have loved is not real in the first place, but a vision of what they want her to be, she of

course will fail to fulfil their dreams and ideals. The flirt is not a passive canvas, but in failing to act as a typical romantic heroine complicates and problematises the male gaze.

Furthermore, the harsh judgement the flirt figure receives exposes the hypocrisy that women who flirt are deemed worse than the men who flirt with them, even when these men are guilty of much more serious sexual transgressions. Even the male characters who are already guilty of adulterous behaviour are horrified by the idea of interacting with a woman who has been seen to flirt too much. They are not only 'pitiful' and 'squeamish' as Mr. Bennet describes; they are also self-deceptive. Winterbourne in *Daisy Miller* ostracises Daisy for flirting even though he is engaged in an adulterous relationship with an unnamed woman in Geneva. Selden in *The House of Mirth* is disgusted by the notion that Lily might be in some way impure, even though he has just finished an illicit relationship with the married Bertha Dorset. Henry Spofford in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* publicly proclaims the importance of female purity while spending his time looking at pornographic images. As Jessica Levine explains, because women are always made to carry the blame for illicit sexual activity, even women who are not guilty of actual sexual transgressions can be indicted if they flirt with a man who expects women to behave badly, due to his earlier experiences, 'whereby the occluded story of the male protagonist's sexual life returns to indict the sexually innocent female' (6). Yet though it is the innocent female character who is often made to pay for a man's sinful behaviour, anxieties surrounding flirtatious femininity reflect a fear that the flirtatious woman either threatens the innocence of the men she charms or exposes their immorality.

Since the label of flirt always relies to some extent on a judgement of an outsider, the works exist in a paradigm where flirtatious femininity and unstable masculinity are inextricably linked. Without the male gaze, the flirt figure would not exist in the same way, for the woman's behaviour would not be analysed and scrutinised in the manner necessary to

label her a 'flirt'. This is illustrated in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's utopian novel *Herland*, a mystical land ruled by an entirely female population. In a world made up only of females, there is no such thing as flirting. When Gilman introduces three men to the land, their attempts to introduce flirtatious play into the female society are met with amusement, if not disdain. When the hyper masculine Terry attempts to flirt with one of the women she refuses to engage with his tactics, be they compliments, gifts or provocative teasing, his 'approach of flattery she dismissed with laughter, gifts and such "attentions" we could not bring to bear, pathos and complaint of cruelty stirred only a reasoning inquiry' (53). *Herland* relentlessly mocks the masculine culture of interpreting female behaviour through the male gaze and makes the visiting men laughable as they see women running from their unwanted advances and believe them to be playing hard to get: '[t]he more coldly she denied him, the hotter his determination; he was not used to real refusal' (117). For many of the flirtatious characters I examine, their behaviour is only transgressive because of how it is interpreted and, often wilfully edited, by men around them. While they might flirt playfully, with no serious intent, if a male character begins to take this playful flirting seriously they risk gaining a costly reputation. It is the male response to flirtation which can transform a girl from a woman engaging in harmless girlish flirtation to being labelled as a hardened 'flirt'.

**The flirt as a threat to American mythology**

Though Richard Kaye's *The Flirt's Tragedy* draws on some American texts as well as British ones in his survey of the flirt figure, there are clearly some differences in the American flirt compared to her European sister which fall outside the scope of Kaye's work. The American flirt is a figure caught between several contradictions unique to specifically American cultural mythologies: the search for progress coupled with the fear of losing innocence, the presentation of the New World as more accepting than Old World Europe while housing

harsher prejudices and concerns about how to reconcile values of freedom and independence with strict moral codes. It is no surprise that the typical 'American girl' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a correspondingly contradictory character. Published in *The New York Times* in 1906, one journalist identifies the contrary aspects of the 'ideal' image of American femininity:

> The American girl is a most interesting contradiction. She is regarded as the world's greatest representative of feminine freedom, and yet, at the root of her character she is the most prudish of girls. She makes the best friend for a man, and yet his worst lover. She cannot deny that she is a flirt, and yet she is at heart hard and selfish. She will do the most unconventional things, and yet in no part of the world is etiquette more insisted on than in American society. ('The American Girl' 6)

The disparity between ideals and experience in American cultural mythology from this period is reflected in the contradictions in the ideal American girl. She is expected to be both liberal and prudish and to think independently while never straying from strict social codes which attempt to regulate any expressions of female power. The flirt figure explores the problem this *New York Times* writer identifies. In flitting between different female roles, the flirt is able to demonstrate the impossibility of such a contradictory ideal womanhood and embodies the problematic disjunction between America's image of itself as a liberal, modern nation, and its hysterical response to minute transgressions of women even hinting towards sexual desire.

The disconnection between the mirage of liberal America and the harsh social punishments placed on flirtatious (even accidentally flirtatious) characters is reflected in fiction. In *Daisy Miller,* Winterbourne tells Daisy that she should not act this way in Europe because 'flirting is a purely American custom' (179). This is an idea which was established in literature much earlier. For example, in Charlotte Lennox's *Life of Harriot Stuart* (1750), the

heroine, who is a brazen, even outrageous flirt according to English standards is shocked by the brash flirtatiousness of the girls she encounters in New York, describing how 'there is no place anywhere where the women labour so much to attract the eyes of a man' (45). While in Britain Harriot's behaviour is regarded as shocking, in the background of the New York girls who are so unashamedly flirtatious, Harriot seems mild mannered, even prudish. So why is it that the flirt figure is treated so harshly in American fiction when flirting is apparently a specifically American trait? Perhaps the instability and ambiguity of the flirt jars too much with the ideologies the nation wishes to preserve. The novels I discuss depict the struggle to reconcile a flirtatious girl whose purity is constantly ambiguous with ideals of nationhood which prize innocence above anything.

Mark Roydon Winchell argues that innocence is 'the one inescapable theme for American writers' (18). A nation born out of conflict and a murky history, the 'new world' vision hinges on disconnecting from an uncomfortable past and positioning America as a new Eden with a second chance at innocence. The flirt is a particularly problematic figure because she contradicts this vision by hinting at knowledge of the Fall. If, as Gail McDonald postulates, America is envisaged as 'a place of Edenic simplicity and youthful innocence' (43), the flirt can be regarded as a threatening figure to national identity. The two cherished values of the nation McDonald identifies, 'simplicity and innocence', are thrown into chaos by this character who embodies uncertainty and toys with the fragile line between innocence and experience.

The flirt figure destabilises the belief in innocence as an achievable or positive construct by exposing how aggressively women's freedom must be regulated in order to retain this Edenic myth. This idea of 'conscious innocence' forms the centre of my readings of *Daisy Miller* and *A Fair Barbarian* in Chapter Three, but echoes of this mythology are seen in many other texts. Retaining the vision of America as a second chance at Paradise is

contingent on a series of deceptions: that America is a land without history, that women cannot have sexual awareness without being fallen and that innocence is a state that can be consciously chosen in the first place. In the transitional period of American fiction, where Victorian ideals are slowly being eroded, the flirt is a figure who embodies the destabilisation of old values and challenges the contradictions of a nation which proclaims itself as a land of both freedom and innocence.

**Does the flirt always have to 'pay'?**

A question which recurs throughout my close readings is why the flirt figure is often presented as more concerning than more openly transgressive female characters. This is a complex question, and one which I will return to throughout this thesis. Yet the idea that subtle transgressions are more threatening to social order than major ones is not unique to these novels. In Lea Jacobs *Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film 1928-1942* (1991), she notes that unexpectedly the films most likely to be censored or edited were not those which depicted the most sexual or traditionally 'bad' women, but those which presented women whose morality was ambiguous. She writes that in censors eyes it was imperative that the audience took away the message that 'immorality is not justifiable, that society is not wrong in demanding certain standards of its women, and that the guilty woman, through realisation of her error, does not tempt other women in the audience to follow her course' (3). Susan Hegeman's research on Lorelei Lee in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* comes to a similar conclusion. While the book is challenging because of the moral ambiguity of the heroine, and the doubtfulness of her awareness of sexuality, the film version is much more straightforward because it 'presents sexuality as a literally visible and therefore relatively containable problem' (548). While the Lorelei of the film might easily be cured of her sexual desires, and ultimately be contained within a traditional marriage plot, the Lorelei of the book undermines

this simplistic moral redemption because we never learn how much she is conscious of the social transgressions she commits in the first place. Jacob and Hegeman's research can offer a helpful start to answering why the flirt is regarded as so problematic in a literary paradigm where the much more morally dubious female characters—such as the femme fatale, prostitute and illegitimate mother—were already ubiquitous. Because flirtatious femininity, unlike fallen femininity, is not marked as unquestionably bad, it could be seen to be sanctioning, even encouraging similar female behaviour.

One way in which the threat of influence is dealt with by authors in this period is to include directly didactic elements to their texts which prompt female readers away from copying the behaviour of flirtatious heroines. This direct didacticism is most heavily apparent in children's literature, specifically novels aimed at girls. Anne Scott Macleod argues that there is a clear pattern of social anxieties being translated into moral messages in American girls' fiction in this period, stressing the connection 'between an anxious, unsettled society and a didactic, moralizing literature for children' (*American Childhood* 97). In these intensely didactic stories, there are often two types of 'flirts': the good girl who temporarily strays into bad behaviour and then quickly repents for it, or the persistent flirt who refuses to alter her behaviour and then is punished accordingly. Of the first type are characters like Meg March in *Little Women* who tries out flirtatious behaviour at a party but is quickly led to realise that her behaviour is wrong and promises not to behave in such a way again (146). Of the second type are characters like Lily Ludlow in Amanda Douglas' *Hannah Ann* (1897) who refuses to see the error of her ways. Though Lily receives transient attention for her reputation as a girl who is 'capital to flirt with' (221), ultimately she is socially rejected for her capricious behaviour and exits the narrative with the damning declaration from a previous admirer that she is an irredeemable 'flirt pure and simple . . . There is no use in our wasting sympathies upon her' (226). The discussion of how didactic girls' fiction is used to deter readers from

becoming flirts makes up the second chapter of this thesis. While most of my discussion centres on how the flirt's demonisation in American fiction provides a commentary on the social structures which are so quick to judge and punish transgressive femininity, this chapter will detail how texts themselves contribute to the presentation of the flirt as a dangerous figure.

While not all of the texts this thesis addresses hold such overtly moralistic messages, it becomes clear that even without direct didactic intent, how the flirt is depicted, and specifically the fate she meets, reveals an underlying pressure for the problem of the flirt's ambiguity to be resolved. While nineteenth-century girls' fiction often makes it clear what exactly constitutes flirtatious behaviour and therefore can more directly warn against it, much of the social concern surrounding the flirt figure is informed by the anxiety that socially encouraged flirting is hard to differentiate from flirting which is considered unacceptable. Ironically many of the female figures that eventually are condemned for flirting too much are initially instructed to flirt by the same society which later condemns them. Even in the overtly didactic texts like *Little Women,* flirting is not universally criticised. When Jo March is declared rude at a party for her unladylike behaviour, Amy tells her that she must '[g]ossip as other girls do, and be interested in dress and flirtations and whatever nonsense comes up' (427). Here, flirtatiousness is not only accepted but required as part of female decorum. Yet, while Jo must learn to flirt more, Amy and Meg must learn to flirt less in order that they remain, as their mother says, 'love-worthy' (152). The difficulty in navigating the line between flirting enough and flirting too much echoes the cultural anxieties about the 'flirt' as a figure who exists on blurred lines between purity and impurity and might be in danger of fully aligning with the latter.

Echoing Adam Phillips' suggestion that to flirt 'is fine but to be a flirt is not' (xvii), the fate of the flirt often depends on whether she is willing, or able to, renounce her flirtatious

behaviour in time for her to be redeemed. Even if flirting is not implicitly bad, there is anxiety that a woman who flirts might develop into something worse: a vamp, an adulterer, an illegitimate mother or a prostitute. As an article published in 1920 in *The Evening World* warns: '[t]here's as much difference between a flapper and a vamp as there is between an Easter egg and a hard-boiled one. But don't overlook the fact that today's Easter Egg can be tomorrow's breakfast with only a little alteration' ('Those Fluttering Flappers' 1). This anxiety that a rebellious woman might easily become an immoral one is reflective of the fears which surround the flirt figures in this period of American literature. A girl who flirts might be harmless and innocent but given how closely she walks the line between good and bad female behaviour, it would take only a 'little alteration' for her to cross it.

If flirting without an end is bad, then the 'flirt' must in some way be made to pay for her behaviour. This idea of payment runs through this thesis. The female characters in nineteenth-century girls' fiction who refuse to give up flirting are banished from their narratives. Daisy Miller and Lily Bart die. Even the apparently liberated heroines of nineteen-twenties fiction are made to pay for their behaviour in some way, whether through personal trauma or a loveless marriage. This becomes especially jarring when, over time, more openly transgressive female character types begin to thrive and prosper. Carrie Meeber in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie,* both survives and finds economic success despite engaging in much worse behaviour than, say, Lily Bart, who dies for her social transgressions five years later. Undine Spragg in *The Custom of the Country* is able to transparently use strategies of seduction to manipulate men in 1913, while Alice Adams is condemned for much less in 1921. The flirt figure struggles to escape the shadow of the fallen woman, whose legacy weighs heavy on the minds of the societies judging flirtatious female behaviour and which seem hesitant to break with tradition that transgressive femininity should be punished, especially if it is seen to threaten gender and moral norms. Ultimately the subversive power of the flirt is always

curtailed. Like the trope in the fallen woman narrative where sexualised femininity is punished with death and disease, the flirt figure is always censored in some way. Of all the texts this thesis will address, none of the flirtatious heroines are able to finish their narratives as 'flirts'. Daisy Miller and Lily Bart die. Meg March, Octavia Bassett, Lorelei Lee and Dorothy Shaw are married off, their flirtatious charms redirected into a socially sanctioned relationship. Alice Adams and Lady Brett Ashley have moments of self-discovery where they renounce the behaviour which has gained them their poor reputations. Though the level to which the flirt is sanctioned varies between the texts, none are left in the undecided state that they start in. One way or another all the flirtatious figures are rid of their interpretative instability and consequently their ability to cause social disruption.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Learning how not to Flirt: Anti-flirting messages in American Girls' Fiction.

> There is something inexpressibly sweet about little girls. Lovely, pure, innocent, ingenuous, unsuspecting, full of kindness to brothers, babies, and everything. They are sweet little human flowers, diamond dewdrops in the breath of morn. What a pity they should ever become women, flirts, and heartless coquettes!
>
> ('Little Girls' 250)

Isn't it a shame that innocent girls turn into flirts? This is the question posited by *Godey's Lady's Book* in 1856. It is a question which reflects the deep-rooted anxiety about female flirtatiousness nearing the end of the nineteenth century, specifically about how women must grow up. Though the article reveals a cultural desire to keep women in a perpetual state of childhood by lamenting the fact that girls must grow up into women at all, it especially bemoans those innocent girls who grow up to be socially disruptive flirts and coquettes. How, the writer asks, can the innocent American girl be prevented from growing up wrong?

The answer to this question can be seen in the emergence of didactic girls' fiction in the late nineteenth century, which focused on warning female readers against flirtatious behaviour. To dedicate a chapter to children's literature within a thesis about flirts might seem an unusual choice. Yet the overtly didactic nature of these texts offers a clear reflection of cultural anxieties concerning the 'flirt' in this period of American history. Girls' fiction from this period is full of flirt figures who are rebuked, punished and forced to mature so that by the time they are adults, they have shed this dangerous label. For want of space I have

chosen to focus primarily on just three texts: Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did at School* (1873) and Elizabeth Weston Timlow's *A Nest of Girls* (1901). Yet these are by no means the only girls' books in which lessons against flirtatious behaviour feature heavily. Works like Louisa May Alcott's *An Old Fashioned Girl* (1869), Elizabeth Champney's *The Vassar Girls* series (1883 -1892), Isabella Alden's *Chautauqua Girls* series (1876-1913) and Amanda Douglas' *Little Girl in Old New York or Hannah Ann* (1897), are just a few more of the many examples of nineteenth-century girls' books to feature warnings against flirtatiousness.

**Reading the 'Flirt' in Didactic Fiction**

While the following chapters will explore how the flirtatious heroine is used to challenge and criticise the social hysteria directed against her, my readings of girls' fiction shows the other side of this discussion: the moments where texts themselves add to the social discourse that a flirtatious woman is a dangerous one. Although some of the heroines I will go on to discuss were poorly received on publication, it is clear that their authors are not condemning their behaviour. Henry James, for example, quickly jumped to Daisy Miller's defence when criticism of her became too harsh.[11] In contrast, when looking at novels written specifically for children, it is a different story entirely. Instead of defending flirtatiousness as a harmless behaviour, girls' fiction from this period tends to condemn it, and, through a series of devices works to sway readers away from this problematic adult behaviour. Unpacking how flirtatious girls are treated in children's fiction highlights underlying anxieties about transgressive femininity that I will revisit throughout this thesis: the fear of women's potential for corruption, the tension between innocence and freedom and the anxiety that

[11] Not only did James clarify in a letter that Daisy was supposed to be read as innocent (*Henry James: Selected letters* 170), he went so far as to edit *Daisy Miller* for a revised publication released in 1909 which makes Daisy's innocence much more obvious.

flirtatious women will subvert patriarchal power structures and undermine traditional values of wifedom and motherhood.

The later part of the nineteenth century marked the emergence of the first didactic fiction specifically aimed at girls. Prior to 1860, children's books tended not to be aimed at either boys or girls in particular. Rather these stories had heavily religious moral lessons designed to instruct with little thought given to entertainment. As Anne MacLeod writes, these stories were 'literarily very limited — narrow, stilted, and wholly given over to didacticism' (*A Moral Tale* 10). Two shifts occurred around 1860: first, the attempts of children's authors to couch moral lessons in more readable stories, and second, the split of literature into boys' and girls' fiction.[12] Once American children's literature divided into boys' books and girls' books, anti-flirting messages began to appear. As girls' literature developed as a distinct genre, this presented the opportunity for writers to shape the moral principles of the readers. As Peter Stoneley explains, one of the primary motives for the writing of fiction for girls 'was that it could help to create the very girl that it was ostensibly about' (10). While it is hard to find a single girls' book which does not allude to flirting as a moral problem, there is no similar message in boys' books from the same time. While Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer go off on adventures, heroines from girls' books learn how to conquer not the outside world but their own moral failings.

The vice of flirtatiousness is one moral failing which must be tamed in order for a girl to develop into a worthy American woman. Through a number of narrative devices, girls' texts direct their young female audiences away from behaviour which is seen as flirtatious, warn them about the perils of becoming known as a 'flirt' and offer them alternative models

[12] While some critics like Beverly Lyon Clark have pinned the beginning of girls' fiction on Alcott's *Little Women* (*Kiddie Lit* 105), others such as Amy Pattee (72), and Susan Ang (51) have refrained from selecting such a specific starting point. In either case the critical consensus points to the latter half of the nineteenth century as the period where American children's literature divides into gender specific genres and with it the start of didactic messages aimed at cultivating specific gendered characteristics and ideals.

of female behaviour, which they promise will prove more fruitful and rewarding than the shallow gains of female wiles. Heightening the cultural anxiety concerning flirtatious behaviour is the widespread belief that flirting is a natural feminine instinct, therefore making flirtatiousness a dangerous vice even for the otherwise virtuous girl. In Alcott's *An Old Fashioned Girl*, her second girls' novel written after *Little Women,* heroine Polly muses on how terrible it is to be inflicted with a natural tendency to flirt:

> What wicked creatures we are! some of us at least. I wonder why such a love of conquest was put into us? Mother says a great deal of it is owing to bad education nowadays, but some girls seem born for the express purpose of making trouble and would manage to do it if they lived in a howling wilderness. I'm afraid I've got a spice of it, and if I had the chance, should be as bad as any of them. (294)

When Polly yields to the temptation to flirt, even just once, she discovers the addictive thrill of power it lends her, and she is ashamed to realise that she shares the 'love of conquest' (294). Though Polly proves that she is naturally 'good' in many ways (she is never angry, jealous or selfish like her cousins), even an otherwise highly moral character finds that she shares a moral weakness when it comes to flirting. Her speech here ignores her Mother's suggestion that flirtatiousness is only a product of 'nowadays', instead suggesting that a love of flirting is an innate part of womanhood, one which she must try and conquer.

More worrying still is the concern that flirtatiousness is such an insidious evil that girls slip into bad behaviour without even realising it. For example, in Isabella MacDonald Alden's *The Chautauqua Girls at Home* (1873),[13] the heroine, Flossy, is taught a lesson when she allows an interested suitor, Col. Baker, to flirt with her, without any idea of marrying

[13] The *Chautauqua Girls* series, which consists of ten novels penned between 1876 and 1913, is based on the Chautauqua movement, an education movement which spread through late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century America, beginning in 1874 as a retreat for church workers and Sunday school teachers. For more information see Honey Hamilton's chapter 'Learning to be an Angel' in *Turning the Pages of American Girlhood.*

him. When Flossy is accused of having flirted with (and then rejected) Baker, she is accused of mistreating him. Though Flossy's flirtations with him seem dubious (she never actively encourages him, and their time together is limited to time spent at church), the narrator makes clear that the reader is to side against Flossy too:

> With what satisfaction had she allowed her name to be coupled familiarly with that of Col. Baker; how much she had enjoyed his exclusive attentions; not that she really and heartily liked him, with a liking that made her willing to think of him as belonging to her forever; she had chosen, rather, not to allow herself to think of any such time; she had contented herself with saying that she was too young to think of such things; that she was not obliged to settle that question till the time came. But, mind you, all the time she chose to allow, and enjoy, and encourage by her smiles and her evident pleasure in them, very special attentions, that gave other people liberty to speak of them almost as one. To call it by a very plain name, which Flossy hated, and which made her cheek glow as she forced herself to say it of herself, she had been flirting with Col. Baker. It isn't a nice word; I don't wonder that she hated it. Yet so long as young ladies continue to be guilty of the sort of conduct that can only be described by that unpleasant and coarse sounding word, I am afraid it will be used. (395-396)

Maria Nikolajeva writes that narrator intrusion is a common device in didactic children's fiction, where narrators 'explain every reason for the characters' behaviour, condemning their faults and mistakes, and thus addresses the reader in comments, explanations, and exhortations, allowing no ambiguity' (182). While a reader of the novel might have sympathy for Flossy, as Nikolajeva suggests, the use of narrator intrusion allows the work to direct the reader response to Flossy's behaviour. Ignoring Flossy's excuses of youth, inexperience or naivety, the narrator brings the blame for Col. Baker's upset squarely on her and suggests that

the reader should judge her similarly. It is only when Flossy admits that 'she had brought it on herself' and owns that she has flirted, that she might be forgiven (396). As Judith Rowbotham points out, children's fiction, particularly of a religious nature, made apparent that it was not enough for girls to avoid knowingly flirting, they must also 'guard against slipping into encouraging innocent admiration too far' (50). Thus, even if Flossy did not actively flirt with Col. Baker, the novel is happy to condemn her for willingness to passively accept his attention.

Like the advice book for adults, girls' fiction was 'created, in part, as responses to the fear of female "disorder" and its dangers to the family, society and the nation' (Vallone 122). By shaping the principles of young readers, the American juvenile novel could limit the threat of this 'disorder'. At the root of many anti-flirtation messages in girls' novels is the fear of female unproductivity as destabilising to society. If the gift of female charm and the desire 'to conquest' (294), as Alcott's Polly calls it, is redirected from the worthy pursuit of wifedom and motherhood to flirting for its own sake, with no thought of productivity other than to create enjoyment or power, then this would be threatening to traditional social and family structures. As Susan Ang writes, novels 'for girls were thus being written with the intention of strengthening the threatened social order, preaching self-sacrifice, anti-individualism and voluntary enclosure within the home and submission to the role outlined for women of wife-and-mother' (66). While a child might be able to flirt without great social consequence, for her to carry this behaviour into adulthood would be much more serious. Thus girls' fiction rewards the girls who learn to curb their desire to flirt, punishes those who fail to stop, discourages flirting by making it ridiculous, offers distraction in the form of more worthy activities and aligns flirting with foolishness in order that it might deter young readers from trying it.

It is important to point out that warnings against flirtatiousness in children's literature are not limited only to American fiction. Judith Rowbotham points out that several British girls' stories prior to 1900 warn girls about the dangers of flirting, which she writes was 'condemned as unfair, deceitful and impious (marriage was, after all, a Christian sacrament) and ultimately, a sure path to misery for the flirt' (50). Citing *Olive Roscoe*, by E. Everett Green, she points out that the flirtatious sister, Pearl Roscoe, is the only one of the sisters who is left as a spinster; a just punishment, it is implied, for being a careless flirt (50). Yet there is something specifically American about the persistence with which anti-flirtation messages appear. The moral judgement which *Olive Roscoe* slips in as a minor subplot becomes the major event in comparable American stories. In *What Katy Did at School*, Katy's attempts to rid the other schoolgirls of their flirtatious habits and her false accusation as a 'flirt' herself is the narrative's central conflict. Similarly, the 'flirting plot' takes centre stage in *A Nest of Girls* and it is only once the main culprit, Romelia, has been banished entirely that equilibrium can be restored. While the dislike of flirting and the condemnation of girls deemed to be 'flirts' is apparent in literature from both sides of the Atlantic in the late nineteenth century, the need to warn girls not to be flirts is given much greater priority in American fiction.

The first reason that young girls in American children's books are more often confronted with lessons against flirtation is that they are in a better position to flirt than their British counterparts. Warnings against flirting are more necessary in American girls' books than British girls' books of the same time because American girls are freer, more independent, less closely guarded by a parent or school teacher and thus more likely to interact with boys. Gillian Avery writes that American girls in fiction are given much more independence than English girls ('Home and Family' 37). Citing the March girls in *Little Women* and Rose-Red in *What Katy Did at School*, she argues that while traits of

independence, spiritedness, headstrongness and even slight mischief were considered normal and healthy in the American girl, 'on English soil they would seem dangerously bold' ('Home and Family' 38). This freedom to roam brings opportunities for contact with the opposite sex. The adoption of Laurie into the sister group in *Little Women,* for example, was responded to with surprise by some English reviewers, who took issue with the way in which the girls interact with a young man entirely unchaperoned (Avery, *Behold the Child,* 171). Since they are often free to travel and attend events without a guardian, Meg and Amy March both flirt with men that Marmee has deemed unsuitable for them; and though they are later rebuked for it, the fact remains that their relative freedom brings them into situations where flirting is a tempting option, and they have no chaperone to stop them.

If the American girl is afforded more freedoms which might bring her into situations where she could flirt, it is imperative that she is taught why she should not succumb to it. In *What Katy Did at School* and *A Nest of Girls,* for example, the need to find a way to interact with boys without flirting is a difficult challenge for the school girls. In British school stories of the same period this is simply not an issue because, as Avery points out, there are simply no boys to come into contact with (169). As Macleod writes, American children's fiction seeks to strengthen girls' moral codes so that they might be able to safely enjoy their independence without danger of corruption, for 'only then, could American society live with its freedoms without descending into social anarchy' (*American Childhood,* 97). If young girls are to enjoy the benefits of exploring unchaperoned and interacting with the opposite sex, then they must be carefully instructed of the moral perils of flirting, so that they do not use their freedom negatively.

Jenny Robinson writes that **'**[a]s a 'youthful' nation, America was as preoccupied with questions of national identity as the young girl protagonists were preoccupied with personal identity' (100). Not only do children's books direct girls away from becoming flirts,

they also promote an American girl to the world who exemplifies the balance between freedom and good behaviour. As I will discuss in detail in Chapter Three, flirtatious American heroines were often a sore point for Americans who believed that they were giving the wrong impression to European readers. The titular heroine of Henry James' *Daisy Miller*, for example, received a backlash for presenting 'the American girl abroad in anything but a pleasing light' with her flirtatious, uncultivated behaviour ('Henry James's *Daisy Miller*' 609). Daisy Miller's failure to promote a good version of American femininity in Europe is countered by many girls' novels from this period which gained popularity on both sides of the Atlantic. One example is Champney's *Three Vassar Girls Abroad* (1882), where three young women travel the world, largely unchaperoned, but retaining their purity and moral superiority over the men who try and engage them in flirtatious banter. When a young Frenchman tries to charm one of the girls, she rejects his advances and discusses him with disdain to her friends: 'I suppose he thought all American girls were like Daisy Miller' (40). In firmly refusing to flirt back with the gentleman, she both voices the concern that American girls' freedom to move about unchaperoned has given them the reputation of 'flirts' (like Daisy Miller), while correcting this misrepresentation. The only thing which irks her is that the encounter seems to support the notion 'that girls should not go out without a chaperone' (42). Her friend Maud, however, reassures her about their lack of a chaperone. If, as she has done, the girls firmly reject any advances from men, then their moral rigidity will prove protection enough from undesirable interactions with men: '[w]hich proves to my mind that well-conducted, earnest American girls do not need a chaperone' (43). In order to benefit from the freedoms afforded to them, the Vassar girls must prove their moral fortitude when it comes to men and find a space between the freedom to be independent and the rigid moral responsibility that comes with this independence.

While Flossy's flirtation with Col. Baker leads her to be seen as an undesirable American girl until she changes her ways, the Vassar girls' refusal to conform to the Daisy Miller stereotype positively elevates them.[14] As Peter Stoneley writes, the American girl, in her uncertain position between childhood and adulthood 'represents both the possibility of coherence (of "ensemble") and the threat of incoherence' because she is relied on to pass on traditional American values to the next generation (2). Flossy's flirtatiousness (however inadvertent) thwarts the social assumption that she is on a linear path to wife and motherhood and thus threatens incoherence. The Vassar girls, however, promise coherence. The fear that the innocent American Girl will grow up into a socially anarchical flirt reflects an anxiety deeper than the individual and speaks of the societal desire to continue stability in terms of gender roles, structures of power and cultural mythologies. Thus didactic girls' fiction tries to manage these anxieties by promoting an ideal vision of the American girl who, like the Vassar girls, learns to avoid the temptations of flirtatious behaviour and grows up into a morally stable and unthreatening woman: the ideal woman, in other words, to raise the next generation of Americans. In all three of the works this chapter will examine in closer detail, the message to young female readers is similar: flirtatiousness might bring shallow and transient benefits, but an honourable and worthy American girl will learn to conquer her moral failings and develop her character so that she will grow up to be a proper American woman. She must, in other words, learn not to be a flirt.

### *Little Women*

*Little Women*, published in 1868, is frequently hailed the first American novel written specifically for girls. One of the few girls' novels to enter into the literary canon, there is a

[14] The Vassar Girls series is not the only girls' book to speak scathingly of *Daisy Miller*. In Alcott's short story 'Poppies and Wheat', published in *Garland for Girls* (1887), flirtatious American girls are regarded by the observer with suspicion: 'Daisy Millers, I fear' (138).

wealth of critical literature on Alcott's novels which far eclipses all the other girls' books I will discuss. Yet, despite the wealth of analysis on *Little Women,* nothing has been written specifically on the concerns about flirtatiousness in the text, although issues around flirting come up at several points in the novel. This is, in part, because criticism of *Little Women* has always been lopsided. Often the tomboyish and rebellious Jo March is considered the only March girl worthy of proper attention. Anne Boyd Rioux writes that Jo 'has always been considered the most important of the March sisters' (193), while Elizabeth Lennox Kesser attributes 'the vitality of the novel' solely to Jo, calling her the novel's one true 'heroine' (15). When Grace Ann Hovet tried to refocus critical discussion on Amy she described how difficult it is 'to counter the tradition of Jo being the hero/ine' (58). While feisty Jo gains the majority of critical concern, the second sister to attract analysis is Jo's opposite, the shadowy invalid Beth, whose perfect nature, incorruptible innocence and early death position her as an archetypal angel of the house, so pure that she can never grow up. Yet it is the often sidelined sisters, Meg and Amy, who are of interest to this study. Unlike Beth, who is too shy to flirt, or Jo, who refuses to do something so girlish, Meg and Amy both struggle to resist the temptation to flirt and must learn to control this vice before they reach adulthood.

Rioux writes that Meg and Amy 'represent two paths towards conventional womanhood, Beth and Jo are in many ways their opposites and, as a result, much more interesting' (194). While it is the March girls who try and refuse womanhood who have been given critical attention, it is precisely Meg and Amy's willingness to enter womanhood which leaves them vulnerable to growing up badly. While the narrative might push Jo towards becoming a woman, there is little concern about what kind of woman she might grow up to be. The only time Jo even comes close to flirting is in jest, when, as Roberta Seelinger Trites points out, she acts the role of a flirt to spite Amy on one of their visits (140). In reality she is always more comfortable being one of the boys than trying to entice them. If the concern for

Jo is that she will not become a woman at all, then for Meg and Amy their willingness to become women opens up a different concern: what if they grow up to become the wrong sort of women? What if these virtuous little women grow up to be manipulative flirts?

Karen Hollinger and Teresa Winterhalter write that 'Alcott's *Little Women* is first and foremost a work of moral instruction for nineteenth-century girls' (177). The anxiety about the women the four March girls will grow up to be informs the structure of the book, the first half of which is largely episodic. The girls, either individually or as a group, learn to tackle aspects of their character and move closer towards their goal of becoming little women their father, and by extension, patriarchal society, will be proud of. Gail Schmunk Murray suggests that what differentiates *Little Women* from earlier morally instructive fiction is that rather than beginning the novel as perfect models of feminine virtue, the four March sisters are able to make mistakes as they learn the boundaries and expectations of American womanhood (64). Marmee, who acts as the family's moral heart,[15] does not pre-emptively correct her daughters' behaviour but allows them to discover, and therefore learn to conquer, their own moral failings. For both Meg and Amy, their tendency to flirt is marked as a character flaw which must be addressed. Compared to Flossy in *The Chautauqua Girls at Home*, however, Alcott's treatment of flirtatiousness is much more sympathetic.

While many critics have discussed the moral teachings in *Little Women*, none have fully addressed the teachings against flirtatiousness, an oversight given that the vice of flirtatiousness is treated very differently to other 'bad' female behaviour in the novel. Though it is made clear in the course of the novel that flirtatiousness is a negative characteristic for a girl wanting to develop into a moral young woman, the novel equally acknowledges that denouncing flirtatiousness is to give up the power it affords, which, given

[15] Anne K. Phillips and Greg Eiselein describe Marmee as 'the adolescents' guiding force' (160), while Anne Scott MacLeod describes her as 'the controlling ethical and emotional force' (*American Childhood* 216).

women's limited social power in this period, is no easy thing. Crucially, Meg and Amy are not demonised or harshly punished for their occasional attempts at flirtation. This differs from many of the other vices the girls exhibit, which result in much more immediate (and often severe) consequences. For example, Judith Fetterley points out that minor transgressions of the four main female characters often result in catastrophic results. Amy's near-death experience of falling through ice is linked directly to Jo failing to control her temper, while, as Fetterley says '[a]n even more traumatic lesson is administered to Jo' (39), when, failing to live up to her promise to visit the nearby Hummel family, Beth must go instead and catches Scarlet Fever, prompting her steady decline and ultimate death. Whereas vices like anger and selfishness are always marked as bad, and therefore always produce weighty consequences, flirtatiousness is seen as a more understandable character trait, and therefore does not precipitate such severe and immediate repercussions. Yet the novel still makes it very clear that the girls must shed this unladylike behaviour before they go too far, finding a balance between sympathy for Meg and Amy's temptation to flirt and disapproval when they indulge in it.

As the oldest March sister, Meg is the first to experience the temptation of flirtation. This happens when she spends two weeks outside the family home with her fashionable society friends, the Moffats. Lynne Vallone characterises adolescence as a perilous time for girls, because 'it is in girlhood that the moral values instilled in children are tested' (2). As girls develop a sense of romantic awareness and step away from the constant parental guidance of childhood, they must prove that they are able to resist the adult temptations that begin to come their way. Meg's fortnight spent away from the March family home acts as a test of her character, as she temporarily leaves the protection of the family and struggles to hold to values of modesty and innocence when left to fend for herself. Embarrassed by her lack of finery and craving the same attention of young men that her friends receive, Meg

allows herself to be dressed up like a 'doll' (146), and adopts an adult persona for one of the Moffat girls' parties, for the first time presenting herself as a sexual woman ready for male attention.

Though Meg identifies her own main vice as envy and suggests that her decision to dress up is driven only by material desire, several critics have identified that there is also a sexual desire running through this. Elizabeth Lennox Keyser writes that her dressed up night 'transforms Meg from the "little girl" she professes to be into an object of erotic desire' (48), and Madelon Bedell writes that Meg 'is not only succumbing to the lure of false, artificial fashion as the moral of the surface story would have it; she is also yielding to the desire to display her sexuality, the sexuality of a young girl on the edge of womanhood' (xviii). Her new outfit is not only expensive and elaborate but emphasises her adult form, 'so tight she could hardly breathe and so low in the neck that modest Meg blushed at herself in the mirror' (140). This contrasts starkly with the dress Marmee packs for her, which is a picture of innocence—white, unembellished and modestly cut. In rejecting the white dress, Meg not only gives in to envy, but to the desire to present herself as a beautiful object in the same way that the other girls do. Dressed in her new garb, Meg is awakened to the power she can hold over men by presenting herself as a sexual prize to be won, and, just as she cannot resist the temptation to make herself beautiful, she cannot resist the attentions of the men around her 'who said all manner of foolish but agreeable things to her' (141). For the first time in her life she gives in to flirting. Soon Meg is in the midst of the male attention 'flirting her fan and laughing at the feeble jokes of a young gentleman who tried to be witty' (142).

Laurie's arrival at the party represents an interruption from home, a reminder of the values that Meg has been taught and then have been tested away from maternal protection. She sees him 'staring at her with undisguised surprise, and disapproval also, she thought, for though he bowed and smiled, yet something in his honest eyes made her blush and wish she

had her old dress on' (142). With Laurie's disapproval, Meg quickly realises she has behaved badly and promises him that she will 'fess up' to Marmee as soon as she is home (144). Meanwhile, Laurie leaves her 'drinking champagne with Ned and his friend Fisher, who were behaving like a pair of fools' (146). MacLeod writes that children's literature often allows the heroine to try out bad behaviour to allow her to act as an example to young readers when she realises the errors of her ways and turns back to the path of virtuous womanhood. Meg's behaviour at the dance is an example of this, as she 'turns away, temporarily, from the right values towards the wrong' (*American Childhood* 55). Marmee's lecture functions as a moral instruction not only to Meg, but to young readers. When Meg tells her that she could not help but enjoy the attention and praise of the men at the dance, Marmee is understanding of her daughter's desire to please, telling her that this is 'perfectly natural, and quite harmless, if the liking does not become a passion and lead one to do foolish or unmaidenly things' (150).

Marmee's reaction to Meg's confession is much more sympathetic than Flossy's family in *The Chauquatua Girls.* Marmee does not characterise Meg's desire for attention as wicked but warns her that while her desire for male attention is natural, to gain it through flirting or other unladylike behaviour is a dangerous path to take. The idea of flirting as unwomanly is repeated again when Meg asks her if poor girls will ever have the chance to marry 'unless they put themselves forward', to which Marmee replies that it would better for her daughters to be 'old maids' than 'unmaidenly girls, running about to find husbands' (152). Though Marmee understands her daughter's enjoyment of the attention flirting gains her, she warns her that to be known as a girl 'running about' after men is a highly undesirable label.

While Meg is able to act like a flirt on this occasion without a lasting negative effect on her character, Marmee warns her daughter that occasional silliness can turn into a fixed bad character if she is not careful to control it. Meg's flirtatious behaviour may be excused so

long as it is seen as a single incident, and not as part of a trajectory to her becoming an established 'flirt'. Part of the reason she is so quickly excused is that she is still seen as a child. Even the girls who dress her up tell her that it is obvious that 'she isn't out yet' (138). Unlike the debutantes at the party, Meg is still considered too young to seriously be part of the marriage market, and thus too young to be held entirely accountable for her behaviour. Yet, when she indulges in flirting and self-commodification at the dance, she is awakened, for the first time, to the realities of the marriage market, even though innocently raised as she is, she does not immediately realise this. She is upset that her primping and her coquettishness stirs gossip, and when she overhears some of this gossip that Marmee is trying to marry her off to Laurie (and his fortune), a 'queer feeling' is stirred inside her (142). Though she tries to shake off these suggestions, telling herself the gossipers are '[s]illy creatures, to put such thoughts into my head' (142), she cannot help but think of it as she approaches Laurie. For the first time, she realises her value as a beautiful single woman and the possibility that self-objectification, charm and manipulation could gain her a rich match. She is scared that this knowledge has corrupted her innocence and tries to minimise the seriousness of her accidental awakening to adulthood. Meg stresses to the girls that she is too young to be taken seriously as a romantic partner. When they tease her about Laurie, she replies 'mother and old Mr. Laurence are friends, you know, so it is quite natural that we children should play together' (138). This reinforces her status as a child, shielding her from the adult realities of her flirtatious play and reducing the moral implications of indulging temporarily in this 'foolish' behaviour.

Meg's flirtatiousness can be forgiven because it is apparent that it is a singular instance rather than a set character trait, which Meg herself makes clear when she tries to distance herself from her own behaviour by calling herself a 'doll' (146). When Laurie interrupts her flirting with two young men who are 'acting like fools' with her, Meg responds

by dissociating her authentic self from the character she is playing for the one night only, telling him 'I'm not Meg tonight, I'm "a doll" who does all sorts of crazy things' (146). She is very clear that this is not a permanent role she is taking on and reduces the seriousness of her transgression by claiming that she is inhabiting the role of the flirt in play. Imperatively, she learns from her mistakes. Meg's shame at her behaviour and her sincere response to Marmee's lecture means that the next time she is brought into contact with one of the men she teased at the dance, Ned, he is disappointed by her refusal to flirt with him: 'Ned was offended and turned to Sallie for consolation, saying to her rather pettishly, "There isn't a bit of flirt in that girl, is there?"' (215).

Yet Ned might be wrong, there still is a hint of flirt in Meg. For while Meg vows to give up flirtatiousness after her experiment with it at Sally Moffat's party, she is tempted once again a year later. When John, Laurie's tutor and neighbour to the March family, proposes to Meg, she is suddenly overcome by the desire to flirt with his affections:

> His tone was properly beseeching, but stealing a shy look at him, Meg saw that his eyes were merry as well as tender, and that he wore the satisfied smile of one who had no doubt of his success. This nettled her. Annie Moffat's foolish lessons in coquetry came into her mind, and the love of power, which sleeps in the bosoms of the best of little women, woke up all of a sudden and took possession of her. She felt excited and strange, and not knowing what else to do, followed a capricious impulse, and, withdrawing her hands, said petulantly, "I don't choose. Please go away and let me be!" (358)

For the second time in the novel, Meg is swept up in the thrill of power she gains by flirting. The urge to act coquettishly rises so strongly within her that it is as if she has no control of it, her instinct described like a creature ready to 'take possession of her'. Without fully knowing why, she finds herself rejecting John though she wants to accept him. Though Meg has

learned to temper her flirtatiousness, this does not mean that she is rid of it entirely. With John she fulfils Laurie's prophecy that girls are 'queer' creatures, for they seem to 'say no when they mean yes, and drive a man out of his wits just for the fun of it' (384). Yet it is not 'just for the fun of it' that Meg acts capriciously with John, for accepting his proposal is to end her power over him. Keyser suggests that Meg's flirtatiousness can be read as her reluctance to compromise on her sense of self, when she knows that marriage will shackle her in social constraints specific to the wife and mother: 'it is possible to view Meg's reluctance, however frivolous and ineffectual, as more than coquetry. She may well sense that she, like her female family in the preceding chapter, is poised on a pinnacle of self-fulfillment from which acceptance of John Brooke's proposal would constitute a fall' (66). Just as flirting at the dance gave Meg the thrill of control where she could make the boys do as she pleased, teasing John allows her power over him while accepting his proposal is to accept his power over her. While the narrative acknowledges that flirting gives a fleeting, exciting power to girls, it is made clear that it is the lesser path to choose. After some advice from John where he tells her 'don't play with me Meg' (358), Meg reconsiders and accepts his proposal. In giving up her superficial flirtatious power, Meg is rewarded with what is suggested to be a woman's higher calling: 'Meg learned, that a woman's happiest kingdom is home, her highest honor the art of ruling it not as a queen, but as a wise wife and mother' (633).

Rioux points out that Meg's enjoyment of this temporary power over John is read harshly even by modern readers, explaining that her students have been critical of Meg's 'ploy' to toy with John's emotions (192). Given that Meg's last attempt at flirting might constitute one last chance for independence, it is interesting that the same modern readers who might admire Jo's attempts to gain power through writing or tomboyishness, are so critical of Meg's attempts to do the same through the more traditionally girlish means of

flirting. Even modern readers of *Little Women* point to female flirtatiousness as a 'bad' behaviour.

While Meg's moment of fault might be so minor that she may quickly be forgiven, this is less true of Amy March. More than a century after *Little Women* was written, critics continue to write Amy off as the unlikeable March sister, citing her flirtatiousness as part of the reason. Madelon Bedell says that Amy betters Jo in her search for independence, 'Fashion-conscious, elegant little flirt though she is' (xvii), clearly suggesting that Amy's flirtatiousness is lesser than Jo's refusal to flirt. Meanwhile, Grace Ann Hovet suggests that Amy has been disregarded by critics 'for being vain, mercenary, flirtatious, fashion conscious, overly ambitious, and self serving' and that readers cannot forgive her for 'flirting with the wealthy Fred Vaughn' (58). However, Hovet argues that this dislike of Amy's traditionally 'girlish' flaws, such as her tendency to flirt, has resulted in readers missing the surprising strength of her character (58). Both within the novel and in the critical approaches to it, female flirtatiousness is seen as a transgressive and problematic behaviour. Indeed, Rioux points out that the manuscript of *Little Women* depicts a far more overtly flirtatious version of Amy, who is toned down for the final cut, quite possibly because either Alcott or her editor 'feared reader's censure of Amy's flirtatious behaviour' (16). It shows the depth of dislike for flirtatious behaviour that readers still often take objection to Amy's flirtatiousness given that it is already a toned-down version of behaviour written over 150 years ago. Yet, though Amy has been read more harshly for her flirtatious tendencies than Meg, within the novel, Amy's flirtatiousness is seen as much less of an issue than her sister's, primarily because she seems to know how much she can flirt without it becoming a problem. As Jo says, Amy 'does it very prettily and never seems to go too far' (515).

While Meg learns to reject flirtatiousness through lectures from Marmee and guidance from John, Amy turns away from flirtatiousness of her own accord (359). Often obscured by

Jo, Amy March is highly undervalued in criticism of *Little Women,* yet, she is arguably the most powerful and independent of the March sisters. She gets her own way much of the time, climbs the social ladder and ends up with the most equal marriage of the sisters. Described by Laurie as having 'a regular talent' for flirting, Amy is the second March sister for whom flirtatiousness is a problem (515). Yet unlike Meg, Amy is ultimately able to correct her own behaviour where Meg needs intervention to do the same. Holly Blackford has observed that Amy is afforded the liberty to flirt where Meg is not, for while 'coquetry is unacceptable for Meg at an earlier ball, allegorically titled "Vanity Fair" and thus equated with sin in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, coquetry for Amy is somehow the artistic creation of a statue' (20). Amy certainly is given more space to try out flirtatious behaviour without immediate rebuke, in part because, as Blackford observes, 'Amy, like Meg, plays coquette when without maternal protection and guidance [and] Amy is often without Mrs. March's counsel, quite unlike the other girls' (23). First separated from the family to protect her from catching Scarlet Fever and later when she travels to Europe as Aunt March's companion, while Meg only spends two weeks outside the family home, Amy spends up to a year. This far prolongs the anxious period where her values are tested, and yet, Amy is the subject of much less anxiety. While Marmee is reluctant to let Meg leave for the Moffat's party, she thinks little of Amy's long periods away from her guidance, saying to Jo that 'her good sense will help her' (522). Why is Amy's flirtatiousness treated so much less seriously than Meg's? And how can Amy still ultimately be said to promote a moral lesson against flirting?

Primarily, this different treatment can be explained by Amy's position as the 'baby' in the family. While Meg's attempts to flirt take place in the adult world, Amy's flirtations are all still contained in the space of childhood. At the dance, the men who flirt with Meg are older than her, and her attempts to present herself as a sexual object inadvertently awaken her to adult truths. In contrast, Amy's flirtations are exclusively with boys, never men. It is with Laurie's

college students that she learns how to flirt, and the language the narrator uses marks these childish interactions as different from the 'foolish [...] coquetry' Meg is accused of (358): 'Amy especially enjoyed this high honor, and became quite a belle among them, for her ladyship early felt and learned to use the gift of fascination with which she was endowed' (378). Still treating Amy as a child, although she is fifteen at this point in the novel, even Laurie joins in this playful mooning: 'he delivered a brown paper parcel to Meg, pulled Beth's hair ribbon, stared at Jo's big pinafore, and fell into an attitude of mock rapture before Amy' (384-385). His actions to Meg (a married woman) are respectful and formal, to Beth he is affectionate and playful and it is on Jo that his gaze rests. The 'attitude of mock rapture' he adopts before Amy plays into the idea that she is the 'queen' of the college boys, without taking it seriously. Similarly, when he suspects one of the boys is getting genuinely fond of her, he tells Jo he will 'nip his little passion in the bud' (389), to which Jo asks with disbelief 'what are the children thinking of' (389). Laurie's differing attitude to Meg and Amy's attempts at flirting illustrates the way in which male attitudes to interpreting female behaviour determine whether girls will be considered 'flirts' or not. While he scorns Meg's attempts to flirt at the dance as immoral and foolish, he encourages similar behaviour from Amy. The difference is that he considers Amy's flirtation as playful and childlike, whereas he assumes Meg's flirting has serious intent. It is Laurie's opinion of them which determines whether they can continue to flirt or not. In deeming Amy's flirtatious behaviour appropriate, Laurie allows her to continue to flirt while Meg has to quickly learn to stop.

Though it is clear that Marmee does not approve even of this childish play at flirting—for example, Jo remarks that 'Mother doesn't approve of flirting, even in fun' (515)—there appears little anxiety about Amy's enjoyment of it because there is no doubt that she will grow out of it. Unlike Meg, Amy's flirting is always artistic and performative. She plays the coquette in the family's theatrical performances, she acts the part on her calls, but she never seems

vulnerable because she never takes it seriously.[16] She, unlike Meg, never has her head turned. Though Amy is called a 'flirt' by Jo and Laurie, Amy is more often flirted with than found to be flirting herself. Ann Douglas suggests that the March girls differ from conventional romantic heroines in their approach to romance, because they seem to 'consent to courtship rather than seek it' (59). While perhaps less true of Meg, this surprising passivity concerning male attention seems an apt description of Amy. Even when Amy writes to the family confessing her plan to accept the proposal of the wealthy Fred Vaughn, whom she likes, though does not love, she suggests that this imbalance is a common problem in her interactions with men: 'I haven't flirted, Mother, truly, but remembered what you said to me, and have done my very best. I can't help it if people like me. I don't try to make them, and it worries me if I don't care for them, though Jo says I haven't got any heart' (503). Though Marmee swiftly responds to Meg's flirtations with Ned Moffat at the dance, and prevents him from coming to call on her at the house, there is no mention of Marmee's response to Amy's letter confessing her plan to marry for money, other than Marmee telling Jo that she trusts Amy's sense to help her through (522). Even at the point of considering marriage, Amy is treated as the child of the family, and thus what would be considered bad behaviour for Jo or Meg is only silly behaviour for Amy.

Amy's coming of age marks her rejection of her flirtatious tendencies, not through instruction but by her own choosing. Susan Ang writes that female protagonists often had to be subdued in order that they did not threaten the social order: '[w]omen, as the transmitters of values, had to be discouraged from making individualistic breaks for freedom, dissuaded from pursuing their own path in life and thus destabilizing society' (66). While Amy seems to

[16] Marlowe Daly-Galeano's 'Louisa May Alcott's Theater of Time' explores in further detail how the March family plays offer a space for the girls to explore worldly threats without risking exposure to the real thing. He writes that '[t]he performances often represent the dangerous, but they do so within a safe environment. Although villainous kidnappers, deceiving witches, runaway wives and coquettes all have their moments in the spotlight, the spotlight itself is domestic and contained' (15). It speaks of how seriously flirting is marked as transgressive in the novel that Daly-Galeano should include the 'coquette' as a figure of equal danger to the 'villainous kidnapper'.

threaten this social disorder, as she matures into a woman, she loses 'much of her relish for society' (672), and instead comes to yearn for the values of home and wifehood, fulfilling Ang's theory. Her earlier plan to marry Fred embarrasses her: '[i]t troubled her to remember that now, she wished she could take it back, it sounded so unwomanly. She didn't want Laurie to think her a heartless, worldly creature. She didn't care to be a queen of society now half so much as she did to be a lovable woman' (672). She realises that her flirtatiousness has always been childish and independently decides against it. Her epiphany that she does not want to be a society darling, but a modest and loved wife, mimics the narrator's speech about Meg. While Meg is instructed not to flirt, Amy decides this for herself, but ultimately they point to the same thing. Though both girls find temporary joy and power as 'queens of society', both discover that this fleeting power is of much less value than the joy they find in being wives and mothers.[17]

Though the anti-flirtation messages in *Little Women* are clear, they are never as heavily moralistic as the ones in *The Chauquatua Girls,* for example, where the narrator pauses to cast her judgement on Flossy's flirtatious behaviour, deeming it 'unpleasant and coarse' (396). While the narrator does pass judgement on Meg's attempts to act flirtatiously with John, calling her behaviour 'foolish' (358), for the most part, the moral lessons do not come from this hierarchical authority, but are voiced by the young characters themselves. Barbara Wall observes this, writing that the novel 'may be preachy but the preaching is made

[17] Reading the novel in the twenty-first century it is hard not to feel as if Meg and Amy have accepted a lesser power to that afforded to them by flirtation. Indeed, many critics have struggled to reconcile the novel's celebration of the March girls growing up with the loss of their freedom as they leave childhood. Ann Murphy suggests that we cannot avoid 'the deep uncertainty with which Alcott struggles to portray female loss of freedom through acculturation and adolescence as somehow enhancing and morally sustaining' (566-567). Sarah Elbert writes that '[a]ll the March sisters are engaged in a search for their adult selves and all – Jo most painfully and powerfully – fear that their unique human potential will be lost or destroyed in the process of growing up' (199). Similarly, Anne Scott MacLeod posits that '[u]nlike the twentieth-century child, who usually sees adult status as liberation, nineteenth-century women more often identified freedom with childhood and clung to it as long as they could.'(*American Childhood,* 16)

acceptable by the quality of the voice in which it is uttered . . . most of the preaching is done by the girls as they talk to each other and not by the narrating voice' (90). When Meg and Amy flirt, they are lectured, not by an authoritative narrative voice but by other family members. Marmee and Jo gently tell Meg that her flirting at the Moffat's was unwise, Marmee refuses to have the flirtatious Ned call on Meg and Jo tells Amy that she should not flirt with Mr. Tudor because 'Laurie says he is fast' (464). The primary instance of direct preaching against flirting, however, comes from Laurie, which is perhaps surprising given his own proclivity for it. When Laurie goes off to college, he is brought into contact with girls much unlike the modest March sisters and finds himself at the centre of their fickle affections. Though Laurie enjoys the attention of these girls, and encourages their behaviour, when Jo rebukes him for 'sending flowers and things to girls for whom you don't care two pins', he is quick to tell her that these flirtatious girls are not the kind that a man like him would ever commit to but that '[s]ensible girls for whom I do care whole papers of pins won't let me send them "flowers and things", so what can I do? My feelings need a "vent"' (515).

This conversation between Jo and Laurie offers a male perspective on flirting. Apparently speaking for all of his male peers, he tells Jo that boys 'don't like romps and flirts, though we may act as if we did sometimes. The pretty, modest girls are never talked about, except respectfully, among gentlemen' (516). Telling Jo 'I'm glad you can't flirt' (516), he continues: 'some of the girls I know really do go on at such a rate I'm ashamed of them. They don't mean any harm, I'm sure, but if they knew how we fellows talked about them afterward, they'd mend their ways, I fancy' (516). Though the moral lesson against flirtation is voiced as a confession between two friends, it is no less didactic than Marmee's lecture to Meg. As Wall suggests, this device lessens the 'preachy' tone of the lesson without diluting it. In using Laurie as a representative of all men whom girls flirt with, his disdain of the girls he showers with gifts and attention acts as a disincentive. For what could be less discouraging to a girl

wishing to flirt than hearing that the men she flirts with are making fun of her behind her back? His explanation that though men appear to like 'romps and flirts' they will ultimately choose 'modest girls' for their future wives, mirrors Meg's attempts at flirting and her ultimate marriage to John. Though she feels a sense of power when she gains the attention of multiple men at the dance and flirts with them to exert this, it is when she reverts to her modest self that she is chosen as a wife. Laurie's speech therefore reinforces the narrative that women who flirt will lose out in the end, while those girls who refuse to participate in this 'foolish' behaviour will be rewarded.

Not only does Laurie provide a speech against flirts, he also practically prevents the March girls from becoming like these college girls, not least in his eventual marriage to Amy. Sarah Elbert suggests that their shared proclivity for flirtatious behaviour makes them a perfect match: 'Amy and Laurie grow up together in Europe. Both are fashionable, inclined to coquetry' (206). Laurie's marriage to Amy at the end of the novel solves the problem of both of their flirtatiousness. Indeed, in the course of the novel, Laurie prevents all of the March girls from flirting (except Beth who would never think of doing so). His disapproving brotherly lecture to Meg at the Moffat's dance interrupts her attempt to act the flirt. When Jo confides to him that she would like to learn how to flirt because 'it does look pleasant' (515), he tells her not to, praising her for her unspoiled character. Finally, his marriage to Amy ends her flirtatious interactions with men such as Fred Vaughn in Europe. Though Grace Ann Hovet 'wonders if Amy, without Marmee's diplomatic advising, would have become an adult femme fatale' (60), arguably it is Laurie, and not Marmee, who prevents the youngest March sister from continuing in her flirtatious ways and becoming known as the wrong sort of woman as she grows up.

The didacticism of *Little Women* is clear. Though Meg and Amy flirt a little without horrible consequence, it is always made clear that their flirtatiousness is something which is

to be managed and ultimately 'conquered' before they go too far. While as children they are able to experiment with flirting without lasting implications, it is important that by the time they are grown-up, they should have rid themselves of this behaviour. Thus, through lectures, rebuke and self-reflection, Amy and Meg's tendencies for capriciousness are gradually tempered and by the time they enter adulthood, both girls have abandoned their flirtatious behaviour and have become the 'modest girls' that Laurie explains men prefer to 'flirts and romps' (516). Through their youthful misdemeanours, young female readers might learn the perils of even occasional flirtations, and as adults they act as examples to these readers of the type of woman they should grow up to be.

Though in the sequels to *Little Women* anxieties over female flirtatiousness are less prominent (explained by the shifted focus away from girls to boys), the occasional messages to it promote the same didactic messages as the original, that though flirting is a natural tendency for the American girl growing up, 'good' women will learn how to avoid it. At Jo's school, though she disapproves of it, she allows 'the very mild sort of flirtation' between the students 'for the simple reason that it could not be entirely banished, and is a part of all education' (*Jo's Boys* 341). Like Marmee, who allows Meg and Amy to learn from their mistakes that flirting has a negative effect on their character, rather than simply forbidding them from trying it, Jo realises that the best way to prevent her students becoming fixated with folly like flirtation is for them to experience its negative sides. When speaking in regard to a student's 'summer flirtation', she explains 'I don't approve of them, but boys and girls will play with edged tools and cut their fingers' (384). As Emily Hamilton-Honey writes, girls' fiction in this period often offered illustrations of heroines making mistakes which the reader, in experiencing the negative results vicariously through the character, might then avoid making in real life. Young readers could: 'experience the outside world while still at

home and understand the risks of failing to "be good" as well as the potential rewards for correct social behaviour' (44-45).

Though we cannot assume that young readers of the novel necessarily adopted the behaviour that *Little Women* seems to promote, there is certainly evidence that the moral lessons in the novel had an influence. Though many of the letters sent to Alcott by young fans of the book have been lost, those which exist prove that many of the contemporary readers of the novel took the book's moral lessons so to heart that they wrote to Alcott asking for personal advice in their own life.[18] As Beverly Lyon Clark described it, with the popularity of *Little Women*, Alcott 'had become everyone's aunt' (*The Afterlife of Little Women* 13). *Little Women* offers many arguments against flirting, and many examples where the female characters learn that though flirtatiousness offers them a thrill of power, it is a bitter, shallow reward which always creates more problems than it solves. As Hamilton-Honey suggests, this offers female readers the chance to avoid repeating such mistakes. While *Little Women* avoids the dry moralism common in earlier American children's literature, it is made very clear to female readers that flirtatiousness is a character flaw which should be corrected and that the unflirtatious woman is more desirable, intelligent and powerful than the romps and flirts who can capture only the most shallow form of attention. As one of Jo's female students says to her in *Jo's Boys*: '[f]rivolous girls may like to be called "little dears" and things of that sort; but the girls who love study wish to be treated like reasonable beings, not dolls to flirt with' (449). As Murray observes, *Little Women*'s 'teaching may not be as didactic as that in heavily religious children's literature prior to 1860, but the moral lessons are just as clear' (64). To grow up into a 'good' American woman means renouncing the shallow rewards of flirtatiousness.

[18] Beverly Lyon Clarks' *The Afterlife of Little Women* details Alcott's contemporary fan base and provides insight into the moral influence the author apparently held over her young audience (13-18).

***What Katy Did at School***

Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did* series published between 1872 and 1890 offers another example of didacticism against female flirtatiousness in American children's literature.[19] As one of the few American girls' series to be continually in print since publication, *What Katy Did* has had a steady level of critical interest, although, as for *Little Women*, criticism of Coolidge's work has focused almost exclusively on the first novel in the series. *What Katy Did* (1872), follows the fairly typical pattern of the headstrong American girl learning how to be a good American woman. For twelve-year-old Katy Carr, the rebellious ringleader of her five younger siblings, this involves a prolonged period of suffering. Ignoring her aunt's demand that she does not use a swing, Katy falls off, badly injures her spine and spends the next four years in what her cousin Helen calls 'the school of pain', where, unable to walk and constrained to her bedroom, Katy learns the feminine ideals of patience, hard work and living for others. The didacticism of the novel is clear. When wild Katy is tamed into a model of good womanhood, she is afforded the ability to walk again. There have been many excellent readings of this first instalment in the series, but very few of the sequels. For this study, it is the second book in the series, *What Katy Did at School* (1873), which will be my focus.

If *What Katy Did* focuses on Katy's reluctance to accept womanhood at all, then *What Katy Did at School* centres on the anxiety about what kind of woman she and her sisters will grow up to be. At the start of the book, her father, Dr. Carr, is concerned that Katy is acting old before her time, and decides to send her and her younger sister Clover away to boarding school in order that they might enjoy their last few years of girlhood without the adult responsibilities of keeping house. His decision taps into two anxieties concerning the

[19] Susan Coolidge was the pen name of Sarah Chauncey Woolsey. While some magazine articles written early in her career were published under her own name, all of her novels were published with her pseudonym.

American girl, the vulnerability of the young girl moving outside of family protection and the fear of the corrupting nature of wider society. Both are experienced in *Little Women* by Meg, who temporarily strays from her values when she spends two weeks with the Moffats in the 'Vanity Fair' chapter. In *What Katy Did at School,* like in *Little Women,* the introduction of the innocent girl to the dangerous game of flirtation is the focus of social anxieties about the innocent American girl moved outside the moral safety of home. Yet where *Little Women* uses Meg to illustrate the pitfalls of her attempts to flirt and instructs readers through lectures provided by Marmee and Laurie, *What Katy Did at School* subverts this. Though their year at school marks Katy and Clover's first close encounters with boys other than their brothers, they are able to withstand the culture of flirting which permeates the school. Shocked at finding her schoolmates so fixated with attracting male attention, Katy acts as an example to the other girls. Sue Sims writes that *What Katy Did at School* distances itself from the heavy moralism of earlier American children's writing by rejecting lectures and preaching in favour of using the Carr girls as positive role models, who might act as examples both to their classmates and to impressionable readers of the novel: 'Katy and Clover do not preach, but their personalities attract their schoolmates, and they are able to effect reform through laughter and good fellowship' (5). Instead of using lectures delivered from either adult characters (such as Marmee in *Little Women)* or by an omniscient narrator (as in *The Chauquatua Girls),* in *What Katy Did at School,* encouragements against flirting are projected through the example of positive unflirtatious heroines.

The school story genre represents a specific threat to young American girls. Separated from the protection of the family home and from the guidance of their parents, the school in *What Katy Did* acts as a test of the girls' characters when left to their own devices. Katy and Clover are shocked to discover that in this space away from strict parental guidance, the girls at the school have quickly developed proclivities for flirting. When their cousin Lilly tells

them that ‘half the girls in the school bow, and speak, and carry on with young men they don't know’, Katy replies quickly that she doesn’t ‘want that kind of fun’ (61). Annoyed at Katy’s response, Lilly sarcastically tells her that ‘we bad girls will have to look out’ (61) and asks Katy if she means to set an example:

> “I don't want to preach to anybody,” said Katy, coloring, “and I wasn't thinking about examples. But really and truly, Lilly, wouldn't your mother, and all the girls' mothers, be shocked if they knew about these performances here?”
>
> “Gracious! I should think so; Mamma would kill me. I wouldn't have her know of my goings on for all the world.” (61)

Katy and Lilly’s conversation serves two purposes. First, it establishes an antagonism which lasts throughout the series. Lilly, as one of the school’s most enthusiastic and callous ‘flirts’, sees Katy’s doubts as a threat to her power and conscience. Katy, on the other hand, is shocked not only by Lilly’s declaration of her flirtatious behaviour, but by her blatant disregard for the moral instructions from her parents. Both girls have been taught that flirting is bad, and as Katy says ‘unlady-like’ (69); yet in school, far away from the eyes of their mothers, the schoolgirls must choose whether to resist or indulge in this forbidden behaviour.

*What Katy Did at School* is a distinctly American iteration of the school story: a genre which is often claimed as British. Gillian Avery suggests that the anxiety about the schoolgirls’ interactions with boys is the distinctive factor separating the American school story from the British one: ‘foreign to the English school story is the pupils’ preoccupation with the boys in the neighbouring Arrowmouth College; Katy and Clover are as innocently unaware that there is another sex as any girls in a pre-1960 English story (brothers, naturally, come into a category of their own). But their companions are obsessed’ (169). A scan of British school stories supports Avery’s observation that the flirting plot reaches prominence in the American school story in a way that it does not in British ones. Though there are

occasional mentions of boys, and ideas of girlish romance, the difference is that the British schoolgirl rarely actually gets to meet them. For example in Angela Brazil's school series—Brazil being one of the most prolific authors of British school stories—the closest one comes to flirtation is in *The Madcap of the School* (1917), when new student, Cynthia, leaves a flirtatious note in an empty fruit basket hoping that a boy will find it and call on her. The note is instead discovered by her classmates, who cure her of her behaviour by one of them donning a false moustache and tricking Cynthia into meeting 'him'. When she does, they reveal her folly to the mirthful group of schoolmates in on the joke (116-118). The problem of female flirtatiousness occupies less than three pages of the book and is resolved without any of the girls actually coming into contact with a member of the opposite sex.

As in *Little Women,* the American girl is presented as less closely chaperoned than her European counterpart, meaning that she is more likely to come into contact with boys and providing more opportunities for the problem of flirting to arise. Furthermore, the need to educate American girls how to develop desirable womanly characteristics is linked to an anxiety about American national identity when finding its place in the world. Deanna Stover writes that in girls' fiction, '[w]omen function not only as moral guides but also as essential parts of a new, post-Civil War American identity' (81). Through the cultivation of 'good' American womanhood, girls have a unique role in securing America's moral identity and value system. Katy and Clover exemplify the morally responsible American girl because they have the freedom of American independence (they live away from home, make decisions by themselves and have the opportunity to behave badly, though choose not to do so) while maintaining the moral rigidity which allows them to benefit from this independence without compromising on their ethical femininity. From the beginning, Katy and Clover establish themselves as counter-cultural in regard to flirting. Though they are given the room facing a boys dorm at the opposite college, they do not try to communicate with them or attract their

attention, gaining them the nickname with boys of the 'Real Nuns', because, as one explains: 'you never looked out of the window at us. Real nuns and sham nuns,—don't you see? Almost all the young ladies are sham nuns, except you' (117). Sick of the 'incessant' flirting of her school mates, Katy resolves to do something about it and decides to 'get up a society to put down flirting' (69).

The formation of the 'Society for the Suppression of Unladylike Conduct' (70), or the S.S.U.C as the anti-flirt club comes to be called, illustrates Katy and Clover's growing influence over their schoolmates and the culture of flirting in the school. Appointed as President of the society, Katy creates the club constitution, which is formed of five articles:

> ARTICLE I. The object of this Society is twofold: it combines having a good time with the pursuit of virtue.
>
> ARTICLE II. The good time is to take place once a week in No. 6 Quaker Row, between the hours of four and six p.m.
>
> ARTICLE III. The nature of the good time is to be decided upon by a Committee to be appointed each Saturday by the members of the Society.
>
> ARTICLE IV. Virtue is to be pursued at all times and in all seasons, by the members of the Society setting their faces against the practice of bowing and speaking to young gentlemen who are not acquaintances; waving of pocket handkerchiefs, signals from windows, and any species of conduct which would be thought unladylike by nice people anywhere, and especially by the mammas of the Society.
>
> ARTICLE V. The members of the Society pledge themselves to use their influence against these practices, both by precept and example. (71-72)

The society constitution embodies several approaches to tackling the problem of female flirtatiousness. Firstly, it clearly establishes flirting as 'bad', equating it with 'unladylike conduct' (71). In her suggestion of the society, Katy's dislike for flirting is voiced even more

strongly. She says that it makes her ‘cross’ and ‘absolutely sick’ (69). Article IV gives a more detailed list of behaviour which is deemed flirtatious, all of which is to be avoided. Yet rather than simply leaving this list of rules of what should not be done, the society is formed to offer an alternative to flirting. As Gillian Avery writes, ‘Coolidge, rather than lecturing her readers about the folly of this practice, introduces a diversion to take the pupils’ minds off the boys next door. Katy invents the Society for the Suppression of Unladylike Conduct, a literary group whose members spend Saturday afternoons composing comic verse’ (169). Though I would argue that there is an authoritarian element to the society, given Article V which tells the self appointed ‘society mammas’ that they will use their influence by ‘precept’ as well as ‘example’, Avery is right to point out that the diversion strategy is used in lieu of a more punitive system of behavioural correction. After establishing that the society’s aims are to combat flirting, flirting is seldom discussed by the girls, who, led by Katy instead enjoy afternoons of writing and storytelling.

Eva Lupold suggests that the formation of the society could be read as either empowering or disempowering for the school girls: ‘[a]lthough the formation of this club can be read as conservative since it could be seen as encouraging girls to stifle flirtatious sexual behaviour, it can also be viewed as a subversive delay and resistance to male intrusion into female space’ (32). Yet, while the forming of female bonds without male interruption might be read as empowering for the girls, the evolution of the society’s name illustrates the unfair blame division when it comes to issues of flirting. The Society of the Suppression of Unladylike Conduct is not the first name suggested for the group. Before the girls settle on this, they reject other suggestions such as 'The Society for the Suppression of Young Men.' and the ‘Put-him-down-Club’ (70). The girls pause temporarily on ‘The Anti-Jane Society’ before settling on the final name (70). The evolution of names moves from ideas which put the onus of flirting on men, to those which place the blame firmly with the girls. This enacts

the gender imbalance that informs ideas on flirting in the series, where it is seen as the girls' responsibility to put a stop to their flirtatious behaviour while the boys are not expected to change their behaviour at all.[20]

The need to instruct girls to take responsibility for any flirtatious behaviour, even if not initiated by them, is apparent in the way that Katy and the other girls refocus the aims of the society strictly on the female response to boys, rather than considering the college boys equally responsible for the flirting problem. Just as Laurie is able to flirt without lecture in *Little Women* while Meg and Amy are not, flirting in *What Katy Did at School* is characterised as a female problem. The other rejected name 'The Anti-Jane Society', though not selected, represents the fear of the permanent title that flirtatious behaviour might ultimately lend a young girl. Though Katy and Clover usually characterise the flirtatiousness of their schoolmates as foolish rather than wicked, there is an underlying anxiety about the fact that if these girls are not cured of this behaviour now, then their adult characters will be fixed in this negative way. They will move from being flirtatious to being 'flirts', a much more permanent and undesirable state. Lilly, the one girl who is invited to but does not join the society, does just this. As I will go on to discuss in greater depth, she offers the counter example to Katy and Clover, a warning to readers about what happens to girls who don't learn to rid themselves of their flirtatious tendencies and thus grow into flirtatious women.

In *What Katy Did at School* flirting is never without consequence. Katy's concerns that even the youngest girls in the school are flirting with the boys next door prove valid when she and Clover are mistakenly blamed and punished for writing notes to the college boys, when in fact it is the school's youngest student, Bella, who does this, signing Katy's

[20] The fact that women are always blamed even when it is men who begin a flirtation will be explored in further detail in my readings of *Daisy Miller* and *The House of Mirth.*

name rather than her own to avoid detection.[21] Disbelieved and harshly punished by the teachers, Katy and Clover become martyrs of sorts to their schoolmates, who further resolve to rid themselves of flirtatious behaviour, seeing the harm it has wrought against the sisters who 'have done more to keep the rest of us steady than any girls in the school' (90). Though the girls consider asking their Father to withdraw them from the school, they decide against it, resolving to clear their names of the flirtation they are accused of by proving their moral character (93). Gail Schmunk Murray writes that in children's fiction from this period, '[g]irls were less likely to fight unjust situations directly. Unlike male heroes, who helped others while also advancing their own cause, female protagonists were expected to be happy simply by virtue of their good deeds' (90). As the president of the anti-flirting league, Katy suffers from particular cruelty from some schoolmates when accused of flirting herself:

> some of the upstairs girls, who resented Katy's plain speaking, and the formation of a society against flirting, improved the chance to be provoking. Lilly Page was one of these. She didn't really believe Katy guilty, but she liked to tease her by pretending to believe it.
>
> "Only to think of the President of the Saintly Stuck-Up Society being caught like this!" she remarked, maliciously. "What are our great reformers coming to?" (94-95)

Katy and Clover's unjust punishment allows them to prove their moral resolve. Their friends rally round them, learning from their example and increasingly penitent for their own past engagement in flirtations with the boys next door. Meanwhile, the girls who refused to join Katy's anti-flirting initiative, grow more antagonistic and more clearly marked as bad examples who should be disliked by readers. In the sisters' suffering, *What Katy Did at*

[21] Bella is only eleven years old and yet despite her age is depicted very negatively in the novel, described once as a 'nasty little thing' (60). Even as a child her obsession with boys has a corruptive effect on her moral character.

*School* parallels *What Katy Did,* where, as Shirley Foster and Judy Simmons describe, the 'narrative structure enacts a progression towards an ideal of female conduct, according to which the achievement of happiness and self-satisfaction is dependent not upon material or intellectual success but upon self-discipline and the learning of a moral code through suffering and the example of others' (108). While in the first book Katy learns the model code of good female behaviour through her own suffering, in the sequel, it is her school friends who must learn through her. Katy, and by extension Clover, become examples of the ideal female conduct Foster and Simmons describe. By the end of term, Miss Jane, the teacher who initially punishes them, asks for their forgiveness for accusing them, explaining that she has been convinced by 'your general conduct, and the good influence which I have seen you exert over other girls' (151).

In the *What Katy Did* series as the female characters grow up from children into young women, their characters lose the fluidity of youth and become fixed either into 'good' or 'bad' womanhood. While most critics have only focused on Katy, Murray writes that all four of '[t]he Carr daughters and their moral maturation comprise the focus of the books' (60). Some critics have rightly taken a negative stance on how girls are forced to shed many of their positive characteristics in order to fit a narrow model of 'good' womanhood. Ang writes that 'it is amazing how many of the female protagonists (who are distinctive and vigorous, not to mention unconventional) grow up to become sweet young things who, on the whole, could stand in for each other without anyone noticing the difference' (70). As Katy and Clover grow older, they become less human, more like emblems of female virtue than complex individuals. Yet, as they are subdued into bland 'goodness', the series poses a question about the girls who fail to follow this path of moral virtue. What happens to the girls who, unlike the Carr sisters, refuse to rid themselves of 'bad' female behaviour as they grow up? For an example of a girl who refuses to modify her bad behaviour, we must only look at

Katy's cousin and schoolmate, Lilly Page.

From their first meeting, the unashamedly flirtatious Lilly and the steadfastly uncapricious Katy stand at opposite sides of female behaviour. While Katy offers a good example to young female readers, Lilly is the girl that readers know not to try and copy. As Sims observes, Coolidge does not need to resort to heavy-handed didacticism in order to make clear that Lilly is not a character readers should look up to: 'empty-headed Lilly is not criticised directly at any point; but "the girls [do] not break their hearts" when she refuses to join the "Society for the Suppression of Unladylike Conduct" – the moral, that the Lillys of this world are not popular with the girls *really* worth knowing, does not need to be stressed' (6).

Lilly is the only girl who refuses to join Katy's society, declaring that she 'didn't set up to be "proper" or better than she was' (70). Vain, snobby and manipulative, Lilly is unpopular with Katy and Clover, as well as the other good girls in the school. Though her mother declares that she is simply 'impulsive as a baby, bubbling over with fun from morning till night' (28), this impulsiveness and fun takes the form of flirting and an obsession with her own appearance that Katy deems awful. Unlike the other flirtatious girls who are willing to improve with Katy's help, Lilly denies that her flirtatious nature is a problem and is bitter and angry at Katy's instigation of the society against it. The anxiety that girls who cannot correct their behaviour will become unladylike women is epitomised in Lilly, who returns as an adult in the next book in the series, *What Katy Did Next.* Though 'prettier than ever', the problematic traits which Lilly exhibits as a child have become fixed, so that she is presented as a cruel and merciless flirt who is unwilling to even let Katy meet her presumed future fiancé, Lieutenant Worthington, calling Katy a 'nuisance' (254). Eventually the narrative places the two girls into competition for Worthington's attentions. True to her promise that she will never be a flirt, Katy makes no effort to try and attract his attention, her head being

too ‘full of interesting things’ to play with a suitor’s emotions. Even when Worthington seems to favour Lilly, Katy has no ‘disappointed vanity’ and ‘none of the vexations of a neglected belle’ (263). Lilly, on the other hand, works harder and harder to flirt with Worthington, eventually driving him away with her attempts to toy with his emotions by trying to play hard to get at a dance: ‘she did not hear when he invited her to walk; she turned a cold shoulder when he tried to talk, and seemed absorbed by the other cavaliers, naval and otherwise, who crowded about her’ (263). Alas ‘Lilly's little attempt to pique her admirer had somehow missed its mark’ (265), and soon Worthington turns to Katy, questioning how he ever could have fallen for Lilly’s vacuous capriciousness: **‘**I can't see now what it was that I fancied so much about her’ (322). The patterns of behaviour that Katy and Lilly establish in school—Katy’s steadfast commitment not to flirt, and Lilly’s refusal to stop—inform their adult characters, and they are rewarded accordingly. Katy, who has never enjoyed the shallow benefits of lots of male attention, gains a desirable and devoted husband, while Lilly, who indulges in the shallow benefits of flirting—‘more partners than she knew what to do with, more bouquets than she could well carry’—ends the novel with nothing (263).

### *A Nest of Girls*

Lilly in *What Katy did at School* is almost a harmless flirt in that she holds no significant influence over the other girls which could lead them to copy her bad behaviour. While she is not a character for readers to emulate, she is not a particular threat to the heroines. Yet, while Coolidge discourages flirting through Katy’s good example rather than preaching a moral warning to readers through Lilly’s bad one, other girls’ authors in this period choose to depict the flirt as a truly dangerous and immoral figure who must be contained at all cost. One example of this is in Elizabeth Weston Timlow’s school story *A Nest of Girls.* The American girls’ school story is a genre which has received little critical analysis. This is a significant

omission when looking at representations of girlhood in this period of American history, for as Kristine Moruzi and Michelle J. Smith point out, 'these stories represent a complex engagement with ideas of femininity, education, morality, obedience, and girlhood' (xiii). The values presented in the American school story in this period offer a glimpse at the values that society wanted to foster in young girls and the characteristics it wanted to expunge. It is unsurprising, then, that moral lessons involving female flirtatiousness feature prominently in many American school stories of the period. *What Katy Did at School* is an unusual school story in that it is students of the school, Katy and Clover, who hold the moral authority over the other girls, rather than the teachers, which breaks from the usual pattern where teachers are guiding moral forces 'necessary to guide girls towards appropriate conduct' (Moruzi & Smith xxiii). While it works towards the same didactic message concerning flirtatiousness, it could not be presented as typical of the genre. Timlow's *A Nest of Girls* is a more typical example of the school story, where the escapades of one determined flirt, Romelia Dransfield, quickly dominates the plot, dragging many of her fellow schoolmates into a series of deceptions and ruses until it is resolved by the intervention of the headteacher, Mrs. Conway. Unlike *Little Women* and *What Katy Did at School* there is little to no criticism of Timlow's novel. While *A Nest of Girls* is mentioned in anthologies and in reference to other girls' fiction, there is no existing pool of criticism specifically on the novel. It is, however, of great value to this study. Not only does it offer a more typical example of the American school story, it is also one of the best examples of girls' fiction where flirting becomes the central plot and 'the flirt' is presented as a truly irredeemable and dangerous figure.

Like Lilly in the *What Katy Did* series, flirtatious Romelia is marked as an unlikeable character from the beginning. The kind of girl not 'worth knowing' (Sims 6). Unlike the other girls, who have flaws which are balanced out with their positive character traits, Romelia has no redeeming characteristics. All of her flaws—'excessive vanity, her craving for popularity,

her instinctive posing' (65) —lend themselves to flirting, and it is through the crudest and most deceitful means that she finds a man of lowly reputation, Mr. Spaulding, who is willing to flirt with her. By pretending that Mr. Spaulding, who the narrator calls 'objectionable in every way' (176), is her cousin, she is able to have him visit her in school. She thinks nothing of the school rules or codes of honour, but seeks only the shallow thrill of attention afforded to her through flirtation. 'Boys and flirting filled her whole mind' (246) and, lacking intellectual capabilities or physical attractiveness, 'she stooped to win in any possible way the attention and excitement that she craved' (246).

The school becomes divided into two groups: those who flirt, led by the unscrupulous Romelia, and those who do not. The flirtatious ones are banded in a group which becomes named the Sin-nics, known as the 'wildest girls in school . . . that would flirt from the windows, if possible; that thought it clever to cheat teachers and slip out of regulations; that studied barely enough to keep on the outer edge of the classes' (91). On the other extreme are the 'Merry Chanters', a group of girls who are disgusted by the flirtatious antics of the Sin-nics and who regard defending the honour of the school and of Mrs. Conway as a personal responsibility. Unlike in *What Katy Did at School* where some of the mildly flirtatious girls are shown to be basically moral and ladylike (like Rose Red), in *A Nest of Girls*, flirtatiousness comes linked with a series of other undesirable and un-American traits. The concerns about national identity are clear in the description not only of the Sin-nics' immodesty, but in their shirking of hard work and their willingness to cheat. Independence, work ethic and honesty are traits celebrated in American children's literature in this period as subjects of particular national pride. Jenny Robinson writes that the presentation of the hard working, independent and truthful American girl in fiction acted as a 'metaphoric expression

Americans had of themselves as republican, hardy, self reliant pioneers' (100).[22] The Sin-nics' flirtatiousness is regarded as just as un-American as their shirking of work and their willingness to cheat. On the other hand, the Merry Chanters represent the idealised American values Robinson identifies, where 'those that worked the hardest were the leaders' (19). The Chanters are disgusted by the Sin-nics reputation for 'low flirting' (180), making it clear that they consider it dishonourable and threatening to the reputation of the other girls and the school.

The division between the two groups stems from a fear of moral contamination, where the flirtatiousness of some of the girls begins to damage the reputations of the other girls, so that soon, much of the school has been dragged into the escapades. Though Romelia is disliked and often ignored by the other girls, her insistence on flirting and her plan to have a boy enter the school pretending to be her cousin threatens the equilibrium and innocence of the whole student population. Much of the Chanters' outrage at the behaviour of the Sin-nics stems from the fear that they too will be tarnished by the poor reputation the girls are forming with the boys in town. When the Chanters confront the Sin-nics about their flirtatious behaviour, they criticise them specifically for flirting 'where you were known and recognized as St. Ursula girls, and attracted attention by your behaviour. Going alone with those students, too, which you know no girl in town does! Giving us a pretty name everywhere' (173). When one of the Chanters, Hester, tries to intervene with the Sin-nics by approaching Mr. Spaulding himself, she finds that even with no intent to flirt with him, she cannot help but be drawn into his one-sided flirtation, which seems to contaminate her own purity. In tears she runs back to the other girls, sobbing, 'I do believe he thought I was just trying to—

[22] Robinson points to two specific examples from *Little Women* which illustrate this celebration of American identity (100): when the March girls are introduced to an English family, they are shocked by one of the boy's willingness to cheat at croquet because as Jo says '[w]e don't cheat in America' (Alcott 196), and surprised by the oldest girl's snobbishness about Meg's work as a governess for 'ladies in America love independence as much as their ancestors did, and are admired and respected for supporting themselves' (Alcott 208).

flirt with him' (197) and scrubs the hand he shook with such vigour that the other girls are alarmed: 'Hester sprang to the washstand and turning out a bowlful of water began scrubbing at her hands with soap and nail-brush as if she had been in soot, paying no heed to their impatient questions. "For goodness' sake, Hester!" scolded Judith. "Your hands can't be so dirty as all that"' (196). The fear of her moral contamination is reflected in her sense that she has been physically dirtied by her interaction with Mr. Spaulding.

The introduction of Mr. Spaulding into the school represents a threat to all of the girls' innocence. A man with a dangerous reputation, Mr. Spaulding is a sexual pursuer, thrilled to gain entrance into a school full of innocent girls. As soon as Hester begins to talk to him, she finds herself disturbed by his overtly sexual insinuations. Though she does not understand the full extent of it, she quickly realises that the threat he represents is far greater a one than she can manage alone, for during 'her sheltered young life she had never before encountered a man of this type and her innocence shrank, she knew not why' (190). Even the pure Hester cannot escape the damage to her reputation, when Mr. Spaulding twists the story of their conversation to present Hester as contriving a meeting between them in order to flirt with him herself. Though innocent of flirting, Hester veers dangerously close to being deemed a 'flirt' simply because of her naive underestimation of the danger of the conflict she involves herself in. To her alarm, she discovers 'the helplessness of innocence against unscrupulousness' when it comes to flirting (230).

Though it is clear that readers are meant to side with the Chanters and despise the Sinnics, there are additional devices used to make clear that the girls who flirt are not characters who should be admired or copied by the book's readers. Like Laurie's speech in *Little Women* against flirts, *A Nest of Girls* similarly validates that men do not like girls who flirt, no matter how it might appear. One of the girl's brothers admits that he will happily flirt with any 'little idiot' (126), so long as she is pretty, but that girls should know better than to think

that the boys who flirt with them have any respect for them, for 'if a girl makes herself cheap she must take the consequences' (126). While the girls in the Sin-nics believe that they have power over the boys they flirt with, the narrative makes clear that this is a fantasy. While the girls kid themselves that their powers of fascination have the boys they flirt with enthralled, Jack's spiteful talk reveals the girls' foolishness:

> "Shouldn't you think," said Katharine, appealing to Virginia, "that any girl would know that a man would make fun of her after all that? You see. Jack comes here and tells me all these things and about his flirtations and shows me the girls' notes. Some of them are so silly. And all these girls ought to know better" (130).

The question of whether all the girls in the Sin-nics should 'know better' than to flirt is debated among the Chanters. It takes a girl to fall from their group, Eleanor Scott, to realise the dangerous temptation flirting poses even to the otherwise honourable American girl.

While Romelia is obviously marked as a 'bad' girl, or 'worthless soul' as Mrs. Conway describes her (265), the novel also offers an example of how easy it is for a basically good girl to stray from virtue when she yields to the temptation to flirt. Amy Pattee identifies a 'prevalence of plotlines of redemption and characters who become role models for others in these nineteenth-century stories for girls' (74). In *A Nest of Girls,* this redeemed heroine is Eleanor Scott, a girl described as having much 'good stuff in her' (146), but who is dangerously tempted away from good behaviour by the Sin-nics, who she cannot help but find 'jolly and amusing' (171). Unlike most of the other schoolgirls who are clearly delineated as immune to the temptations to flirt or fully unable to fight the temptation, Eleanor is caught in between the two groups. Intelligent and honourable enough to be accepted into the Merry Chanters, she also enjoys the frivolous folly of the Sin-nics, gaining her the reputation as somewhat 'Dr. Jekyll-and-Mr.-Hyde-y' (145). Her inability to choose between the two sets, gradually lead to her expulsion from the Chanters, who do not

understand how she could be worthy of their company when she is willing to spend time in another group which only talks about 'students and dress and their flirtations' (146). By slowly isolating her, the Chanters inadvertently do Eleanor more harm than good as she 'gradually drifted entirely into the other circle' (171), where her mildly flirtatious behaviour gets more and more serious. The group policing that works well in *What Katy Did at School* fails here, when the girls fail to realise that they might 'have prevented Eleanor from gradually slipping into the wrong set by vigorous, out-spoken disapproval of what she did' (171).

A recurrent motif in girls' fiction of this time is the alignment of the girlish temptation to flirt with the temptation of Eve. For example, the chapter in Alcott's *An Old Fashioned Girl* where Polly tries out flirting for the first time is titled 'Forbidden Fruit', and even though Polly's attempts at flirtation are characterised as 'such a very mild imitation of the fashionable thing that Trix & Co [the other girls] would not have recognized it' (262), the narrator ominously interrupts to warn that even having 'nibbled at forbidden fruit' carries a price (270). Similarly, in *Little Women,* Meg's temptations to display herself as a beautiful object are described through Edenic metaphor: 'the serpent got into Meg's paradise' (442). Eleanor's temptation in *A Nest of Girls* follows this pattern. She is 'enticed' into the Sin-nics escapades (177), and when she grows 'tired of being good' (236), she passively goes along with their plots to meet boys outside of the school. She thus becomes like the 'fallen Eve', having tasted the forbidden fruit of flirting, she cannot easily rejoin the good side. This idea of Eleanor as 'fallen' is clearly established in a conversation between Maud (a member of the Sin-nics) and Virginia (a member of the Chanters):

> "Give it all up, Maud," advised Virginia. "You are four and we are thirty, strong. Every other girl in school is against you."

> "We are five, may it please your majesty. Don't forget we are recruited from your own immaculate ranks," sneered Maud, with a sweeping courtesy. "You may be pleased to know that Eleanor Scott is a 'Sin-nic' equal to any" (180)

Eleanor acts as an example of the good girl gone wrong for young readers. Unlike Romelia she is not a clear villain but is a relatable character to be learned from. Her trials illustrate that there is no such thing as safe flirting, for yielding to the temptation to flirt even once opens the door to do so again, gradually getting more and more serious until Eleanor's good character is corrupted and she seems indistinguishable from the rest of the Sin-nics. It is not enough that she is not the ringleader of the flirtatious mischief because in not challenging it, she passively encourages it. The erosion of her admirable qualities and her transformation into a flirt is described in language which stresses how her passive acceptance of the other Sin-nics' bad behaviour leads her to eventually adopt it for herself—she is described as having 'drifted' and 'slipped' into flirting (171). Maud smugly proclaims that Eleanor has become one of their own, an idea which horrifies Virginia and the other Chanters, who are filled with guilt that they 'might have done more to hold her' to the virtuous side (198).

As it is, Eleanor is offered an opportunity for redemption. When the conflict comes to a head in the school, Mrs. Conway gets involved. Though Eleanor, like Meg, Amy and many girls in *What Katy Did at School,* does not think 'that what she had done mattered so very much' (236), Mrs. Conway awakens her to the insidious evil of flirtatiousness:

> With vivid words she made her, for the first time, see the temptations of her double-sided nature, to which both higher and lower things of life almost equally appealed. She made her feel how by this constant yielding in little things the lower side of her nature had been steadily gaining ground so that she had done things that she frankly confessed would not have occurred to her earlier in the year (236-237)

In ‘The Opportunity of the Teacher’, a non-fiction essay by Timlow, she writes that ‘[c]hildren are at school not merely to cram Latin and mathematics down ostrich-like throats, but to learn to become loyal and true and high-minded, and to strengthen characters that should grow more womanly day by day’ (11-12). The teacher’s job, Timlow writes, is to ‘imbue them with a deep scorn of all that is ignoble and base’ (12). In order to grow into a wholesome and honourable American woman, Eleanor must be rid of her flirtatiousness; but first she must be made to realise why she must get rid of this behaviour she sees as of little consequence. Mrs. Conway fulfils Timlow’s ideal teacher role by teaching Eleanor to take her flirtatious folly seriously and learn to scorn it. She warns Eleanor that though her immature flirtatiousness ‘is not essentially wicked’ (226), if she allows herself to continue to engage in ‘silly flirting’ as she has done (226), it will slowly transform into something more serious. Eleanor takes Mrs. Conway’s lecture and resolves to change her ways, to stop yielding to her ‘lesser nature’ and to move back into the Chanters group. In the flash forward at the end of the novel it is revealed that Eleanor has managed to live up to her potential. She is married to a clergyman, involved in mission work and becomes the mother to ‘five splendid boys’ (394). In rejecting flirting, Eleanor is saved from what is promised to be an unfulfilling fate and is rewarded with a husband, occupation and children.

Eleanor and Romelia illustrate two different paths of girls who have fallen into the temptation to act like flirts. Eleanor renounces her flirtatiousness and thus is prevented from carrying this dangerous behaviour into her adult life. Romelia, however, refuses to renounce it. While Eleanor returns to good femininity and ceases to threaten social disorder, Romelia’s refusal to apologise for flirting leaves open the opportunity for the chaos she causes in the school to be repeated. Unwilling to reform, the only solution to the threat that Romelia represents is for her to be removed. While the other Sin-nics only get a lecture, an announcement is made: ‘Romelia Dransfield, who by her own confession as well as by all the

circumstantial evidence has been at the root of all the evil of dissimulation this winter, will not return after the present quarter' (280). Romelia's expulsion signals the defence of good womanly values by the removal of those who fail to practice them. Moruzi & Smith explain that '[t]he girls' school story is typically one of transformation, in which the protagonist learns to conform to the rules and codes of school life' (xxiii). Yet the opposite is also true. The antagonist in the girls' school story is often the girl who is taught the 'codes' and 'rules' but still rejects them. Romelia must be expelled because not only does she break the school rules of flirting, and even illicitly invites a boy into the school, but she also refuses to admit wrongdoing. Thus, though many of the schoolgirls are involved in the flirting plot, it is Romelia who is punished most harshly because she alone remains unapologetic and unwilling to change her behaviour.

While Eleanor is redeemed, Romelia, who refuses to stop flirting, is banished from the narrative. Significantly, she is omitted from the final chapter which details the futures of each of the other main girls. While all of the other girls have their next twenty years outlined—their work, marriages, children and health—Romelia's name is not even mentioned. While we are given a detailed account of the fates of all the 'good' girls, the reader is given no suggestion of Romelia's future—whether she lives into adulthood or not, whether she marries, what she works as—the implication being that it does not matter. A reprehensible and unlikeable flirt, as soon as Romelia is removed as a threat to the moral standing of the more worthy girls, she is ignored. Without having to say it in so many words, the didacticism of *A Nest of Girls* is clear. Girls should strive to be like the Merry Chanters, spurning flirtatiousness in the pursuit of virtue and honour. They might learn from Eleanor, who temporarily succumbs to flirtatiousness and celebrate her return to virtue. Yet they must at all costs avoid being a Romelia.

Through a variety of narrative devices and techniques, American girls' fiction nearing the end of the nineteenth century points to an image of female flirtatiousness as both unladylike and un-American. Though the American girl might be forgiven for a careless flirtation, the American woman will not be. Minor incidents of flirting are forgiven in the young heroine, with the expectation that the girl will learn from their misdemeanour and not carry this behaviour into adulthood. Underlying all these narratives is a sense of anxiety about flirting which is allowed to continue too long. Just as Amy March might have grown up to be an 'adult femme fatale' (Hovet 60), or Eleanor Scott is warned she must 'shape her life on altogether different lines' (238) to avoid becoming an ignoble flirt as an adult, what is important is that girls renounce flirtatious behaviour before it becomes an ingrained part of their identity. The few flirtatious girls who continue on to be flirts as adults face harsher punishment. Romelia in *A Nest of Girls* is deemed 'worthless', while Lilly in the *What Katy Did* series loses her expected fiancé to the more modest Katy. The heroines of girls' fiction who are tempted to flirt discover that the benefits of flirting bring only a shallow reward and that to engage for too long in this frivolous behaviour is to risk the corruption of a womanly character. Those who manage to resist are rewarded and celebrated. Though authors might promote these ideas in different ways, the end message is the same: to mature into a worthy American woman is to leave flirtatiousness behind.

CHAPTER THREE

## The Fear of Innocence in *Daisy Miller* and *A Fair Barbarian*

Approaching the end of the nineteenth century, women labelled as 'flirts' were surrounded by a divisive social discourse. A brief survey of newspapers and magazines from the period reveal two contradictory images of the flirt, one defending her as the unwitting victim of social misrepresentation and the other depicting her as the ultimate example of modern womanhood gone wrong. In 1869 *The Albion* characterised the flirt as a 'vampire who lives upon the hearts of men' ('Modern Flirtation' 250). In 1874 *Lippincott's Magazine* described the flirt as ruthlessly seducing and then abandoning men, 'rating her prowess by the extent of the wounds inflicted' (629). In 1893 *The Washington Post* called flirtatious women a 'social fungi' of urbanisation (Wilcox 18). Yet, for each article which demonises flirting as corruptive to womanly virtues is another arguing the opposite: that flirting is the natural product of innocent femininity and that problems are only caused by men misreading it as serious romantic intent. In 1875 a writer for *The New York Times* argued that 'the most audacious flirts . . . are invariably women of remarkably affectionate disposition' ('An Apology for Flirts' 4), and in 'The Art of Flirtation' (1911) the writer praised women who have mastered the art of flirting as a 'charming amusement' which focuses on 'enlivening' life (7). It is apparent that there is a strong division between the demonisation and defence of the flirt figure in this period, a divide which is hinged on a single question: is the flirt the antithesis of innocence or an embodiment of it?

The idea of innocence lies at the heart of nineteenth-century American literature. Mark Royden Winchell describes it as 'the inescapable theme' (18) and Patricia Nelson Limerick writes that among America's 'persistent values, few have more power than the idea of innocence' (1). A nation built on a murky history, the obsession with innocence is built on

a deep-rooted cultural anxiety about the potential of a second fall. In the paradigm of Edenic mythology, the role of women is unclear and problematic. If Adam's original fall is attributed to Eve, then women innately threaten the creation and sustainment of New Eden America. This is reconciled through most of the nineteenth century by keeping female characters in prescriptive and clear moral roles, namely either that of the virtuous, angelic and 'innocent' ingenue, or the dark, seductive, 'post-innocence' fallen woman, a binary of innocence versus sexuality which neatly divides the 'good' woman from the 'bad' one. Leslie Fiedler suggests that America's cultural preoccupation with innocence puts women in a hazardous position because, in the rebirth of America 'it is woman who has become the guardian of morality and the embodiment of conscious' (49). If Eve does not stray into sin, Adam will not be tempted to follow, and the mythology of a second Eden will remain secure. Yet for this to be upheld, the 'innocence' of Eve must be undeniable.

The flirt is a problematic figure to reconcile with Edenic mythology. While the latter is predicated on moral certainty and clear differentiation between the pre and postlapsarian Eve, the flirt resides in ambiguity which makes such distinction impossible. Thus, at the beginning of Henry James's 1878 novella, when Randolph Miller announces the arrival of his sister, Daisy, it is with an introduction which heralds a new wave of female characters who would challenge and undermine stock moral archetypes: '"[h]ere comes my sister!" cried the child in a moment. "She's an American girl"' (138). With this apparently simple introduction, Randolph begins a discussion which is anything but straightforward. What is an American girl and how might a more three-dimensional female character be reconciled with the static archetypes produced through Edenic mythology? Moving away from the simplistic female types of mid-nineteenth-century American literature, who Joyce Warren scathingly describes as 'female nonpersons' (103), Daisy's flirtatiousness represents a new type of American

femininity, and specifically a new image of innocence, which Winterbourne, along with his society, struggles to reconcile with his outdated expectations.

Daisy is one of American fiction's first and best-known flirt figures. Described by Winterbourne as an 'extraordinary mixture of innocence and crudity' (161), Daisy is flighty and frivolous, both childlike and suggestive, and cloaked with ambiguity which prevents her fictional community and her readers from gaining a clear picture of her character. Yet while Daisy Miller is a renowned character in American literature, she is often spoken of as a literary anomaly. Due to the lack of criticism on flirting and the flirt figure, Daisy's flirtatious identity has meant that she is usually discussed in isolation, rather than as part of a distinct literary lineage where flirtatious female characters are used to challenge old fashioned notions of American womanhood. To begin to correct this critical lacuna, I will situate *Daisy Miller* alongside a forgotten text, Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Fair Barbarian.* [23]

Though *A Fair Barbarian* was written as a direct response to *Daisy Miller* and was published in 1881, just three years after James' novella, the two works have seldom been discussed together. The few critics who have identified their similarities, like John Seelye and Mark Noonan, have commented only in passing.[24] The stories might be summarised almost identically: a naive and flirtatious American girl becomes caught in a cultural clash in Europe where her manners are scrutinised and those around her try to figure out if her free and transgressive behaviour is the mark of a 'bad' woman or an innocent one. Yet Burnett's

[23] I have chosen to include Burnett in this study of American literature because despite the fact that she was born in England and is often read as a quintessentially British children's author, she was widely claimed by her contemporary American audience as one of their own. Burnett's family emigrated to America when she was seventeen, and from then on, though she was a regular visitor to Britain, she spent most of her life in the East Coast of America. I follow other critics' leads in allowing Burnett to be part of this study, as, for example, Gail Schmunk Murray does in *American Children's Literature and the Construction of Childhood* when she claims that Burnett's years spent living in America, her marriage to an American, her American publishers and common use of American protagonists all justify her inclusion in a discussion of authors who are American by birth (111).

[24] See, for example, Seelye's *Jane Eyre's American Daughters* (194) and Noonan's 'The Campaign for Realism in the New Periodical Press' (296).

novella offers a happy alternative to Daisy's death, where in supplying her heroine, Octavia Bassett, with a fiancé at the end of the novel, she escapes Daisy's tragic fate and concludes the story as Seelye describes 'an innocent girl from the American West [who] triumphs over the stiff and stodgy residents of a British provincial town' (194).

Pairing *Daisy Miller* and *A Fair Barbarian* offers an enriched approach to James' famous novella, for when Octavia and Daisy are brought into dialogue it becomes clear that Daisy is simply the beginning of a stream of flirtatious female characters whose flirtatious ambiguity undermines the static and outdated binaries which traditionally position American women either as incorruptibly pure or irredeemably bad. Both texts invoke the conventions of the innocence narrative prominent in nineteenth-century American fiction, yet they also play with this genre. Rather than assuming innocence to be a desirable and stable state, both novellas present a more complicated vision of 'innocence' which can be either authentic or inauthentic. At the centre of both novellas is the flirt figure who can be read as both innocent or not innocent and thus problematises any notion of interpretative or moral simplicity.

**Daisy Miller**

Shrouded in ambiguity and without a direct voice in her own novella, Daisy Miller has always been a difficult heroine to decipher. The debate over whether Daisy should be read as a champion or antagonist of American innocence proliferated to such an extent in the wake of the novella's publication that in 1879 William Dean Howells described America as 'divided into Millerites and anti-Millerites' (qtd in. Stafford 111-112). It is a debate which continued over the course of the next thirty years.[25] Reflecting on *Daisy Miller* in an article published for *The Ladies Home Journal* in 1904, Winfield Scott remarked that Daisy's weakness is not

[25] After which the debate was somewhat resolved by James' 1909 revision of the novella in which Daisy's innocence is made blatant and Winterbourne shaped less sympathetically (*The Novels and Tales of Henry James Volume 18)*.

her morality but her 'sense of girlish modesty and decent reserve' and that her tragedy is because she is so innocent that she has 'no conception of the fact that social laws could be held binding upon her' (17). Yet other reviewers suggested the opposite: that Daisy's 'innocence' is a deception and that her death from Roman Fever is the just punishment for her moral laxity.[26] In 1880, Abby Sage Richardson wrote for a Christian Union publication that mothers who had read Daisy's story had generally reacted by moving 'towards greater restriction and conservatism in the raising of their daughters' (184), while in 1894, an article for *Harper's Bazaar* claimed that '[a] competition has been going on for some years with a view to discovering which nation—England or America—could furnish, through its novelists, the more unpleasant type of the young women of the period. For some time America had the lead, and Daisy Miller was the representative' (Crosland 634). It is a harsh judgement of Daisy, particularly considering the popularity of the 'femme fatale' figure during this period.[27] Why should a character whose crimes are only social and not moral ones, cause a greater outcry than characters who are clearly marked as wicked?

Described by Lynn Wardley as a heroine who 'oscillates' between several social binaries (222), Daisy is a figure of moral uncertainty because she falls somewhere between the American ingenue and fallen woman. Winterbourne is obsessed with the idea that Daisy

[26] In many ways Daisy's death mimics the traditional fate of the fallen woman, who dies as a punishment for her sexual crimes. Yet, for an audience well aware that this is a fate reserved for a physically fallen female, Daisy's death, despite her still being a virgin, calls into question at what point a girl's fall occurs: is it with a sexual act or simply at the point of being talked about? Roman Fever is subsequently used as a motif in expressing female transgressiveness in the decades following *Daisy Miller,* inspiring the title for Edith Wharton's *Roman Fever* (1934), where one of the characters tries to trick another into going to the Colosseum at night in the hope of her contracting (and dying from) the fever in an echo of Daisy's fate.

[27] If we are to survey literature from both America and Britain in this period, this means that Daisy is implied to be worse than famous femme fatales like Jean Muir, in Louisa May Alcott's *Behind a Mask* (1866), an actress who is consistently described as witch-like and disguises herself as an innocent young governess in order to manipulate the family and acquire their fortune, or Lucy Audley in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), who uses her supposed weakness and feminine frailty to mask her sordid past and attempted murder of her ex-husband.

must be put into a 'category' and is tormented by his doubts that she seems to evade every definition he finds for her: '[w]as she simply a pretty girl from New York State – were they all like that, the pretty girls who had a good deal of gentlemen's society? Or was she also a designing, an audacious, an unscrupulous young person' (144). In order to try and find a solution to Daisy's ambiguity, Winterbourne must design a new category, or as James describes, 'a formula which could be applied' to her, which he eventually does by describing her as 'only a pretty American flirt' (144). In finding a label for Daisy, Winterbourne momentarily believes that his old-fashioned model for understanding women has been proved right. Yet his relief is short lived, for unlike the fallen woman or angelic ingenue, the flirt figure cannot be so neatly contained. Again and again Daisy subverts Winterbourne's expectations, and says and does things which challenge his simplistic expectation that women are either completely innocent or immoral. Despite his proclaimed fondness for Daisy, Winterbourne refuses to accept that she can be moral while still having agency and actively engaging with the world. Like her critical readers, he expects that she should conform to a poetic ideal of what innocence looks like. He almost does not mind whether she is elevated as a perfect example of innocence or condemned as a fallen woman so long as she is given clarity and his torment at her interpretive instability is brought to a close.

Despite America proclaiming innocence as an imperative part of cultural mythology, and Winterbourne being heavily aware that female innocence is something to be cherished and protected at all costs, he discovers that defining innocence is not the straightforward task he would have expected. Raised with a worldview that has informed him that women fall into two groups—those who are 'dangerous, terrible women' and those who are perfectly pure and proper—Winterbourne struggles to fathom a girl who seems neither terrible nor angelic. As he admits, he has 'never, as yet, had any relations with young ladies of this category' (144). To place such importance on innocence is problematic outwith the antiquated binary

model of women as either angel or fallen where 'innocence' can be used synonymously with 'virginal'. Daisy highlights that such a stark definition of 'innocence' is inadequate when applied to female characters who are not merely symbols of purity and sin. Winterbourne's speculations about Daisy's innocence are not based in whether she has succumbed to pre-marital sex, but rather focus on innocence as a more abstract concept. He is caught in a difficult predicament where he knows the importance of defining Daisy as either innocent or not innocent but struggles to define exactly what innocence is.

The absence of clear parameters of what constitutes innocence is what makes Daisy such an epistemological nightmare for Winterbourne and the rest of the American expatriate community. Fiedler writes that the defining feature of the uniquely American notion of innocence is that it does not hinge on specific actions or behaviours: '[w]hat the European male fails ever to understand is that the American Girl is innocent by definition, *mythically* innocent; and that her purity, therefore, depends upon nothing she does or says' (312). Yet while his definition helps to explain why Daisy's innocence cannot be defined according to social codes of what a girl should and should not do, he is wrong to suggest that it is only the Europeans who misunderstand her. As I will go on to explain in greater depth, Daisy is most disastrously misread not by Europeans, but by her fellow Americans. Furthermore, Fiedler's assertion that American innocence cannot be touched by a girl's actions is challenged by Annette Kar's statement that American innocence is a specific construct of 'inviolable innocence compounded with instinctive moral judgment' (32). It is not enough for Daisy to be abstractly innocent. She must also prove her innocence through her perfect moral judgement. It is here that Daisy falls short. Winterbourne and the other Americans fail to understand 'American innocence' in the way Fiedler defines it. Instead they ascribe moral values to Daisy's behaviour to define her as either innocent or fallen. Far from Fiedler's assertion that to misunderstand American innocence is the mark of a non-American, Daisy is

the victim of a national mythology which is so abstract that it cannot be understood even by its own natives.

Daisy's flirtatiousness troubles Winterbourne because he cannot understand how innocence can be reconciled with worldly awareness. How can a girl who flirts be innocent? Seven times in the novella, he tries to define the opposite of 'innocence' in the hope that this might bring clarity to categorising Daisy. Yet each time he is dissatisfied, for he still fails to capture Daisy with his self-created binaries. He begins by describing her as 'an extraordinary mixture of innocence and crudity' (161), then a few pages later as a 'inscrutable combination of audacity and innocence' (171). In the first description he focuses on her social primitiveness as a sign of her lack of innocence, in the second it is her boldness that he uses. Yet each time Daisy says something he thinks exposes her lack of innocence he is plunged back into confusion by her gaze, which he finds cannot be 'called an immodest glance, for the young girl's eyes were singularly honest and fresh' (140). He meanders through several other definitions for defining innocence, yet finds each to be unsatisfying. He posits innocence as the opposite of 'recklessness' (173). Innocence as the opposite of 'ignorance' and 'vulgarity' (162), and an innocent person as the opposite of a 'reprobate' (188). Yet each revision offers him no further clarity on Daisy's innocence, for while each individual negative trait might be a sign of her lack of innocence, it might also simply stem from her being, as he describes, 'a young person of the reckless class' (184). Coming from a literary tradition where female characters' innocence is pre-established and static, Daisy's ambiguous intent renders her innocence a fluid and interpretively slippery concept.

As the narrative progresses it becomes increasingly apparent that there are two types of 'innocence': childlike naivety which is oblivious of its own state of innocence, and performative innocence, underpinned by a set of prescriptive cultural behaviours that mark a woman as pure. While Daisy might be of the first kind, for her to be deemed 'good' by her

society, she must also perform cultural innocence in the appropriate way. This gap between the construct of cultural innocence and natural innocence becomes conspicuous in the scene where Mrs. Walker finally disassociates herself from Daisy. When Mrs. Walker and Winterbourne witness Daisy walking in the streets unchaperoned with Mr. Giovanelli, Winterbourne describes Daisy as 'very innocent' (171). Mrs. Walker responds immediately that Daisy is 'very crazy' (171). While Winterbourne seems to suggest that if Daisy is not innocent, then she is morally wanting, Mrs. Walker's concern is not about Daisy's morality, but about how other people might be interpreting her behaviour. Daisy is 'crazy' not because she is doing something genuinely immoral, but because she is disregarding the fact that she is causing gossip and speculation, apparently uncaring that '[f]ifty people have noticed her' (171). When Winterbourne asks Mrs. Walker what her plan is, she replies 'to drive her about here for half an hour, so that the world may see she is not running absolutely wild, and then to take her safely home' (171). If Mrs. Walker's intervention was only to protect Daisy's real childlike innocence by shielding her from adult experiences, her plan of rescue would simply be to take her home. Instead, her most pressing concern is to make sure that Daisy is *seen* to be behaving in an appropriate manner.

The question of the novella is not whether Daisy is innocent or not, but whether she performs innocence in the proper way. Her flirtatiousness exposes the disjunction between actual innocence and performative innocence, where she might be punished for behaviour stemming from an authentic childlike naivety if she fails to perform innocence properly. Paul Lukacs supports my suggestion that there are two types of innocence, writing that Daisy Miller is a problematic text because 'the same textual evidence yields two radically different readings, one which praises Daisy for her innocence, another which indicts her for it' (213). Depending on what kind of 'innocence' one searches for, Daisy might either be praised as

being an example of true American innocence stifled by a judgemental and backwards society or criticised for her wilful refusal to play the role of the idealised American ingenue.

If there are two types of innocence—natural innocence (childlike naivety, ignorance of cultural rules or sexual implications) and performative innocence (a display of deliberate purity, consciously avoiding adult experience, removal of oneself from society for fear of moral contamination)—then *Daisy Miller* suggests that America protects the second kind but not the first. Daisy is childlike and headstrong, apparently unaware of the longstanding impact of her indiscretions. But she is also, as Mrs. Walker describes, 'naturally indelicate' (174). She fails to present a front of purity and in her genuine lack of sexual awareness, places herself in positions which make her look as if she is not innocent at all. Perhaps the greatest catalyst for her social fall is her visit to Chillon castle with Winterbourne. Mrs. Costello reads the trip as proof of Daisy's total lack of moral propriety and believes her willingness to be seen unchaperoned in public with a man is evidence of her defiance of social rules concerning girls' interactions with the opposite sex. On the contrary Daisy's willingness to go to the castle shows the opposite. The castle is not simply an excuse for an illicit romantic trip, Daisy has previously planned to go with her family but this is cancelled when her 'mother gave out' (145). She then tries to convince her brother to accompany her but he 'doesn't think much of old castles' (145). While Daisy's motivation is only that she wants to see the castle, it is Winterbourne who goes with duplicitous intent. It is he who suggests that they should go together and he who ascribes a suggestiveness to Daisy's innocuous interest in the castle. When Mrs. Costello incredulously asks if 'you two are going off there together' (149), it is with an emphasis on the recklessness of their plan, especially given the brief nature of their acquaintance. Yet when Winterbourne later quotes her, there is an added level of provocativeness in his echo of her phrase 'going off': 'the only very definite conclusion he came to was that he should enjoy deucedly "going off" with her

somewhere' (157). Yet though it is Winterbourne who adds a sexual inference into the excursion, it is Daisy's reputation which is damaged for it. It is a paradox that her real naivety—which means that she sees going with Winterbourne to be as unproblematic as to go with her mother or brother—causes her to make decisions which others can project unvirtuous meaning onto.

It has been a trend in Jamesian criticism to discuss the transatlantic dynamics of his work in such a way that the characters in his novels are simply reduced to symbolic emblems of their nationality and this is certainly true of *Daisy Miller*. Richard Kaye describes Daisy's tragedy as 'a martyrdom of American innocence on the pyre of European attitudes' (153) and Marsha Kinder as 'an innocent young girl going abroad, where her actions are misunderstood by Europeans' (360). When these critics position American innocence as the opposite of European tradition, they suggest that Daisy might have escaped her fate by simply staying in America. This is certainly an oversimplification, for far from being the only American in Europe, Daisy enters a European city which is already heavily Americanised:

> In this region, in the month of June, American travelers are extremely numerous; it may be said, indeed, that Vevey assumes at this period some of the characteristics of an American watering place. There are sights and sounds which evoke a vision, an echo, of Newport and Saratoga. There is a flitting hither and thither of "stylish" young girls, a rustling of muslin flounces, a rattle of dance music in the morning hours, a sound of high-pitched voices at all times. (135)

While critics have suggested that James' Europe is unused to and suspicious of Americanness, the image of Vevey as an 'American watering place' indicates the opposite. In echoing Newport and Saratoga—two powerful American towns of the wealthy elite—the Europe Daisy enters is one in which Americanness not only exists, but actively thrives. Theoretically, she should be well positioned to blend seamlessly into their microsociety.

While contemporary critics have tended to read Daisy's judgement as coming from Europeans, earlier reviews seem aware that this is not the case. A review of *Daisy Miller* published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in July 1879 describes the novella as 'a purely American picture; and the strange, beautiful, dainty, innocent, and very foolish little American girl, with her ignorant defiance of all rules, is criticised and condemned by Americans abroad, not by the society native to the places which she scandalises' ('New Books' 107). Where Kaye and Kinder have tried to explain Daisy's social expulsion as the mistranslation of American customs in Europe, what we see is a concentrated society of Americans who so closely group together that they barely interact with the Europeans who live there. There are even moments of self-consciousness about the lack of Europeans in this European city as in Mrs. Walker's interest in 'studying European society' (176), which she does by bringing in token Europeans into their exclusive group as if they are curiosities to be examined. At the party hosted for the American expatriates she has 'collected several specimens of her diversely born fellow mortals to serve, as it were, as textbooks' (176).

From the opening paragraph to Daisy's death, which spreads 'to every member of the little American circle' (190), while barely touching the wider European community, Daisy is judged in an American framework, not a European one. In order to prove their moral purity, Daisy is constructed as 'other' from her compatriots so that she cannot be seen to represent what all American girls are like: '[t]hey ceased to invite her; and they intimated that they desired to express to observant Europeans the great truth that, though Miss Daisy Miller was a young American lady, her behavior was not representative – was regarded by her compatriots as abnormal' (184). It is Americans and not Europeans who drive Daisy's expulsion from their community. There is a deep hypocrisy in that the Americans picture themselves as more modern and liberal than their European counterparts, yet they choose to ostracise Daisy in case the Europeans should start to imagine that America is a place which

would accept such flirtatious femininity. When the novel was first published, American readers similarly jumped to disowning Daisy as an American character. The anonymous author of the article 'Henry James's "Daisy Miller"', in *Scribner's Monthly* in 1879, wrote of America's horror that their nation should be associated with such an abhorrent female character and criticised Mrs. Costello as being 'too shadowy' a character to properly rebuke Daisy and make clear America's disgust at James' impetuous heroine (609). For readers to side with Mrs. Costello, whose primary role in the novella is to judge and condemn those who do not adhere to her rigid standards, illustrates contemporary attitudes to female flirtatiousness. As in the novel, readers' responses were exaggerated by the embarrassment that European readers might think Daisy an accurate representation of American girls, with the *Scribner's* writer explaining that Americans 'naturally feel a little sore when an experienced observer, like Mr.James, produces a character which cannot be meant otherwise than typical, and yet exhibits an American girl abroad in anything but a pleasing light' (609). While critics such as Kaye and Kinder have suggested that the theme of expatriation is a chance for America to be observed by Europe, in *Daisy Miller* it mainly offers the opportunity for Americans to judge other Americans. Transplanting a group of Americans abroad exaggerates rather than dilutes national mythologies. Daisy experiences a harsher judgement because her American community feel the need to defend their reputation in Europe by taking an exaggerated stance against a girl who is portraying their nationality negatively.

The vision of America as a progressive, liberal nation is set against the reality of the American community in Europe, which is depicted as judgemental, old fashioned and patriarchal. Daisy is oddly positioned because she is an American, whose ways are merely perplexing to Europeans but repellent to those of her own nationality. This hypocrisy is particularly strong because the Americans in the novel repeatedly narrate European society as

less socially progressive than America. At best Europe is presented as quaint and traditional, at worst as archaic and judgemental. Randolph Miller, who John Randall describes as representing 'in miniature the unpleasant bragging American tourist' (572), makes particularly ridiculous claims against Europe. First, after having suffered wobbly teeth, he blames this toothache on 'this Old Europe' (137). He tells Winterbourne that '[i]t's the climate that makes them come out. In America they didn't come out' (137), disregarding the connection between his propensity for crunching sugar cubes and his sudden lack of teeth. Later, in the days before Daisy's death, he declares that Europe is a bad place to go out at night because 'it's so plaguey dark', adding, 'you can't see anything here at night, except when there's a moon. In America there's always a moon' (190). Though both statements are childishly ridiculous, as per Randall's suggestion that we read Randolph as a miniature American adult, we should not simply discard what Randolph says as comical. Though his assertions that Europe has hurt his teeth and doesn't get enough moon are certainly comic, they also reveal an inbuilt prejudice of Americans against Europe which even children have learned to mimic.

Daisy consistently describes Europe as 'perfectly sweet' (143), a patronising compliment which positions Europe as a quaint escape from the more developed America. In small ways she implies Europe to be an inferior version of America, such as in her dislike of the clothes available in the shops: 'I am sure they send all the pretty ones to America; you see the most frightful things here' (143). The hotel culture in Vevey is similarly described as 'very good, once you got used to their ways' (143), a clause which is careful to show the adjusted expectations of Americans used to the displays of modernity back home. Thus when Winterbourne explains to Daisy that she must not flirt because 'flirting is a purely American custom' (179) which doesn't exist in Europe, he implies that Europe is behind America in

terms of accepting transgressive female behaviour. What might be acceptable in New World America will be dangerously read in (what Randolph describes as) 'Old Europe' (137).

When Winterbourne warns Daisy not to flirt it is because he believes she will be condemned by Europeans. He should instead have warned her about the Americans. *Daisy Miller* exposes the disjunction between the vision of nineteenth-century America as a free and modern nation and its entrenched hierarchies, judgements and gender roles. While the American characters read Europe as old fashioned and traditional, they seem unaware that the prejudices they carry go far beyond those of their European peers. Though Winterbourne verbally mimics the other Americans in his community, his private musings show his doubts about his own proclamations of America as a place of liberalism. When Mrs. Costello tries to teach him about the structure of New York 'her picture of the minutely hierarchical constitution of the society of that city' is 'to Winterbourne's imagination, almost oppressively striking' (147). Though he does not speak this aloud, Winterbourne's faith in the liberalism of his nation is less than secure. The 'hierarchies' Mrs. Costello refers to are microcosmically replicated in the European hotels, so that Daisy is pushed further down the social ladder as she transgresses social codes and is scorned for her disregard for keeping to her own class. Mrs. Costello's first reason for disliking Daisy's family is not to do with Daisy's flirting at all, but is based on her dislike of the family's friendly relationship with their courier. She haughtily declares 'they treat the courier like a familiar friend—like a gentleman. I shouldn't wonder if he dines with them' (148). For a nation which, as Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz describe, is 'steeped in the myth of classlessness' (7), *Daisy Miller* exposes the void between America's projected image of itself as advanced and accepting, and the reality, where Americans are proved to be more exclusive and judgemental than the Europeans they claim to be more progressive than.

Contrary to the liberal and open attitudes that America claims to foster, Daisy is pushed out of society because she does not conform to the narrow and restrictive model of innocence that is protected by American mythology. The cultural obsession with preserving innocence places her in a perilous position because she cannot be neatly contained within the Edenic dichotomy of pre and postlapsarian Eve. Unable to accommodate for the fact that real innocence might manifest in indiscreet female behaviour, Daisy is pitted against a national mythology which will go to any length to preserve a specific vision of innocence, no matter the cost. A famous example of America's inflexible and violent defence of perceived innocence is found in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* (1860). Paired with the dark and mysterious Miriam, Hilda is the archetypal pure woman, obsessed with preserving her innocence above anything else. This fixation ultimately causes her to cast out her best friend in her time of need, for fear of her own purity being contaminated by Miriam's relation to sin. Emily Schiller suggests that Hilda is 'blinded by her own value system' (376) and reads Hilda's attempts to 'choose' innocence as an admission that she is not innocent in the first place (377). Ironically, Hilda's aggressive preservation of her own innocence causes her to become the worst version of herself, she is willing to forget empathy, kindness and loyalty in the pursuit of a state of purity, though this purity has already proven to be false. Schiller writes that Hilda 'is a clear demonstration of the power of innocence to blind us to its limitations, warp our judgment, and persuade us to defend its static—and questionable—virtue at all costs' (388). Hilda's 'innocence' is a paradox, a metaphor for a nation so obsessed with preserving innocence that it can no longer in any way be considered innocent. Schiller's analysis of Hilda is helpful for thinking about how Daisy's 'natural' innocence clashes with the cultural perception of what innocence should look like. If Hilda might be 'innocent' without being 'good', then Daisy might be 'good' without being 'innocent'.

Through *Daisy Miller,* it becomes increasingly apparent that the 'innocence' that Daisy exhibits is not of the right persuasion. While Winterbourne struggles to ascribe malice, calculation or deliberate seduction to her behaviour, he cannot deem her a 'good' woman because she does not adhere to his preconceived notions of the behaviours he associates with moral femininity. Just as Hilda's 'innocence' has more to do with trivial, performative details and her deliberate cultivation of 'innocent' behaviours, Winterbourne's idea of innocence is one so heavily shaped by his culture that he reads innocuous deviations from social codes as evidence of Daisy's lack of purity. He notes that she dresses in a showy manner, her dresses all have 'a hundred frills and flounces, and knots of pale-colored ribbon' (138). Though he remarks that this makes her look 'admirably pretty', it also marks her as a conspicuous consumer who is perhaps too concerned with cultivating her own appearance. Mariana Valverde suggests that 'showy dress' was often a subject of concern according to Victorian social rules, where for young girls it was 'plain dress' which was associated with 'more virtue' (179). When Daisy's showy dress style is linked to her flirting it becomes the subject of moral concern. Even her usually absent mother is critical of her decision to dress up for Giovanelli, as she tells Winterbourne 'I didn't see the use of her putting on such a dress as that to sit round with Mr. Giovanelli' (176). It is such trivial behaviours becoming inscribed with moral meaning which allow women to be categorised as either 'innocent' or not.

In a similar way to how Daisy's appearance becomes evidence of her lack of moral purity, Daisy's speech, specifically her tendency for 'chatter' (180), causes Winterbourne to question if Daisy can really be an innocent American woman, who he would expect to be measured and reserved. Like most aspects of female behaviour, how women conversed was subject to strict social codes in the late nineteenth century, the rules to which were unpacked in etiquette guides aimed at middle class American Women. One of the most popular guides,

Florence Hartley's *The Lady's Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness* (1860) advises women how to speak in public:

> You should be quite as anxious to talk with propriety as you are to think, work, sing, paint, or write, according to the most correct rules. Always select words calculated to convey an exact impression of your meaning. Avoid a loquacious propensity; you should never occupy more than your share of the time, or more than is agreeable to others. (152)

The advice is not only aimed at politeness but hints at deeper social codes which will be transgressed if women do not moderate their speech when in public. Even in this short extract, the advice about women's conversation is linked in several ways to morality. Talking too much is to show a lack of concern for others, to show a lack of modesty, to make yourself disagreeable and to appear vulgar. Winterbourne's frequent comments that Daisy chatters too much are not only observations on her manners but form part of his analysis of her moral character. He remarks early on that 'it was many years since he had heard a young girl talk so much' (142), and later that 'he had never heard a young girl express herself in this fashion' (143). Daisy's 'chatter' subverts expectations for how young girls will conduct themselves because she refuses to play the passive role of the listener. Leland Person suggests that James' society would expect conversation between men and women to adhere to a patriarchal hierarchy, with an 'active male, gathering himself to a point; the passive woman, listening patiently' (80). Daisy's love of talking disrupts this structure. In almost all their time together, Daisy dominates the conversation, leaving Winterbourne in the traditionally feminised role of the listener. Though her talkativeness is not implicitly bad, it is seen as so unusual for a 'nice' girl to be so forward in her opinions that her loquaciousness once again prompts Winterbourne to 'question whether this was, in fact, a nice girl' (170).

Unlike the fallen woman who is banished from her community for a realised sexual transgression, Daisy is excluded from hers simply because she too closely resembles a fallen woman. That Daisy can remain a virgin while still becoming a social outcast shows that innocence is not a clear or static state but one which is socially constructed and expected to be performed in a certain way. Daisy makes the mistake of thinking that she will be fine so long as she does not cross the line from flirtation into something more physical. What she fails to realise is that 'American innocence' is embedded in tiny social details and rituals: how she dresses, how she talks, who she sits with and where she walks. Even Daisy's harshest judge, Mrs. Costello, concedes that Daisy might not actually be bad, but justifies her harsh social fall because Daisy is at least 'hopelessly vulgar . . . Whether or no being hopelessly vulgar is being 'bad' is a question for the metaphysicians. They are bad enough to dislike, at any rate; and for this short life that is quite enough' (162). Daisy dies, not because she is 'bad', but because she is 'vulgar'. In the pursuit of American innocence, to be indiscreet is equated with immorality.

It is not simply that Daisy flirts which troubles Winterbourne but who she chooses to flirt with. Winterbourne believes that Daisy is exposing her lack of innocence in her willingness to be associated with Giovanelli who, as he describes, falls short of his social measure of propriety: '"He is not a gentleman," said the young American; "he is only a clever imitation of one"' (170). Though Winterbourne admits that 'if he was an imitation, then he was an excellent one' (170), he still expects that Daisy's admiration of Giovanelli proves that she is not a virtuous woman because 'a nice girl ought to know' (170). Winterbourne interprets Daisy's naivety as a specific affront to their shared nationality, feeling 'a superior indignation at his own lovely fellow-countrywoman's not knowing the difference between a spurious gentleman and a real one' (170). Daisy's behaviour is not universally objectionable, it is objectionable because she is American. Given that Winterbourne himself concedes that

Giovanelli plays the gentleman convincingly, it seems extreme that he should be so offended by Daisy's inability to distinguish the difference. Yet reading this scene, not with Daisy as an individual girl, but Daisy as a reflection of American girls in general, reconciles this contradiction. Returning to Fiedler's description of American girls as the guardians of the nation's morality (49), Daisy's inability to decipher a good man from a morally dubious one touches on a deeper anxiety, that she is failing to live up to her role as a moral compass.

It would be impossible to argue that Daisy has no notion of romance or attention for she enjoys being adored and flourishes under the gaze of multiple gentlemen. As she herself admits to Winterbourne, she wants to be desired, and for her absence to cause 'a little fuss' among her disappointed suitors (157). Yet there is also a heavy element of play to her flirting. Imperatively, Daisy enjoys the vague attention of multiple men more than the serious attention of one. As Winterbourne observes 'she could chatter as freshly and freely with two gentlemen as with one' (180). To Daisy, flirting is a game which is entirely separate from seduction, thus it is entirely possible that she is a suggestive and deliberate flirt while still being innocent of any serious sexual intent.

In an article for *The Albion,* 'The Innocent Girls' (1876), the writer warns that men should not take the encouragement of a young flirtatious girl too seriously, because 'she may not have the slightest wish to catch you, and, when you propose to her she has not the vaguest idea whether she is in love with you or not. Probably she is startled to hear you talk about such a thing' (9). What the writer identifies is that flirting does not necessarily indicate a desire for anything more serious. The mistake that Winterbourne makes is to presume that if Daisy is found to be flirting, then she is equally guilty of manipulating men using seduction. The question should not be whether Daisy is flirting or not, for she admits she is, but whether her flirtation is an end in itself, or a means to a more serious end. Winterbourne, however, proves unable to differentiate between flirting as a self-contained, playful activity, and flirting

as the first step to seduction, which becomes evident in his confrontation with Daisy about Giovanelli:

> "Ah!" rejoined Winterbourne, "if you are in love with each other, it is another affair."
>
> She had allowed him up to this point to talk so frankly that he had no expectation of shocking her by this ejaculation; but she immediately got up, blushing visibly, and leaving him to exclaim mentally that little American flirts were the queerest creatures in the world. "Mr. Giovanelli, at least," she said, giving her interlocutor a single glance, "never says such very disagreeable things to me." (179)

Winterbourne fails to understand the evidence of Daisy's innocence. To Daisy, Winterbourne's suggestion that she and Giovanelli are in love is an inappropriately adult one. His talk of love implies that there is much more to Daisy's friendly flirting than she has agreed to and she is visibly upset that he has tarnished her free and easy relationship with a serious interpretation. As the *Albion* article suggests, Daisy does not have the 'slightest wish to catch' a man with her flirting, proof that her flirtatiousness was never intended to be taken seriously in the first place (9). The pathos of *Daisy Miller* is that Daisy is presented as a manipulative femme fatale by the collective imagination of her society, when she is in fact so innocent of any attempts at serious seduction that she is upset at the mere suggestion of adult realities like being in love.

Although people around him are concerned that Daisy will contaminate his innocence, Winterbourne's innocence is compromised before he meets her. It is speculated at the start of the narrative, and then later confirmed that 'the reason of his spending so much time at Geneva was that he was extremely devoted to a lady who lived there—a foreign lady—a person older than himself' (45). Though the narrative centres on Winterbourne's attempts to reconcile Daisy's flirting with the idea that she is not inherently a 'bad' woman, he seems oblivious to the hypocrisy that he is judging her for her fickleness when he himself is more

guilty of this behaviour. While Daisy is scrutinised for every social misstep, Winterbourne's double crossing is seldom mentioned in criticism of *Daisy Miller*. When Daisy discovers the existence of this woman in Geneva, she questions him fiercely, though while Winterbourne is 'bewildered' by her indignation, he appears to feel no embarrassment about his secret being revealed (160). Winterbourne may court multiple women without fear, while Daisy is accused of sordidness for her (much tamer) flirtations with multiple men. Furthermore, there is the strange paradox that Winterbourne may still retain his American innocence despite his own sins, yet his innocence is threatened by contamination from Daisy.

When Mrs. Costello hears of his plans to accompany Daisy to Chillon castle, her concern for him places all blame with Daisy, and suggests that her nephew is in danger of falling into the flirtatious trap of a 'dreadful girl' because he is 'too innocent', he replies 'dear aunt, I am not so innocent' (149). There is a disjunction in how clarifying Daisy's innocence, or lack of innocence, is of urgent importance and yet Winterbourne can playfully say that he is 'not so innocent' without any consequence. Daisy is an unmarried, unattached girl who flirts playfully and without sexual intent. Winterbourne, meanwhile, is an adult man in an adulterous relationship. Yet it is Winterbourne's innocence which is protected and he who is angry that Daisy does not want to commit to him and him alone. Although he freely flits between his two women, he is disappointed to realise that Daisy has not simply pined for him while he is away and is 'vexed' that she 'should not appear more impatient of his own company' (170) after his absence. Though she has readily admitted that her flirtation should not be taken seriously, Winterbourne tries to transform her flirting into seduction by reimagining her charms as if they are specific to him. On his return from Geneva he is upset that Daisy has been seemingly unaffected by his absence as this indifference is 'so little in harmony with an image that had lately flitted in and out of his own meditations; the image of a very pretty girl looking out of an old Roman window and asking herself urgently when Mr.

Winterbourne would arrive' (163). Upset by Daisy's flirting, Winterbourne tells her '[y]ou're a very nice girl; but I wish you would flirt with me, and me only' (178). It is a request which shows the extent to which he has misread Daisy. Daisy's flirtatiousness allows her to interact freely and openly with men without being compromised. In offering them no promises, she can innocently play at romance without ever crossing the line into offering it. In asking Daisy to only flirt with him, Winterbourne is asking her to give up her childish games of romance for a more serious and adult relationship, essentially giving up the innocence which he is so determined she needs to possess to be worthy of his time

Though comic in tone, Winterbourne's suggestive 'I am not so innocent' reveals something true, that while preoccupied with Daisy being innocent, he is more likely to corrupt her than the other way around, making his Aunt's warning somewhat unnecessary. He wants Daisy's attention to himself yet expects her faithfulness without reciprocation; throughout his entire relationship with Daisy he continues his relations with his Genevan woman on the side. As a man, Winterbourne has the freedom to lose his own innocence without consequence, whereas Daisy's entire social identity is hinged on her performance of 'American innocence'. Though Daisy dies for flirting, Winterbourne is able to continue in an adulterous relationship without consequence. The oppressive notion of innocence which stifles Daisy's natural naivety barely touches Winterbourne. Ultimately it does not matter that Winterbourne in his own words is 'not so innocent', for masculine innocence was never the cultural concern in the first place.

When considering the flirt's power to disrupt cultural mythology, gender politics and traditional approaches to defining femininity, there is one question I will keep revisiting: how much does she mean it? Daisy is a figure who causes controversy, division and uncertainty both within the social world of her novel, and in the responses of her readers. Should we read Daisy as a deliberate social revolutionary who is calculatedly using flirtation to manipulate the patriarchal, outdated society she finds herself trapped in? Or, as Daniel Hoffman-

Schwartz et al. suggests, is there 'the possibility that the flirtatious character is one who earnestly 'never means it' but who nonetheless can tell us something about the nature of ordinary sincerity' (8).

Criticism is divided over whether Daisy is aware of the impact of her behaviour or not. Ihab Hassan reads Daisy's actions as deliberate social protest, writing that 'it is by conscious choice rather than necessity that she immolates herself to her innocence' (43). Sarah Marsh agrees, pointing to the curiosity that since Daisy dies so rapidly after contracting Roman Fever, it suggests she chooses not to take the malaria pills she is offered. If this is what James is implying, Marsh argues, then we would have reason to read Daisy's death as 'a means of escaping' the prescriptive and limited options available to her (232). There are certainly parallels between Daisy Miller and other flirtatious heroines who come after her and meet a tragic end, namely Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* (1899) and Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* (1905). In each case the woman's death might be read as a final display of defiance against society. Yet the ambiguous nature of whether their deaths are accidental or premeditated means that there is the possibility that, as Hoffman-Schwartz suggests, the flirt might protest against her society without meaning to (8). Daisy's reactions to being told off for her behaviour seem to point to this reading, for instead of replying with anger at the repressive rules for female conduct, she often responds with confusion. When, for example, Winterbourne tells her that it is improper for someone in her social position to flirt, Daisy retorts 'it seems to me much more proper in young unmarried women than in old married ones' (178). By living by her own ideas and moral code, she challenges the logic of the rules which govern society. Yet it is a defiance which serves only her own enjoyment of life without necessarily suggesting a wider social purpose.[28]

[28] Further evidence for this reading can be found in the stage play James wrote in in 1882, *Daisy Miller: A Comedy in Three Acts.* There are significant deviations from the original work, namely that Daisy and Winterbourne are articulated to be in love with each other and finish the play a couple

Daisy is misjudged because her nation is so focused on preserving an inauthentic performance of innocence that it will not believe in her authentic purity. It is only in death that clarity is given to her character, freeing her from the misrepresentations she has been buried under:

> Giovanelli was very pale: on this occasion he had no flower in his buttonhole; he seemed to wish to say something. At last he said, "She was the most beautiful young lady I ever saw, and the most amiable;" and then he added in a moment, "and she was the most innocent."
>
> Winterbourne looked at him and presently repeated his words, "And the most innocent?"
>
> "The most innocent!"
>
> Winterbourne felt sore and angry. (191)

Even though America proclaims itself as a nation of 'innocence', American Winterbourne fails to recognise the actual innocence Daisy embodied because he expected 'innocence' to manifest in particular ways. It takes a European, Giovanelli, to inform Winterbourne that he and his American community have overlooked Daisy's authentic innocence in their rush to condemn her for failing to fit in with their prescriptive model for what 'good' womanhood looks like. Her flirtatious behaviour, which is read as so outrageous that she cannot possibly be considered 'innocent', proves to be the flirtatiousness of a girl so innocent that she cannot see why it would be regarded as outrageous at all.

---

ready to return to America to get married while Giovannelli and Eugenio are recast as villains. Yet a major difference between the novella and the play is that the theatrical Daisy gets the direct voice that the original Daisy is always denied, which allows her to provide a commentary on her own death scene. In the play, though she contracts the fever, she recovers, and in a soliloquy to the audience declares 'I was afraid I should die, and I didn't want to die' (144). Though there are enough notable differences between the different iterations of Daisy that we cannot simply amalgamate the motives and thoughts of the 1878 and the 1882 Daisy, it is one of the moments in the play where Daisy is particularly direct, and therefore seems to imply a clarification on the original narrative which would discount Marsh and Hassan's readings of her death as suicide. For an in-depth analysis see Wortman's 'The Interminable Dramatic Daisy Miller'.

**A Fair Barbarian**

Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Fair Barbarian* (1881) is a text which has been almost entirely ignored in critical dialogue. As Burnett's legacy has become increasingly focused on her children's fiction (*The Secret Garden, A Little Princess, Little Lord Fauntleroy*), much of her adult fiction, including *A Fair Barbarian,* has been forgotten about. Yet the heroine of this work, Octavia Bassett, is of significant value to this study. *A Fair Barbarian* revises the transatlantic dynamic of *Daisy Miller,* transforming the tragedy of James' novella into a comedy. Like Daisy, Octavia is an American flirt transplanted into Europe, whose free and liberal behaviour challenges and undermines traditional models for thinking about women. Yet Burnett presents Octavia as a primarily humorous rather than threatening character. Instead of focusing on the community's struggle to decipher the flirtatious heroine, it is Octavia who struggles to understand the old-fashioned expectations for women that she encounters on her travels. Just as perplexing as Daisy is to Winterbourne are the residents of the fictional town of Slowbridge to Octavia, who humorously undermines their rigid and conscriptive notions of what good femininity will look like.

While reviewers of *Daisy Miller* shocked even Henry James in their harsh responses to his heroine,[29] the reviews of *A Fair Barbarian* tended towards the other extreme, reading Octavia as innocent of even her self-confessed transgressions. In 1881 a writer for *The Saturday Review* acknowledged the similarities between the two texts but added that Octavia 'unlike Daisy Miller, of whom she sometimes reminds us, is merely frank, not fast. She is willing, and even anxious, to learn English ways of behaving' ('Two Minor Novels' 376).

[29] In a letter dated August 1880, James wrote to Eliza Lynn Linton defending Daisy's behaviour against public criticism, writing that 'little Daisy Miller was, as I understand her, above all things innocent . . . I did not mean to suggest that she was playing off Giovanelli against Winterbourne — for she was too innocent even for that' (*Henry James: Selected Letters* 170).

This reading is flawed in two regards. Firstly, it makes assumptions about Daisy's behaviour which are not substantiated by the text: Daisy is only read as 'fast' because those around her are unwilling to recognise that her flirtatiousness could be a sign of innocence. Secondly, Octavia herself suggests that she could be considered 'fast'. She asks Mr. Barold directly '[d]o you think I am fast', to which he replies, 'I am happy to say I do not find you slow'. Rather than take offence at his ambiguity, she does not deny it: '"that means I am fast" she said. "Well no matter"' (96). Like Daisy, Octavia's moral ambiguity challenges restrictive cultural models of femininity that assume flirtatiousness must be incompatible with innocence.

Like James' heroine, Octavia is an American abroad whose new community struggles to understand a girl who is moral without being passively angelic. Though while Daisy's flirtatious and uninhibited behaviour is received with disdain and fear, Octavia's failure to blend into small town English society is dealt with in a comic register. Though I have argued against Richard Kaye's assertion that Daisy is a victim of pure American innocence misunderstood by judgemental Europeans, he is certainly correct in identifying that the protection of innocence is at the heart of James' novella. While Octavia could also be comfortably defined as an emblem of American innocence, one of the reasons perhaps that she is punished so lightly compared to Daisy is that while Daisy is constantly scrutinised for how she enacts (or undermines) an innocence-centric cultural mythology, Octavia's innocence is examined and tested to a much lesser extent because she is not surrounded with other Americans. Before Octavia is even introduced to the reader, the threat she poses is minimised by the humorous observation that the town she enters is quaint, old fashioned and easily scandalised:

> Slowbridge had been shaken to its foundations. It may as well be explained, however, at the outset, that it would not take much of a sensation to give Slowbridge a great

> shock. In the first place, Slowbridge was not used to sensations, and was used to going on the even and respectable tenor of its way, regarding the outside world with private distrust, if not with open disfavor. (55)

Even the name of the town is a gentle parody of its backwardness and disconnect from the wider world. Flirtatious Octavia shocks and perplexes the Slowbridge community who read her as coarse and reckless at best and revolutionary at worst. Yet because the narrative invites the reader to gently ridicule the stiffness of the English town, it is never in doubt that we should take hysteria over Octavia's 'revolutionary' femininity with a degree of scepticism. The town's fear that Octavia's flirting is a masked 'endeavor to entangle' (111) the decent people of Slowbridge in sin and chaos is suggested to be an overreaction akin to the horror at the introduction of mills in the town, as supposedly 'with mills and mill-hands comes murder, massacre, and mob law' (55). The narrative's wry observation that 'no massacres took place' (56) is an anti-climax which is mirrored in the fear that Octavia will radically disrupt social stability in Slowbridge. In reality, Octavia arrives, flirts, and leaves with no disastrous consequences other than a few upset sensibilities.

Before Octavia arrives on her Aunt Belinda's doorstep, Slowbridge is an English monoculture, where Americans are not approved of: '[i]t was not considered good taste to know Americans – which was not unfortunate, as there were none to know' (56). While the Europe James' envisages in *Daisy Miller* is one which is accepting of large numbers of American tourists, in selecting small town Slowbridge as a setting, instead of multicultural hubs like Geneva or Rome, *A Fair Barbarian* creates a blank canvas for Octavia's visit, where she is the first and for a while only encounter most of the town has with American culture. While characters like Mrs. Walker, Mrs. Costello and Winterbourne in *Daisy Miller* have experience of both American and European culture, and therefore hold a certain authority to speak of both nations, the vision of America proclaimed in Slowbridge is one based entirely on speculations,

gossip and prejudice. As one Slowbridge resident, Lady Theobald, hysterically declares, it is regarded as a nation where 'the laws were loose, and the prevailing sentiments revolutionary' (56). Kate Flint explores the difficulty in assimilating the American female traveller into European culture, writing that '[t]he apparent illegibility of the American Girl to an English audience was, therefore, related to broader anxieties concerning the development of American culture' (227). As Flint suggests, the England that Burnett presents is one which is fearful of the 'unknown' America and the potential corrupting influence of foreign morality on English virtue. Wanting to associate with America is seen as something vaguely shameful, so that Miss Belinda is ashamed of her ties to the nation, even feeling 'a delicacy in mentioning her only brother, who had emigrated to the United States in his youth' (56).

Octavia's arrival seems to confirm Slowbridge's fears about America, specifically the threat that the modern American girl might pose to modest femininity. Miss Belinda voices the concerns about this infiltration of American femininity into neatly ordered English life. As Flint suggests, she struggles to read her niece's 'Americanness', and is upset by every aspect of Octavia's appearance and behaviour. Her appearance is 'so very stylish that it was quite startling' (58) and her dress covered in frills, flounces and ribbons in 'the most recklessly extravagant manner' (62). Miss Belinda is 'stunned' by such a display of excess and she is further upset by Octavia's loquaciousness which deviates from her expectation of how a moral girl will behave (64). As her niece makes herself at home Miss Belinda makes 'the most laudable efforts to recover her equilibrium, and not to feel as if her head were spinning round and round'; but as Octavia chatters freely about her gentlemen friends, 'the utter calmness, and freedom from embarrassment, with which these announcements were made, almost shook Miss Belinda's faith in her own identity' (63).

When Lady Theobald corrects Octavia's behaviour, she invariably adds a scathing remark that 'different countries contain different people; and in Slowbridge we have our

standards' (72). The implication is that while America might accept Octavia's flirtatious and conspicuous behaviour, it is unacceptable according to English standards. It is a sentiment which echoes Winterbourne's warning to Daisy that 'when you deal with natives you must go by the custom of the place' (179). Yet while both Winterbourne and Lady Theobald clearly imply that flirtatious behaviour is only out of place in Europe, in Daisy's case, it is not the 'natives' that she offends, but the Americans. While Slowbridge imagines America as a place of freedom and liberation, America too has a stringent code of what constitutes acceptable and transgressive female behaviour.

The angel-fallen woman dichotomy crumbles when confronted with Octavia, who is both fiercely independent and a self-confessed flirt and yet also clearly marked as a likeable and moral heroine. As Miss Belinda explains, to try and condemn Octavia as a fallen woman, simply because she does not conform to the narrow vision of the moral woman, is to ignore common sense and empathy: 'I assure you she has a kind heart, dear Lady Theobald,—and is so innocent of any intention to do wrong—I am sure she is innocent—that it seems cruel to judge her severely' (129). Despite the scorn that Octavia's behaviour creates in her community, people are forced to re-evaluate their opinions of her when they realise the many positive qualities she has. She is described as 'good natured and generous to extravagance' (89) and 'more affectionate than people fancy' (160). She repels any attempts of the more conservative Slowbridge residents to demonise her with her openness, her kindness and her cheerfulness, all of which jar with the traditional notion of what an immoral woman is like.

Octavia challenges the links which are drawn between aspects of women's behaviour and the possible moral outcomes, by refusing to accept, for example, that flirtation is always a precursor to sexual immorality, or self-presentation to self-commodification. Louise Barnett writes that many nineteenth-century heroines are made to surrender 'some degree of personal fulfilment and freedom because of social realities' (281), where they must subdue themselves

to align with social expectations of female behaviour. Octavia refuses to adapt to the "social realities" in Slowbridge and would rather cause upset and scandal than alter her behaviour. This is played out in an argument over her manner of dress. She is criticised for the extravagant white dress she wears on her arrival, which she embellishes with a scarf which looks like a veil, 'a long affair of rich white lace', because it makes her 'look quite like a bride' (67). To dress so bride-like as a single woman is regarded as troublesome because it hints at a desire to grasp the rights of a married woman without a husband. When Lady Theobald sees her in this outfit she calls it 'absurd – besides being atrocious' (71), taking particular objection to the sparkling rings Octavia wears which look too close to engagement rings, demanding that she 'put them away, and save them until you are a married woman' (71). Yet Octavia refuses to alter her dress, or to remove her rings, undermining the very notion that her costume and jewellery are related in any way to sexual knowledge: 'I think it was pretty cool in her to order me to take off my diamonds, and save them until I was married. How does she know whether I mean to be married, or not?' (72). Though Lady Theobald and Miss Belinda are troubled that Octavia's desire to make herself attractive and dress like a married woman reveals a lack of purity, conversely her disbelief in the connection between her pretty outfits and a sexual future demonstrates her innocence.

Octavia's innocent world view allows her to engage in behaviours which are regarded by others as inappropriate, precisely because she is too innocent to understand the potential implications of breaking codes of discretion. This is similar to Daisy, who as Barnett remarks would rather bring Winterbourne 'into her pastoral world of innocence' than join his 'repressive world of social propriety' (285-286). There is a disconnection between the innocent intent behind Octavia's actions and the suggestive way they are received, which is illustrated in a conversation between Mr. Barold and Lady Theobald:

> "It is scarcely customary for English young women to confide in their masculine travelling companions to such an extent," remarked my lady grimly.
>
> "She did not confide in me at all," said Barold. "Therein lay her attraction. One cannot submit to being 'confided in' by a strange young woman, however charming. This young lady's remarks were flavored solely with an adorably cool candor. She evidently did not desire to appeal to any emotion whatever." (83)

Lady Theobald immediately reads Octavia's chatter with Mr. Barold as a sign of her flirtatiousness, assuming if Octavia lacks discretion she also must lack moral virtue. Yet Mr. Barold recognises Octavia's natural talk for what it is: the uninhibited speech of a girl so free of manipulative or sexual intent that she has not even considered the consequences of speaking in this manner. Octavia's unawareness of social scandal protects her from the assumptions people make about her. Her innocence acts as a protective shroud because it allows her to do socially inappropriate things without damage to her character because she is so oblivious to the sexual meaning that observers might be inferring from her actions. As Barnett suggests for Daisy, though the Slowbridge residents are concerned that Octavia's behaviour is morally corruptive, it is precisely her lack of corruption which leads her to reject the repressive social rules others try to enforce on her.

Octavia's flirtatiousness allows her to be a subversive figure while apparently unconscious of this. Without necessarily intending to be socially disruptive, in following her own ethical codes rather than rigidly conforming to what is expected of her, she challenges antiquated rules and preconceptions of what good and bad femininity look like. Barbara Vinken writes that flirting is an activity which lends women power in a realm which traditionally perceives women as frivolous, 'a way of coping with not being taken seriously by asserting that seriousness is not an option. By showing dead seriously that deadly seriousness is but a masquerade – to be taken seriously' (87). As a flirt Octavia is, as Vinken

describes, ‘on the margins’ of acceptable behaviour (87), just pushing the boundaries of what is expected of women but without crossing the line which would banish her from society. She is frivolous and light-hearted, undermining conventions with her humorous refusal to conform. As Vinken suggests, Octavia’s flirtatiousness shows that she does not take the rules of English society very seriously, and, in taking so little notice of them, forces others to question their traditional notions of power. When Octavia flirts with Mr. Barold, asking if he thinks her ‘fast’, her aunt is shocked:

> “what a terrible thing to say to a gentleman! What will he think?”
>
> Octavia smiled one of her calmest smiles.
>
> “Isn't it queer how often you say that!” she remarked. “I think I should perish if I had to pull myself up that way as you do. I just go right on, and never worry. I don't mean to do anything queer, and I don't see why anyone should think I do.” (98) [30]

Octavia is vocally critical of the custom where a girl might be condemned for the slightest indiscretion, suggesting that it is not the fault of a girl if her flirting is taken too seriously, but that of the people who misinterpret it. When Mr. Barold asks her if she is not concerned that her flirting will be regarded as sexual immorality, she argues that it is foolish that in society girls are subjected to such scrutiny that ‘everything means something, or is of some importance’ (109). Octavia’s flirtatiousness allows her to challenge the social rules and

[30] Octavia’s statement ‘I just go right on, and never worry’ reflects the optimism of her absent father whose investments in the Nevada silver mines means that the family’s wealth goes up and down. Octavia describes him as ‘awfully rich sometimes. And then again he isn't. Shares go up, you know; and then they go down, and you don't seem to have anything’ (65). Just as Octavia is positioned between traditional ideas of good and bad femininity, her identity is also made unstable through her family’s fluctuating social and economic status. Her father’s willingness to gamble their wealth is accepted by Octavia, who believes things will turn out well because he is ‘lucky’ (65), but upsets Miss Belinda, who declares to her niece that the uncertainty would make her ‘perfectly miserable’ (65). In many ways, Octavia’s lack of concern about her reputation mirrors her father’s optimism in business. She is willing to gamble her reputation in Slowbridge and believes that any disapproval she accrues will have no lasting cost. Her innocent belief that her father’s ‘luck’ will stop him falling into poverty contrasts with Miss Belinda’s horror at the idea of the risk involved, further emphasising the fact that Octavia’s Americanness, specifically her refusal to ‘worry’, is a source of bewilderment to her new community.

restrictions she comes across without being intentionally progressive. She does not arrive in Slowbridge with the purpose of modernising the community, but simply refuses to change according to standards she thinks are outdated. *The Saturday Review's* analysis that Octavia is 'anxious' to change her ways and to fit in with European customs is not true, for she persistently flouts the rules she sees as unnecessary and makes little effort to fit in with the more passive girls in the town only when it suits her (376).

Several critics who have examined the omnipresence of Edenic mythology in mid-nineteenth-century American fiction have pointed out that the fixation with protecting innocence results in characters who are undeveloped and immature. Emily Schiller describes *The Marble Faun's* Hilda as fostering a 'childish intolerance for anything that challenges her simplistic ethical system' (387), while Linda Ray Pratt criticises male protagonists who refuse to see women as anything other than wholly pure or wholly evil, writing that '[i]n refusing the reality of women who are touched by the world, these false Adams condemn themselves to a life of self-deception and moral infancy' (165). Through Octavia, the residents of Slowbridge gradually awaken from this moral immaturity. Though it is often with reluctance, they must gradually adapt their simplistic moral systems in order to accommodate a girl who is neither passively pure nor sinful. While at first Octavia's reluctance to conform with Slowbridge's social rules and moral standards is regarded with contempt and suspicion, increasingly those around her realise that Octavia's refusal to adapt to their ways might be for a good reason. Perplexed 'that her simplest statement or remark created a sensation' (66), Octavia points out to her aunt and others around her that perhaps it is not her behaviour which is at fault, but the exaggerated way in which others respond to it. Through Octavia's challenging of the notion that there is one correct model of femininity and that morality is a static and inflexible concept, Miss Belinda is awakened to the fact that her own niece might find her 'very ignorant and silly' (90) for believing so blindly in the

prescriptive social rules she is accustomed to. Though Octavia and Daisy behave very similarly, Octavia's flirtatious transgressions incur no moral penalty because the English residents of Slowbridge are willing to believe that her indiscreet behaviour might still be innocent. The Americans in *Daisy Miller,* however, hold fast to their 'moral infancy' (to borrow Pratt's term). They would rather condemn an innocent girl than question their own value system which expects women to conform to rigid codes of behaviour.

Although Octavia is read by some members of the community as a wayward child, according to Schiller and Pratt's parameters, Octavia is the most morally mature character in the novel. While Lady Theobald's niece and Octavia's best friend, Lucia, parrots the black and white moral rules she has been taught young women must abide by, Octavia rebukes her corrections. When Lucia warns Octavia that her flirtatious behaviour is attracting criticism from people in their social circle, Octavia responds 'I don't mean to displease them . . . unless they are very easily displeased' (97). Unlike Lucia, Octavia lives by a different moral system. Secure in her knowledge that she is not a fallen woman, she does not care if she is not performing female virtue in the expected manner. Though she does not want to upset those around her, she will not compromise her freedoms or manners simply to satisfy others' expectations of her. Her response to Lucia's correction echoes Daisy Miller's when she is told by Mrs. Walker that she cannot walk in the street with Mr. Giovanelli: '"I have never heard anything so stiff! If this is improper, Mrs. Walker" she pursued, "then I am all improper, and you must give me up"' (173).

Both women refuse to live by what they see as arbitrary social rules, choosing instead to act according to their own conscience. This is met with resistance from their communities, a resistance which harks back to the Edenic mythology which informs readings of both figures. As Gloria Chasson Erlich explains, the fear of female disobedience can be linked to Eve's disregard for the rules of paradise: 'Eve is thus herself both innocent and deadly. She

initiates no evil, conceives none, desires none, but it is her willingness to disobey authority and operate on a morality of her own making that makes it possible for Satan to get through to man' (168). In a conversation between Mr. Barold and Lady Theobald, Barold warns of the dangers of modern girls who are 'disposed to take the reins in [their] own hands' adding that such 'fast' girls threaten the young men in the town who 'flattered and courted' are dragged into 'unhappiness afterward – and even a great deal of scandal – which is dreadful to contemplate' (79). As Erlich explains, the fear of female disobedience is directly linked to women's potentially negative influence on men. Barold's statement illustrates this, for he is not fearful for 'fast' girls themselves, but the effect that these girls might have on the morality of the men they charm. He praises Lucia instead for her passive and repressed behaviour, which better aligns with his expectation that women should be implausibly good in order not to negatively influence men, acting out Pratt's suggestion of male 'moral infancy' (165). For those characters, like Lucia and Miss Belinda, who allow Octavia to challenge their stiffly held preconceptions of how an innocent woman should behave, they take their first steps away from moral immaturity and towards a more complex understanding of morality and gender politics. Those who will not compromise on their static moral principles are left in their ethical infantilism.

Not only does Octavia prove that there is more than one iteration of female innocence, she also questions whether the social pressure for girls to appear innocent is a good thing at all. Through the friendship between Octavia and Lucia, *A Fair Barbarian* illustrates how the fear of female innocence being corrupted creates a form of corruption of its own. Juxtaposed with Octavia's free and natural innocence is the contrived and unnatural purity of her best friend. A Hilda-like figure, Lucia is the epitome of performative female virtue. At the start of the novel she is passive, silent, reserved and removed from the world, even the tiny sheltered community of Slowbridge. Under the 'rigorous rule' (75) of Lady Theobald, Lucia is brought

up with the expectations that girls should be voiceless, ornamental and morally incorruptible. Age nineteen, Lucia has 'been permitted to have no companions, and the greatest excitements of her life had been the Slowbridge tea-parties' (75). For her innocence to be protected she is removed from interactions with the world.

Lucia exposes the paradox that both Burnett and James address: that innocence which is demanded and cultivated by a society is not truly innocence at all. Authentic innocence is regarded as transgressive because it disregards social convention, and performative innocence is cultivated in its place. Lucia's innocence is of the second type: a contrived innocence which denies her real personhood. Her appearance evokes fragility and purity with her 'soft white skin', 'reed-like grace' and 'soft eyes [which] wore a decidedly frightened look' (74). Though she is an adult, she has no control over her own life, her innocence protected by all adult decisions being made on her behalf. She is poised to follow the traditional path where women are passed directly from their father's care to the care of a husband, with no space between where they can develop independence. Though it is Lady Theobald who acts as a surrogate father figure, this idea of a girl moving from one sheltered sphere to another without opportunity for worldly experience is embodied by Lucia. Willing to passively accept whatever life she is offered, Lucia is excluded even from discussions concerning her own future, though '[i]t had been discussed in whispers since her seventeenth year' (76). Though she is aware of the whispers, she accepts that this is a narrative which excludes her, though it is about her.

Lucia is positioned to continue and reinforce a social discourse which holds women in static, childlike roles in order that they do not lose their one commodity: innocence. As Mr. Barold describes: '[w]hat a charming wife Lucia would make for a man to whom gentleness and a yielding disposition were necessary! We do not find such girls in society nowadays' (79). Lucia and Octavia stand at different sides of progress. Octavia is seen as dangerously

modern and Lucia is passive and sheltered from moral complexity. Yet through their friendship, Lucia becomes more of a person as the narrative progresses. Pratt writes that while 'prelapsarian Eve is necessarily a static and abstract companion to the unfallen Adam – postlapsarian Eves are the most human characters of all' (156). Though neither Lucia (nor Octavia) ever has a sexual 'fall', in being freed from the constraints of the artificial purity which requires her to stifle her personhood, Lucia becomes more human as she begins to move away from the silent ingenue figure she has been aligned with.

Octavia awakens Lucia to the possibility that she can escape from the oppressive restrictions of a 'good' girl, without being a 'bad' one. Before meeting Octavia, Lucia's 'brief girlish life had not been a very happy one' (103), but she knows no other viable alternative. Yet in the flirtatious American girl, Lucia sees an alternative existence. Observing her friend's socially rebellious behaviour, for the first time Lucia begins to doubt her assumption that there is only one way to correctly perform femininity: '"[w]hy should we expect her to be exactly like ourselves?" Lucia went on. "How can we be sure that our way is better than any other?"' (103). This marks the start of Lucia's awakening, where she begins to realise that what she has been taught as correct female conduct is a very narrow model, which holds women in static and limited roles. In Octavia, she sees an example of a different type of femininity which permits more autonomy and opportunity.

Lucia makes the connection between the pressure for girls to perform innocence and the corruption of the authentic self. She comes to realise that Octavia's flirtatious, free behaviour is more natural and innocent than the stifling ideal of purity and virtue that she and the other girls she knows have been taught:

> "We are all cut out after the same pattern," she said. "We learn the same things, and wear the same dresses, one might say. What Lydia Egerton has been taught, I have

been taught; yet what two creatures could be more unlike each other, by nature, than we are?" (103)

After this realisation, Lucia defies her aunt's rules and begins to copy Octavia's behaviour. The transformation is immediate. The changes in her physical appearance act as an analogy for her transformation from a symbol of purity to a full person. The first description of Lucia depicts her as a ghostly figure: she is 'delicate' and 'very pale', sits in 'dead silence' and drops her eyes at any mention of the outside world (74). Yet by the end of the novella, she has broken away from this ghostly existence. She has, to borrow Joyce Warren's word, transformed from a 'nonperson' into a person (103). Mimicking Octavia's flirtatious inhibitions lends Lucia humanity that marks her physical appearance so much that even her aunt cannot ignore the 'brighter colour in her cheeks', that her 'figure seemed more erect', that 'her eyes had a spirit in them which was quite new' and that 'she moved to and fro with a freedom not habitual to her' (126). Lady Theobald is horrified that her niece's transformation is aligned with her new similarities to Octavia, who she describes as 'a girl whose conduct toward men is of a character to – to chill one's blood' (127). It is with great disapproval that she observes as Lucia 'chatted and laughed gayly with Francis Barold' (126), imitating her friend's relaxed interactions with men.

Ultimately Lucia must become less angelic in order to become more authentically innocent. It is a reversal of *Daisy Miller*, where Daisy's authentic innocence is destroyed in order that performative innocence can be preserved. In *A Fair Barbarian,* it is performative innocence which is undone and natural, impulsive innocence which thrives. Burnett offers an alternative ending to Daisy's story, where Octavia escapes from the tragedy that befalls Daisy. The structure of the two stories run parallel, both American flirts arrive in Europe, are increasingly regarded with suspicion and disapproval as they play with social boundaries and ultimately push their rebellion one step too far so that it appears that they have finally crossed

the line from flirtation into genuine seduction and therefore might finally be perceived (and punished) as fallen women. Daisy is caught walking alone at night with Giovanelli and Octavia is found outside on the balcony, lingering alone with Mr. Barold. Brought side by side, the echoes of *Daisy Miller* in *A Fair Barbarian* are easy to see in these scenes where finally it seems as if the flirt has gone too far:

> "I am afraid," said Winterbourne, "that you will not think Roman fever very pretty. This is the way people catch it. I wonder," he added, turning to Giovanelli, "that you, a native Roman, should countenance such a terrible indiscretion." "Ah," said the handsome native, "for myself I am not afraid." "Neither am I—for you! I am speaking for this young lady." Giovanelli lifted his well-shaped eyebrows and showed his brilliant teeth. But he took Winterbourne's rebuke with docility. "I told the signorina it was a grave indiscretion, but when was the signorina ever prudent?"
>
> "I never was sick, and I don't mean to be!" the signorina declared. (James 189)

> "Octavia," said Miss Belinda, "how imprudent! In that thin dress—the night air! How could you, my dear, how could you?"
>
> "Oh! I shall not catch cold," Octavia answered. "I am used to it. I have been out hours and hours, on moonlight nights, at home."
>
> But she moved toward them.
>
> "You must remember," said Lady Theobald, "that there are many things which may be done in America which would not be safe in England."
>
> And she made the remark in an almost sepulchral tone of warning. (Burnett 105)

The similarities between the scenes are numerous. Lady Theobald's warning that 'things which may be done in America which would not be safe in England' echoes Winterbourne's

earlier warning to Daisy that her flirting, which is fine in America, will be wrongly received in Europe because it 'doesn't exist here' (179). Yet knowing, as of course Burnett did, of Daisy's fate, Lady Theobald's statement takes on irony. Daisy learns the hard way that her flirtatious behaviour can not be tolerated by American society, and Octavia inversely finds that her English community are much more forgiving than initially expected. Burnett also echoes James' depiction of the gender imbalance in how flirtatiousness is judged and punished. Giovanelli and Winterbourne have no fear for themselves that they will catch Roman Fever, even though they are as exposed as Daisy, and while people are horrified at Octavia's behaviour, no one even mentions a physical or social risk to Mr. Barold. When the preservation of innocence is made the responsibility of female characters, male characters' actions seem to have little moral consequence.

Both girls are warned that their behaviour could be dangerously reckless. Miss Belinda describes Octavia as 'imprudent' (105) and Giovanelli warns Daisy that she is committing a 'grave indiscretion' (189). In both instances, a lack of adherence to acceptable female behaviour is aligned with physical sickness. Miss Belinda's warning that she will catch a cold echoes Winterbourne and Giovanelli's concern that Daisy will contract Roman Fever, which of course she does succumb to. Even more striking is that both heroines respond almost identically, with a strong assurance that they will not become ill. There is defiance in both Octavia's assertion 'I will not catch a cold' (185) and Daisy's 'I never was sick, and I don't mean to be' (189). While Octavia's assertion that she will not become sick is proved right, Daisy's confidence is misplaced.

At the last minute, just as it seems that Octavia will follow in Daisy's footsteps, she is redeemed by the sudden appearance of a previously unmentioned fiancé. When she refuses Mr. Barold's proposal, he turns 'pale with wrath and wounded feeling' (169). Angrily, he accuses her of toying with his emotions: 'I see that I have—humiliated myself in vain; and it

is rather bitter, I must confess' (169). Yet just as it seems as if she will be irreversibly labelled as a manipulative jilt, Octavia casually declares a secret that halts the downwards spiral of her reputation: 'I suppose I may as well tell you of it. I'm engaged to somebody else' (169). In the final chapter, the fiancé appears, and a quick wedding takes place. Kate Flint writes that the last-second marriage is a common trope for dealing with transgressive female characters, offering a 'way in which slightly risqué heroines may be exonerated, retrospectively, from exerting manipulative flirtation' (223). Retrospectively, Octavia's flirtatious transgressions are forgiven as childish antics because, having entered a secure and traditional social role as a wife, she no longer represents transgressive femininity and her innocence is no longer a question of public debate. When James rewrote *Daisy Miller* as a comedic stage play in 1882, Daisy is forgiven her flirtatious transgressions in a similar way. Almost at death's door, Winterbourne declares his love for her and pleads to her unconscious form 'Daisy, won't you live, won't you live for me?' (185). To this question, Daisy stirs and begins her recovery; she is quite literally given an escape from death brought on by society's judgemental attitudes by the affirmation of Winterbourne's love. She lives not just *for* Winterbourne but *because* of him. Though both Daisy and Octavia use flirting to gain some autonomy from male authority over the course of their novellas, ultimately it takes a man to sanction their behaviour and prove to the world that their flirtatious actions were simply the journey to growing up to be conventional and good wives.

Adam Phillips in *On Flirtation* writes that flirting can cause social unrest because it creates uncertainty in a world which 'values reliability' (xvii) and 'puts in disarray our sense of ending' (xix). The ending of both novellas bring a clear resolution to the issue of ambiguous flirtatiousness, solving the problem of disorder Phillips suggests flirting causes. Neither heroine is left morally ambiguous and thus the cultural belief in innocence is left intact. What if the last ten pages of *A Fair Barbarian* had not been written, and Octavia not

been provided a fiancé to retrospectively excuse all her flirtatious behaviour? Could she have survived the narrative or would she have been killed off in the same manner as *Daisy Miller*? In opposite ways, both Daisy and Octavia's fates suggest that the demystification of the flirt's moral ambiguity (and of her innocence or lack thereof) takes priority over understanding the flirt as an authentically complex individual. The end of both novellas re-establish the stability that the heroines' flirtatiousness temporarily denies.

Though in some ways Octavia and Daisy's fates seem to be opposite, their social function is very similar. They both deviate from social codes, challenging the preconceptions that a woman must either be implausibly good or unredeemable wicked. Yet, though they both have a fleeting disruptive effect on their communities, their power to cause social disorder is curtailed through marriage and death, and social equilibrium is returned to Slowbridge and the expatriate community in Europe. Nevertheless, while Daisy and Octavia might not be the radical heroines they could have been had they been able to finish their stories without being interpretatively resolved, both heroines illustrate that 'innocence', as it is understood in late-nineteenth-century America, could be considered a contronym. Innocence means both the lack of adult awareness that one must follow appropriate social codes and yet also the performative purity where innocence must be performed according to a set of stringent rules. William Dean Howells, in his analysis of James' novella in *Heroines of Fiction* (1901), concludes that America rejects Daisy because it is a nation that does not want to 'allow that innocence might be reckless and angels in their ignorance of evil might not behave as discreetly as worse people' (176). In the figure of the flirt, both *A Fair Barbarian* and *Daisy Miller* suggest that America's obsession with inviolable innocence fosters factitious virtue while destroying the very innocence it seeks to protect.

CHAPTER FOUR

## Invisible Lines: The Dangers of the Marriage Market in *The House of Mirth* and *Alice Adams.*

I shall premise by saying that all attractive females are in a certain sense flirts. Remembering that flirtation is playing at being in love, I shall assert, without fear of contradiction, that every women whose attractions will permit her to choose her husband, and who is not compelled to snap at the first chance, like a hungry dog at a bone, begins to play at this game from her earliest years. In what other manner, pray, is a young female to acquire any knowledge of the men who are seeking to engage her affections? She understands perfectly well that marriage is the end and aim of feminine existence, that eighty-two percent of her sisters become wives and mothers, and that of the eighteen percent who remain single, almost all are unhappy at their lot . . . She has thought for years of the delight of having a beau, long before that beau comes. When he does arrive, if she is a sensible young person, she will endeavour to learn something of his disposition, temper, and character. And how can she do this save by flirtation? She may have been favourably impressed at first, but as, under the influence of the game, the man shows himself as he really is, as his minute grain appears under the varnish of manner and society-politeness, she may have just cause to think less kindly of him. But he, having a measureless self-esteem, makes love more and more fervidly, until with him the game becomes downright earnest. He proposes and is rejected, and goes round everywhere swearing that the girl is the most consummate flirt that ever existed.

('An Apology for Flirts' 4)

This defence of the flirt, penned by an anonymous writer in 1875 for *The New York Times*, is significant in many regards. A defence of female flirtatiousness in a period where girls deemed to be 'flirts' were so commonly demonised is highly unusual, its inclusion in a respected paper like *The New York Times* even more so.[31] The writer points out a contradiction: that girls are encouraged to flirt in order to select a suitable partner, yet, having engaged in flirtation, they are then vulnerable to accusations that they have flirted too much. When being constructed as a 'flirt' is enough to shroud a girl in scandal, to choose not to flirt at all is also not an acceptable option. A girl must flirt if she is to escape the misery of the 'eighteen percent' (those women who fail to marry) while knowing that she must not be too picky for fear of gaining a bad reputation. As Marty Gould explains in his study of Victorian periodicals, while 'Victorian magazines generally acknowledge the destructive potential of sexual play, they also frequently defend flirtation as a vital social activity' (279). This anxiety that a woman must neither flirt too little, nor too much, is reflected in many of the texts this thesis addresses. Daisy Miller's innocent flirting prompts Winterbourne to deem her a girl 'a gentleman need no longer be at pains to respect' (96), and eventually costs her life. In Burnett's *A Fair Barbarian,* Lucia is almost left in the eighteen percent because she does not flirt enough, and Octavia, who is on the brink of flirting too much, is only rescued from scandal by the timely arrival of her fiancé. These female characters are caught in a web of societal rules and double standards which create invisible lines which determine whether a woman's flirtatiousness is deemed socially appropriate or not.

[31] Perhaps aware of the controversial nature of their article, the writer proceeds with a disclaimer. They are not coming to the defence of 'reprehensible' flirts who wish to 'make her victims dance around her' (4), but those unfortunate, well meaning girls who become known as 'flirts' because their behaviour is misjudged and misrepresented

This chapter will unpack the representation of these invisible lines, looking specifically at texts by Edith Wharton and Booth Tarkington, two of the most popular writers in early-twentieth-century America. Both wrote numerous novels which address the double bind that while flirting is taught as necessary and socially desirable to some extent, women who fail to adhere to an ambiguous code of acceptable and unacceptable flirtation are cast as socially deviant 'flirts'. Tarkington's and Wharton's corpus provide a plethora of flirtatious heroines who struggle to navigate a society which demands that their value lies in acquiring male attention, but without looking as if they are doing so. Though I will give primary focus to Wharton's Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* (1905), Wharton uses female characters who act flirtatiously in many of her works, including Sophy Viner in *The Reef* (1912), Undine Spragg in *The Custom of the Country* (1913), Charity Royall in *Summer* (1917) and Ellen Olenska in *The Age of Innocence* (1920). Similarly, though Alice in Tarkington's Pulitzer winning *Alice Adams* (1921) will form the centre of my discussion, Tarkington frequently revisits the flirtatious heroine, from Cora Madison in *The Flirt* (1913) to Lola Pratt in *Seventeen* (1916), Sally Ealing in *Women* (1925) and Claire in *Claire Ambler* (1928).

Both authors identify the space between a girl coming of age and her marriage as the time where flirting is both most important and most dangerous. For Lily Bart and Alice Adams, being able to flirt is essential for escaping a life of dreary spinsterhood. Yet at the same time, flirting is a dangerous game for the single woman, whose reputation might be irrevocably blemished if she is to gain a reputation as a 'flirt'. In her study of debutante culture in Wharton's writing, Maureen Montgomery explains that the period between a young woman's debutante ball, where she comes out to society, and her wedding, where she celebrates her successful reintegration into the social hierarchy, is 'a liminal period fraught with anxieties' (50). A young, single woman must carefully negotiate the line between settling too soon (which might produce a bad match) and waiting too long (threatening

spinsterhood), while knowing that the longer she stays in this liminal space, the more opportunity she has to suffer a blemish on her reputation which could exclude her from the marriage market entirely. Maintaining the illusion of a debutante's 'innocence' is made more complicated because in order to successfully secure a partner during this period, the debutante will necessarily engage in behaviours which might be misconstrued. As Montgomery writes: '[a] thin line had to be walked between attracting suitable men's attention and not earning the reputation of a flirt' (51). In order to find a partner, a girl must engage in mildly flirtatious behaviour, but she must do so without ever becoming known as a 'flirt'. It is the idea of this 'thin line' between flirting enough and not too much which frames my reading of *The House of Mirth* and *Alice Adams*. Both Lily and Alice are heroines who are caught in a contradictory social paradigm where they must flirt just enough to secure a socially desirable husband but not so much that they attract negative attention. Crucially they must manage to stay in this safe space between the two extremes without clear rules to delineate socially approved flirting from flirting which will cause a woman to be socially scorned.

Though Wharton is often paired with other early-twentieth-century authors, comparisons of Wharton and Tarkington are almost non-existent. While Lily Bart is often compared to other contemporary female heroines (most commonly Dreiser's Carrie Meeber and James' Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer),[32] she has not been discussed alongside Alice Adams, who arguably shares Lily's experience of navigating the American marriage market far more closely than many of Lily's more popular literary partners. In texts written fifteen years apart, Lily and Alice both struggle to navigate the liminal space between the safety of

[32] See Alan Price's 'Lily Bart and Carrie Meeber: Cultural Sisters' where he describes Carrie and Lily as two 'apparently antithetical' characters who actually share many similarities (240), and Caren J. Town's 'The House of Mirrors: Carrie, Lily and the Reflected Self.' where she describes Carrie as a successful version of Lily Bart (44). Richard Kaye compares Lily to Daisy Miller (152) and Monika Mueller compares Lily to Isabel Archer in James' *Portrait of a Lady* (194).

childhood and marriage. After entering the marriage market to praise and attention, several years later, they have still not secured a husband and find that their flirtatious charms are becoming less and less effective. Forced to flirt more urgently than ever, they both veer dangerously away from the demure flirtation of an ideal debutante. What rules do both women break which repositions them from popular belles to feared husband hunters? How are these constructs of acceptable and unacceptable flirtation created and how are these heroines expected to adhere to the narrow ideal of neither prude nor flirt without knowing what constitutes the right level of flirtation? Examining the downfall of Lily Bart and Alice Adams offers answers to these questions and exposes the double binds and contradictory standards faced by the aging debutante who is forced to flirt more and more urgently and then is punished for doing so.

**The House of Mirth**

Lily Bart in Wharton's *The House of Mirth* is one of literature's better known flirt figures. Louis Auchincloss describes Lily as Wharton's 'most vivid' heroine and Joan Lidoff deems Lily 'one of the most compelling of the female spirits' (181). From her debut, where she was read by some as a faultless heroine destroyed by a cruel society and by others as a moral warning of the ruin facing the morally ambiguous woman,[33] Lily has been read kaleidoscopically. Her inherent ambiguity, which thrills and challenges her prospective suitors in the novel, extends into the critical realm, with critics struggling to agree on how to read her. The primary critical discussions surrounding Lily Bart centre on determining her level of agency. Is she a passive victim in her own fate or is she involved in her own objectification? Myrto Drizou and Janet Beer Goodwyn suggest the former. Drizou describes

[33] See *Edith Wharton: The Contemporary Reviews*, an edited collection of contemporary criticism of Wharton's works. For reviews of *The House of Mirth* see pages 107-136.

her as ‘captive to the shallow principles of upper-class New York’ (xvii), while Goodwyn writes that Lily is trapped ‘in a series of stereotypical poses in the interpretation of which she has no power to intervene’ (59). Linda Wagner-Martin calls her ‘flowerlike in fragility as well as name’ (110), while Shari Benstock describes her as ‘beautiful, decorative, self-absorbed’ (149). Other critics read Lily as a more active character. Frances L. Restuccia reads her as a deliberately duplicitous character whose defining features are her ‘doubleness, multiplicity, elusiveness’ (228), while Scott Shumaker praises her attempts to escape ‘a prosaic life’ when she ‘deviates from the marriage script’ (317).

That Lily flirts is unambiguous. Richard Kaye describes her as having a ‘polished penchant for trickery as a means of surviving in the sexual marketplace’ (165), while Lori Merish describes her as having a ‘flirtatious, seductive manner’ (254) and as manipulating men with ‘confiding glances and gestures of intimacy’ (255). But how this flirting should be interpreted, whether Lily should be celebrated or condemned for her flirtatious skills causes another critical divide. Deborah Lambert reflects on Lily’s inevitable failure to please her audience: ‘[w]hen Lily practices her wiles successfully, the narrative attacks and denigrates her; yet, when she fails to do so, the reader finds herself frustrated’ (77). Though Lambert envisages this divide as occurring between readers and fictional characters, it is mirrored in the varying critical responses to the novel: is Lily’s problem that she flirts too much or that she does not flirt enough? Often critics overlook the fact that Lily is not the only one in her social group to flirt. Though she is perhaps a more beautiful and more skilled flirt than most, it is not her behaviour which is unique but how she moves from being a single woman who engages in proper and desirable flirtation to being declared an unmarriageable ‘flirt’. It is this question—where does her flirtatious behaviour deviate from social acceptability—I seek to address.

At twenty-nine years old and without the backing of wealth or family name, Lily Bart is in a precarious situation when the novel opens. After years of intricate negotiations in the marriage market where she has still failed to secure a husband, Lily has an epiphany about the gender inequality that she faces as a single woman. As she observes her cousin, Jack Stephey, who, also without means, is trying to marry into money, Lily realises: '[a]ll Jack has to do to get everything he wants is to keep quiet and let that girl marry him; whereas I have to calculate and contrive, and retreat and advance, as if I were going through an intricate dance, where one misstep would throw me hopelessly out of time' (42). While Jack can lazily attract the attention of a wealthy heiress without risk to his reputation, Lily laments that she must constantly work at walking the perilous line of making herself available to single men without appearing as if she is doing so. Like Daisy Miller who is 'old enough to be talked about' (172) and yet too young for the protection of a husband, Lily exists in what Montgomery calls a 'liminal period' between childhood and marriage, full of hidden pitfalls and dangers for which Lily is disastrously unprepared. In a society where social expectations for single young women are full of what Kathleen Moore describes as 'clear veneers and hidden complexities' (8), Lily must not only obey the social rules she knows about, she must also somehow not break the ones that she is not aware of. As Lily points out, even 'one misstep' could decide whether she will be allowed to remain a society belle, or whether she will be cast aside as a wanton and immoral flirt. Beneath the surface of social etiquette lies an unspoken web of rules for young women on the hunt for a husband, which exist to divide 'good' flirting from 'bad' flirting.

Before I delve into a discussion of why Lily's flirting is deemed 'too much'—how, in other words, she crosses the invisible line between good flirting and bad flirting—first we must ask, why is it that Lily must flirt at all? 'Isn't marriage your vocation', Lawrence Selden asks Lily early in the novel, '"[i]sn't it what you're all brought up for?" She sighed. "I

suppose so. What else is there?"' (8). Unequipped for any form of financial independence but without an income of her own, marriage is not only Lily's 'vocation', but her only feasible option. She exists in a social sphere where marriage is, as the author of the opening article describes, the 'end and aim of feminine existence' ('An Apology for Flirts' 4). Lily is both aware of her need to flirt, and so confident in her ability to do so that she barely discerns between potential suitors. Even though Selden has no chance at marrying Lily, when they have tea together early in the novel he is amused to see her test out her flirtatious charms on him: '[t]he provocation in her eyes increased his amusement—he had not supposed she would waste her powder on such small game; but perhaps she was only keeping her hand in; or perhaps a girl of her type had no conversation but of the personal kind' (8). In a community which values her only in relation to men, Lily has internalised these values so that she is left with little to say to men that is not designed to be compelling and challenging.

Though her reputation for wanting to marry into money is regarded as distasteful by her community, Lily's calculating economic view of marriage is one which originates from what society has taught her. Lily's flirting only begins in earnest after she loses the only man she loves romantically because of her low economic status:

> She had several times been in love with fortunes or careers, but only once with a man. That was years ago, when she first came out, and had been smitten with a romantic passion for a young gentleman named Herbert Melson, who had blue eyes and a little wave in his hair. Mr. Melson, who was possessed of no other negotiable securities, had hastened to employ these in capturing the eldest Miss Van Osburgh. (57)

Having had her romantic love disappointed, Lily adapts to the rules of her society, which dictate that money and social position prevail over everything. Many critics have been quick to note that Lily's society is governed by stock market values, where marriageable singles are read like products of fluctuating value. Lorraine DiCicco writes that 'the men, even the

married ones, are aware of Lily's market value, as are their wives, who entertain her in their homes' (84). Kathleen Moore describes Lily as an 'individual as identified within a value system' (8) and Wai Chee Dimock suggests that '[t]he marketplace is everywhere and nowhere, ubiquitous and invisible' (64). Lily and her peers are valued as commodities, with personal advantages and disadvantages ascribed social weightings which deem the individual a desirable or undesirable investment. Herbert Melson's rejection of Lily is rooted in her low economic value. Meanwhile Lily flirts with wealthy men on the basis that they will recognise her social value, specifically her youth and beauty which, as Bärbel Tischleder notes, is considered as a 'form of capital' (72). After being rejected by the one man she is romantically interested in, Lily learns to appraise men based on their economic prospects, just as they commodify her according to her economic and social value. Very few critics have mentioned Lily's early rejection by Melson, which is a significant omission given how it exemplifies how Lily's social community teaches her that romance comes second to wealth, and then criticises her for searching for a rich husband.

Lily is not alone in her efforts to marry up. In the background to her struggles to secure a husband there is a large group of men and women who are similarly trying to secure their place in society through an advantageous partnership. Lily, who knows too well the make-or-break nature of the social game she is playing, is highly aware of this competition: 'the vicissitudes of the "new people" who rose to the surface with each recurring tide, and were either submerged beneath its rush or landed triumphantly beyond the reach of envious breakers' (106).[34] In the period of finding a husband, Lily and the other singles are left in an

[34] Several critics have explored the idea of social Darwinism in *The House of Mirth* specifically Lily's failure to be one of the 'survivalists' in her tribe: Bert Bender argues that Wharton's novel 'explicitly' deals with notions of sexual selection (315). Carol Singley suggests that Lily exists in a society where 'individuals, like organisms, compete against each other and only the fit survive' (*The House of Mirth: A Casebook*, 11). Nancy Bentley writes that 'Wharton not only transcribes the manners of the New York elite but glosses them as the anthropological rites and religion of a "tribe"' (48). As much work has already been done in this area, I will largely avoid discussion of the Darwinian aspects of the novel, other than to point out the importance of the tribe and the individual's dependence on it. As

uncertain social space which she imagines as treacherous water. As Thomas Loebel writes, human commodities 'that can't be sold, unmarriageable women and men without means, are remaindered into the bargain bin and eventually excluded from the system altogether' (112). Either Lily must find a husband of adequate wealth and status to lift her out of the single marketplace, or she will eventually be left behind. To fail to do so and to be deemed 'unmarriageable' (6), as Lily calls Gerty Farish, is to be left as a spinster, a fate which Lily considers as no life at all. Though she has 'fits of angry rebellion against fate, when she longed to drop out of the race and make an independent life for herself', she cannot help but question 'what manner of life would it be?' (34). Though it might be more dangerous for a girl to be known as too available than not available at all, Lily considers a life such as Gerty's such an insult that she cannot bring herself to retire from the marriage market as an unimportant, but socially respectable, spinster.[35]

Aside from the threat of spinsterhood, not flirting enough has another pitfall: surrendering power too soon. Realising the temporary power of choice granted to her through flirtation, Lily is justifiably reluctant to settle prematurely. It is a reluctance which costs her. As she admits to Selden: 'I threw away one or two good chances when I first came out—I suppose every girl does' (9). This notion of risk underlies flirtation. To choose to stop flirting and settle down with someone is to close the door on hypothetical better options in the future. Yet to wait for these future offers is to risk losing the best option in the fruitless search for a better one. In some regards Lily is sensible not to settle immediately with the first man she flirts with. She wishes to escape the fate of heroines like Isabel Archer in Henry James'

---

I will go on to discuss in much more detail, Lily's exclusion from an acceptable social 'tribe', increases the likelihood that she will cross the invisible lines which expose a girl as the wrong sort of woman.

[35] Lily's fear of spinsterhood is not unfounded. Leslie Petty describes the spinster in early-twentieth-century literature as a 'pathetic character, lonely, bitter, vulnerable', whose function was to quell the apparent 'threat of the single woman' (244). Though she might be seen as socially acceptable, she is certainly not an aspirational or desirable figure.

*Portrait of a Lady* who gives up her powers of flirtation far too soon with disastrous effect. Like Lily, Isabel is a magnetic presence for men; charming, imaginative and somehow distinct from the women around her. Yet to everyone's surprise Isabel is charmed by the manipulative Gilbert Osborne and marries prematurely, leaving her stranded in a loveless marriage to a man she grows to find intolerable. Her cousin Ralph tells her sadly: '[y]ou seemed to me to be soaring far up in the blue – to be sailing in the bright light, over the heads of men. Suddenly someone tosses up a faded rosebud – a missile that should never have reached you – and straight you drop to the ground' (343). Though flirting for too long might lose Lily some good options, as Isabel's miserable fate illustrates, the cost of settling too soon can also be cruelly high.

Flirting affords Lily power in a society where she is otherwise powerless. As a woman, without money and without living parents, Lily is in a weak social position. Flirting temporarily flips the power hierarchy so that she can momentarily gain influence over men she would otherwise be socially inferior to. Each time she deliberately flirts she gains a 'renewed sense of power in handling men' (75). While several critics have suggested that Lily's enjoyment of the 'game' of flirting is a negative mark of her character (75),[36] her enjoyment is not about hurting the men she charms but celebrating her own skill. Though she has no romantic desire for Percy Gryce, when she hears that he is to be married to Evie Van Osburgh she imagines reviving their flirtation, not so as to marry him, but so as to test whether she has the skills to do so: 'she smiled to think of the excitement of recapturing him from Evie' (82). Although Lily begins to equate her lack of a husband to failure, she seems to enjoy the thought of 'capturing' a man's attention more than keeping it.

[36] Scott Shumaker describes Lily as a 'master manipulator' who exerts power over men with her 'manipulative charm' (317), and Elaine Showalter writes that Lily does 'an extraordinary amount of harm to men' ('The Death of the Lady' 51). Though Maureen Howard is slightly more forgiving of Lily, she writes that '[a]s a great calculator of her advantages, she is hardly an innocent' (141).

The power that Lily is granted in flirtation only lasts for a certain window of time. Lily appears to believe that she may reject as many men as she pleases, when in fact, each rejection costs her, a small amount at first, but one which increases with every new passed-over suitor. With a trail of disappointed suitors, her cold and economically focused approach to flirting gains her the reputation of a husband hunter and a gold digger (40). Lily tells Selden 'I know there are men who don't like me – one can tell that at a glance. And there are others who are afraid of me: they think I want to marry them' (7). As Lily's reputation as a husband hunter grows, her choice of men willing to marry her dwindles. This is made worse by the involvement of their families. When Selden asks Lily what happened to one suitor, Dillworth, Lily replies that 'his mother was frightened . . . she packed him off to India' (9). While Lily works her charms on the men themselves, she overlooks the influence of their families. As Lily continues to flirt rather than settle into a marriage, she fails to recognise the steady mist of social gossip which accumulates around her. As her once spotless name is linked to more and more men, concern grows about the authenticity of her affections and the integrity of her intentions, slowly reducing the pool of men who will be willing to risk showing their interest in her.

While Lily might be sensible not to jump at her first offer of marriage, one of the invisible rules she transgresses is that she flirts for far too long. Though there is no clear marker of how long a girl can be out in society before she finds a husband, Lily has unknowingly crossed it:

> She had fewer invitations than usual for the autumn. She had so long been accustomed to pass from one country-house to another, till the close of the holidays brought her friends to town, that the unfilled gaps of time confronting her produced a sharp sense of waning popularity. It was as she had said to Selden—people were tired

> of her. They would welcome her in a new character, but as Miss Bart they knew her by heart (88).

Richard Kaye posits that it is Lily's prolonged deferral of marriage which causes her downfall, writing that the novel pivots on '[t]he danger inherent in protracted female choice' (165).[37] As Lily becomes aware through her lack of invitations, to wait too long to secure a partner is to risk society getting bored and moving their attention onto younger debutantes. While Lily has a 'dazzling debut', eleven years later she must work harder and harder to stay in the social circles she once entered effortlessly. While James' Isabel Archer illustrates the dangers of choosing a husband too quickly, Lily's continued deferral risks missing the opportunity to choose one altogether. Even in works from this period where the depictions of flirts are sympathetic, often this acceptance of flirtatiousness only lasts for a limited window of time. In Booth Tarkington's *Claire Ambler,* Claire, like Lily, has flirted far too long. On the cusp of her twenty-fifth birthday, finding herself working ever harder for male attention, she has an epiphany while observing the new debutantes flirting excitedly with a plethora of potential partners: '[d]id I do it like this at eighteen? Am I still doing only the same things I did then – endlessly repeating them as long as I can stay in the ring?' (226). Realising that she is clinging on to a role which she will soon grow too old to play, Claire revises her plans and settles down with a man she has previously rejected. Though she is equally aware of her unusual position as an older debutante, Lily, unlike Claire, does not allow this fear of aging out of the marriage market to propel her into a marriage. Even at the age of twenty-nine—the

[37] Kaye addresses *The House of Mirth* in some depth in *The Flirt's Tragedy.* As with much of Kaye's discussion, his focus remains on flirting as a socially subversive behaviour rather than on those, usually women, who become labelled by their flirtatious behaviour. He positions Lily as equally flirtatious as Selden, who he describes as 'erotically unresolved' and able to achieve self knowledge 'through acts of flirtatious desire' (163). While I will draw on some of Kaye's wider ideas about flirting as causing 'epistemological problems' (26) for those who try to interpret it, I will move away from his reading of Lily and Selden as equally engaged in artistic flirtation and examine instead the secret rules for single women which deem Lily a 'flirt' when almost all of those around her engage in flirtatious behaviour without getting labelled by it.

age that many critics have noted is her last chance to find someone—Lily rejects three marriage options.[38]

Ironically, Lily becomes renowned for being the wrong sort of flirt because she does not take flirting seriously enough. Though much of Lily's flirting is clearly a means to an end (she flirts to find a husband) she also flirts for less prescriptive reasons. Phillips explains that there is a difference between 'flirting' and '[being] a flirt', suggesting that flirting to achieve a predetermined end is regarded as acceptable because it promises the return to social equilibrium in the form of a marriage or other stable outcome (xvii). Flirting for the sake of flirting, however, prompts social unease because it is chaotic. If one flirts just for the enjoyment of flirting then normal social rules and power hierarchies are thrown into a state of disarray, with no promise of a return to stability. Flirtation is chaotic when at least one party does not know how seriously to take the flirtation, so for Lily to flirt without a goal causes disruption because those she flirts with presume that she must want to marry them, and then are angry when she proves non-committal. Lily watches as Mrs. Dorset flirts with Ned Silverton with growing jealousy, for she realises that Mrs. Dorset can enjoy the thrill of flirtation without the risks that Lily would encounter were she to flirt so carelessly: 'the mere thought of that other woman, who could take a man up and toss him aside as she willed, without having to regard him as a possible factor in her plans, filled Lily Bart with envy' (22). Lily makes a severe mistake in thinking that she can flirt for fun, as Bertha and her married friends can. When she fails to see her flirtation through to the close with Percy, Mrs. Trenor exasperatedly rebukes her: 'Lily, you'll never do anything if you're not serious' (66). Her cousin Jack Stepney adds to this ominous warning when he criticises Lily for displaying

[38] Lorraine DiCicco writes 'at twenty nine, Lily knows that she has reached her expiry date' (89) while Elaine Showalter suggests that '[t]elling the history of a woman past thirty was part of the challenge Wharton faced' ('The Death of the Lady' 40) because by this age women were expected to either be married, or have passed all possibility that they might be. As a single but desirable woman at the late age of twenty-nine, Lily is an anomaly in the literature of this period.

herself so indiscriminately at the Festival of Living Art: 'there is no provision as yet for the young woman who claims the privileges of marriage without assuming its obligations' (139). A married woman can flirt because she has the protection of a husband, while a single woman who engages in the same behaviour risks ruin.

Because flirting is inherently ambiguous, the flirtatious woman always risks being misinterpreted. Lily's falling favour with her aunt begins when her cousin Grace Stepney accuses Lily of making herself 'conspicuous' with Mr. Trenor (110), implying that they may be exchanging money for sexual favours. Though her aunt does not believe the rumour, she immediately blames Lily for having become the subject of gossip, declaring it 'horrible of a young girl to let herself be talked about, no matter how unfounded the charges against her' (112). Lily's reputation for flirtatiousness makes it easy for Bertha to falsely accuse her of having an affair with her husband. Echoing Grace's description, Bertha declares Lily 'conspicuously on his hands in the small hours' and reminds her that she has a reputation for being a 'big responsibility in such a scandalous place' (180). Though Lily has not engaged in any sexual activity, because she is already recognised as a flirtatious woman, it is easy for Grace and Bertha to misrepresent her.

This threat is heightened when it is her spurned suitors who are doing the interpreting. Though a woman may flirt playfully and without any intent of pursuing a relationship, if the man she flirts with interprets her behaviour differently she may find herself in trouble. When Lily tries her charms on Gus Trenor, she wrongly believes that he will be happy to exchange his money for her flattery. However, Gus is bitter and angry that Lily has 'made a fool' of him by tricking him into believing her affections are sincere:

> Trenor laughed. "Don't talk stage-rot. I don't want to insult you. But a man's got his feelings—and you've played with mine too long. I didn't begin this business—kept out of the way, and left the track clear for the other chaps, till you rummaged me out and

> set to work to make an ass of me—and an easy job you had of it, too. That's the trouble—it was too easy for you—you got reckless—thought you could turn me inside out, and chuck me in the gutter like an empty purse. But, by gad, that ain't playing fair: that's dodging the rules of the game. Of course I know now what you wanted—it wasn't my beautiful eyes you were after—but I tell you what, Miss Lily, you've got to pay up for making me think so" (128-129)

Lily's narrow escape from being raped by Trenor illustrates the perils the man spurned can present to the single woman. Though Lily is sure that she can flirt with Gus without cost on her part, she is wrong in how easy it will be to 'hold him by his vanity' (75). When he realises that Lily has flirted with him only for financial gain, his vanity, the very thing she believes she can control him by, leads him close to taking his revenge by force. As Lily's list of rejected men grows longer, so too does the risk that she will be ruined by one of them. As Gus Trenor illustrates, it is dangerous for a single woman to underestimate the potential cost of disappointing an eager suitor after flirting with him.

Lily's mistaken belief that she can continue to flirt indefinitely without social consequence proves disastrous. This can be traced to her mother, who wrongly teaches her daughter that her beauty will protect her from all the pitfalls of this difficult period where she must flirt successfully without being seen to do so. After the death of her husband and the decline of their wealth, Lily's mother fixates on Lily's physical appearance as 'the last asset in their fortunes, the nucleus around which their life was to be rebuilt' (30). Lily's mother builds Lily's belief that her beauty will not allow her to fail at her task of finding a wealthy husband, and thus gives her the mistaken belief that she can continue to dither and flirt without making the effort to secure a man, because she thinks another one will always be available. Judith P. Saunders writes that, 'age twenty-nine, Lily should be prepared to modify her selection criteria, to accept a husband somewhat less ideal than one her nineteen-

year-old self would have contemplated' (18). Yet Lily does not do so because she fully trusts in the power of her beauty to ensure a happy ending for her: 'she felt that she could trust it to carry her through to the end' (44). What Lily fails to realise is, as Janet Beer Goodwyn writes, 'that her beauty and her talents are only valid if circumscribed within the institution of marriage' (57). This miscalculation can be directly linked back to her mother's misguided belief that Lily's beauty has an infinite value which will compensate for every other family failing: '[s]he remembered how her mother, after they had lost their money, used to say to her with a kind of fierce vindictiveness: "But you'll get it all back—you'll get it all back, with your face"' (25). While Lily can use her beauty to compensate for her poverty, it is not enough to cancel out the rumours and scandal which builds up around her. Lily miscalculates how much beauty is worth in the marriage market when not supported by other factors (social status, wealth, good reputation).

Lily's status as an orphan is an important factor in her failure to adequately negotiate the line between successful flirting and morally questionable flirting. Though Lily's mother gives her poor advice when it comes to calculating her opportunities, she is left more vulnerable still when her mother dies and she is left to fend for herself. The role of the mother or surrogate guardian in the fraught period where a girl must secure a husband is a vital one. As several critics have identified, Lily is especially vulnerable to social missteps during her time out in society because she does not have this maternal guidance. Pamela Knights writes that with no 'mother nor effective guardian, Lily Bart justifiably deemed herself disadvantaged' (227), while Melissa McFarland Pennell describes Lily as 'an orphan who must fend for herself in the social realm' (87). Though as Joan Lidoff points out 'Lily encounters a host of inadequate mother figures', namely her aunt, Mrs. Peniston (199), she never finds the guidance that she desperately needs. Without a mother to guide her through the coming out and courtship process, Lily is vulnerable to making social errors which will

blemish her reputation because without a moral mentor she can often only figure out social codes retrospectively.

Lily pays a high price for figuring out social rules as she goes along. It is only when a mistake is already in the public domain that Lily can learn that it is an error, and by this time it is too late to avoid the social consequences of it: '[o]nce again, Lily had withdrawn from an ambiguous situation in time to save her self-respect, but too late for public vindication' (248). Though Lily's errors of judgement are often read as moral mistakes, it is her lack of knowledge of social rules which cause her to make decisions which mark her as the wrong sort of flirt. For example, when she takes tea alone with Selden in his flat, a decision which blemishes her reputation, it is only when she is leaving the flat and sees the reaction of a woman in the stairway that she realises her decision to have tea could be misread. It is with frustration that she realises that her innocent decision to have tea has broken an unspoken rule of proper female decorum: '[c]ould one never do the simplest, the most harmless thing, without subjecting one's self to some odious conjecture?' (12). The question of whether Lily knows she is transgressing when she goes to Selden's flat still divides critical opinion. Maureen Howard thinks Lily does not, describing the incident as 'Lily's innocent adventure in going to Selden's rooms' (140), while others, like Janet Beer and Elizabeth Nolan, read the incident as a sign of Lily's 'willingness to take a risk' (22). The early reviews of the novel tended to be unforgiving of Lily's errors and sceptical of her apparent naivety. In one review, 'The abode of the fool's heart', published in *Literary Digest* in 1905, the reviewer writes that Lily's decision to go to Selden's flat without a chaperone 'would appear to some as the kind of compromising step a girl of Lily Bart's stamp would have had the strength to deny herself' (qtd. Tuttleton et al. 120). Yet this reviewer's belief that Lily must have known the risk of her decision to enter the flat does not match Lily's frustration upon realising her error, as she is described as 'vexed to see that, in spite of so many years of vigilance, she had blundered

twice within five minutes' (14). Not only does her frustration imply a lack of premeditation, it also reveals the fragility of her societal position. Lily is aware that years of blemish-free behaviour may be undone in the briefest moments where she lets her guard down.

If flirting is a risky behaviour for all single women, then this risk is magnified when the woman in question has no significant external protection. Across Wharton's novels the flirt figures who pay most dearly for their transgressions are those who lack the protection that comes with family status. While Undine Spragg in *The Custom of the Country* may trade on her family name and status to protect her (and has living parents to answer for her), Wharton's less fortunate female figures are often those without such secure backgrounds. Many critics have linked the success or failure of Wharton's female characters to their economic prospects. Elaine Showalter writes that 'to cut your deal as a woman in Wharton's world, and to emerge with dignity, it is necessary to be an aristocrat' ('Spragg: The Art of the Deal' 92-93), while Jennifer Haytock agrees, suggesting that 'Wharton's women fall into two categories, although not those of chaste or fallen; they are either poor or financially secure and it is this distinction that decides their fate' (73). While economic status is certainly a factor in Lily's decline, it is not the only one. Wharton's wealthier heroines also tend to be the heroines with living parents.[39] Arguably it is this kinship which helps the young heroine navigate the perilous space of the marriage market, even more so than financial backing. While Lily is certainly economically disadvantaged, it is the absence of family protection and guidance which leaves her most vulnerable to mismanaging her time as a debutante.

In order to retain the feminine virtues of purity and innocence, Lily must appear as a passive player in the marriage market while actively pursuing a man and marketing herself.

[39] Similarly cast astray are heroines who, like Lily, are both poor and orphaned, for example Sophy Viner in *The Reef,* who makes several social errors for lack of better knowledge; Mattie Ross in *Ethan Frome,* who is dependent on the charity of her romantic rival Zeena Frome; and Charity Royall in *Summer,* who has only her adopted father, who fails to instruct her or warn her of the missteps she makes, only offering her a horrifying solution of an incestuous marriage when she falls pregnant out of wedlock.

As Lori Merish writes, 'Lily's tenuous position is that of a single woman who must exhibit an air of lofty exclusiveness and elusiveness while simultaneously projecting availability' (254). While Merish envisages this as a difficult task for any single woman, Lily is more vulnerable than most because of her lack of someone to intervene on her behalf. For those fortunate girls with adequate guardians, the illusion of 'elusiveness' is easier to maintain, because they do not have to market themselves. The Van Osburgh daughters, who are married off one-by-one, offer an example of the successful intervention of the guardian in the debutante's marriage success. Even the 'dumpiest, dullest' daughter, Evie, is matched to Percy Gryce, a marriage in which she is 'placed' by her mother (80). Evie can act as the perfect innocent woman, safe from having her reputation besmirched by over-zealousness because she passively waits as her mother orchestrates the courtship and engagement:

> Ah, lucky girls who grow up in the shelter of a mother's love—a mother who knows how to contrive opportunities without conceding favours, how to take advantage of propinquity without allowing appetite to be dulled by habit! The cleverest girl may miscalculate where her own interests are concerned, may yield too much at one moment and withdraw too far at the next: it takes a mother's unerring vigilance and foresight to land her daughters safely in the arms of wealth and suitability. (80-81)

The ease with which Evie finds a suitable husband compared to Lily's struggles highlights both the importance of guardianship in the process of a girl's entrance into society and the additional risks for those, like Lily, who must manage alone. Evie is carried safely from the protection of her family to the shelter of a husband, without having to appear as if she is on the hunt for a husband at all. Lily has no such luxury of being a passive player but must manage for herself the balance between appearing available enough that a man might choose her, yet not so available that she appears to be doing the choosing herself.

Lily is acutely aware that having to contrive romantic opportunities for herself has left her vulnerable to criticism:

> Sometimes she thought it was because Mrs. Peniston had been too passive, and again she feared it was because she herself had not been passive enough. Had she shown an undue eagerness for victory? Had she lacked patience, pliancy and dissimulation? Whether she charged herself with these faults or absolved herself from them, made no difference in the sum-total of her failure. Younger and plainer girls had been married off by dozens, and she was nine-and-twenty, and still Miss Bart. (34)

Even Lily's realisation of her error cannot help her. She tells her friend that she knows that she has 'the reputation of being on the hunt for a rich husband' (40), but she cannot stop this search because marriage is the only future which offers her anything. Lily is caught in a no-win situation. She cannot afford not to flirt because her aunt is too passive to intervene on her behalf. But making her own opportunities has cost her greatly because it reveals her as a girl too keen for marriage, and without the feminine modesty to wait to be chosen by a man rather than working for his attention. While many of the early reviews of the novel depict Lily as an anti-heroine with a steadfast and deliberate defiance of moral authority,[40] Lily is desperate for a guiding figure who can help her navigate the social rules which bind her. Her aunt's occasional input is futile because her advice speaks to the customs half a century before. She is 'full of copy-book axioms, but they were all meant to apply to conduct in the early fifties' (8), offering little of relevance to Lily's struggles. Desperate, she asks Selden for help: '"[d]on't you see," she continued, "that there are men enough to say pleasant things to me, and that what I want is a friend who won't be afraid to say disagreeable ones when I need them? Sometimes I have fancied you might be that friend"' (8). Lily's almost childlike pleas

[40] Dianne Chambers writes that 'Edith Wharton's readers in 1905 would have found the ending of *The House of Mirth* tragic but entirely appropriate. The cautionary tale of a woman who transgresses social and moral laws is completed by Lily Bart's death' (61).

to Selden for help undermine the critics who argue that Lily's disobedience of social rules is always deliberate. Furthermore, her honest request to Selden calls his failures into question. Why, when Lily so clearly states a desire for his guidance does Selden fail so spectacularly to provide it?

Many critics have weighed in on Selden's moral weakness. Poised as the novel's moral centre, he speaks to Lily of the need for integrity and inner strength that he never achieves himself, swayed as he is by the slightest blemish on Lily's public reputation. Erin Mahoney describes him 'a defective Prince Charming' (37), Linda Wagner-Martin as 'even more naive than Lily' (247) and Dianne Chambers as 'conspicuously not available' when Lily is most in need (62). Lily desperately requires a friend who will help her behave appropriately in the marriage market, as well as the moral support of a mentor who will ultimately believe in her good character despite the gossip which may accumulate around her. Mary Nyquist reads Selden as betraying 'one of the major duties of mentorship' (94), by failing to steadfastly believe in Lily's goodness and allowing his opinion of her to be swayed by rumours and gossip. He is, she writes, 'almost smugly self-protective' (94). Lily's conversations with Selden are some of the few open ones she has with men in the novel and yet he is so convinced that she is playing games with him that he refuses to take what she is saying seriously.

Selden's inability to mentor Lily is linked to his inability to see her as anything but a 'flirt'. Her flirtatiousness is the quality which both attracts him and later repulses him. In their first encounter at the station it is her flirtatious intrigue which attracts his attention: 'he could never see her without a faint movement of interest: it was characteristic of her that she always roused speculation, that her simplest acts seemed the result of far-reaching intentions' (3). He is amused by the thought of 'putting her skill to the test' (3), and that her every movement is 'part of the same carefully elaborated plan' (4). Though later he is irritated by the thought of

all the ‘opportunities she has had for practicing such arts since their last meeting’ (167), it is precisely these ‘arts’ which draw his aesthetic and intellectual interest to start with. He regards her flirtatiousness as such an integral part of her that he is amazed to find her defending herself against his accusations that she is manipulating Percy Gryce: ‘[t]hat Lily Bart should object to being bantered about her suitors, or even about her means of attracting them, was so new to Selden that he had a momentary flash of surprise’ (55). Selden is so fixated with Lily’s mastery of the art of flirtation, that his vision of her is obscured.

While Selden persistently reads Lily as the sum of her flirtatious charms, it is when she is with him that she is at her least flirtatious. Nyquist points out that Lily’s interactions with Selden are specifically described as lacking in coquetry (86). When she asks him why he came to Bellemont, she takes ‘all tinge of coquetry from the question’ and when she starts to move away from him it is ‘not with a gesture of coquetry, but as though renouncing something to which she had no claim’ (58). Apparently disarmed by Selden’s lack of marriageability, when they are alone Lily temporarily sheds her flirtatious pretences and becomes a more authentic version of herself. Therefore, there is a heightened irony in Selden’s refusal to believe that she might have an identity outwith attracting male attention. It is with ‘a touch of resentment’ that she asks him ‘why you are always accusing me of premeditation’ (59). While Selden should be the person who can see past Lily’s capriciousness, he either cannot, or he wilfully refuses to. Lily longs for Selden to better understand her, to see her as ‘more than a piece of sentient prettiness, a passing diversion to his eye and brain’ (84), yet it is only once she is dead that Selden does so. While Selden is positioned to be Lily’s hero, his reluctance to accept her if he thinks she is sexually tainted means that he never becomes the redemptive figure she requires. Like Henry James’ Winterbourne, who is more concerned with finding the ‘formula that applied to Miss Daisy’ (144) than whether she lives or dies, Selden is more concerned about

converting her ambiguous flirtatiousness into a clear category of female behaviour than he is about Lily herself.

Not only does Selden fail to be the friend that Lily asks him to be, he also benefits from and reinforces the double standard that means that single women are disproportionately punished for sexual indiscretions compared to men or married women. While Lily comments than men never 'suffer much from such exposure' (93), she knows that as a woman she must be conscious of 'every turn of the allusive jargon which could flay its victims without the shedding of blood' (97). It is a double standard that many critics have identified, specifically in the irony that Selden rejects Lily for her reputation for being too easily available, when he himself has been involved in an adulterous relationship with Bertha Dorset.[41]

Jessica Levine writes that not only does Lily suffer more public exposure than Selden for lesser social indiscretions, but that Selden, who should protect her, projects his own sexual crimes, of which she has nothing to do with, onto her:

> In a world where women must avoid even the semblance of impropriety, innocent behaviour is likely to be judged guilty by men who assume that all women engage in the kind of behaviour their mistresses do. Winterbourne does not distinguish between Daisy and his mistresses in Geneva; similarly, Selden tragically forgets that Lily Bart is not of the same breed as Bertha Dorset. In both works, the woman comes to carry the moral burden of the man's illicit sexual activity'. (6)

[41] Melissa McFarland Pennell describes it as 'the double standard that governs the lives and reputations of men and women' (88) and Judith Fetterley writes: 'Lily knows that her life is structured and her conduct judged differently from that of men' (205). Meanwhile, Mary Nyquist points out that '[w]ere Lily to have had an affair with the married Gus Trenor, she would have duplicated exactly Selden's experience' (92) Even though Selden has himself engaged in adulterous behaviour, he is horrified by the idea that Lily might have. While he judges her harshly for behaviour that she only may have engaged in, Lily forgives Selden for the same crime, even losing her own opportunity for redemption by protecting him from further scandal.

Selden is repulsed by the idea that Lily may have engaged in adulterous behaviour, even though he himself has done so repeatedly.[42] When the men that judge women are themselves so used to their illicit encounters with traditionally 'bad' females, it becomes inevitable that they will interpret the innocent and minor social transgressions of a flirt as the more serious social crimes of their mistresses. The difficulty for Lily is that while she might occupy a space between the angelic woman and the fallen woman, she trusts that her liminal position will be understood by outsiders and that she will not be mistaken for a fallen woman. Ruth Bernard Yeazell writes that conduct books in the early twentieth century dictated that the ideal woman must neither be 'a prude nor a coquette… the modest woman occupies a mystified space between' (6). As a flirtatious female figure Lily occupies this 'mystified space' between two better known modes of feminine behaviour. The problem is that it is not the woman who chooses where on the spectrum of female 'types' she falls. While Lily is always a flirt, and never an adulteress (and certainly not a prostitute), she relies on being correctly demystified by those around her. Selden struggles to believe in this mystified space between the totally pure and the totally impure woman, so when he sees Lily deviate from the bland purity of his cousin (Gerty Farish) and behave in a way which hints at her sexual availability, he assumes that she is like Bertha.

Lily's attempts to try and figure out the rules which govern how she may and may not flirt are futile because there is no stable list to follow. What decides whether Lily is an endearing and innocent flirt or a gold-digging and promiscuous one is nothing to do with

[42] As I detailed in my third chapter, American literature at the turn of the century tends to place women as holding more responsibility for preserving innocence and morality than men. As Leslie Fiedler summarises, it is women who are expected to be the 'embodiment of conscious' (49). This idea of female responsibility is often apparent in narratives depicting flirtatious female characters. Though a flirtation implicitly involves two parties it is usually only the female party who is held responsible for any negative consequences or whose behaviour is deemed socially inappropriate or transgressive. For example, in Wharton's *The Age of Innocence,* Newland Archer explains this double standard in regard to his fiancée May Welland: 'it was his duty as a "decent" fellow, to conceal his past from her, and hers, as a marriageable girl, to have no past to conceal' (37).

what she does, but with how she is perceived by others. Though Rosedale does not believe the rumours he has heard about Lily, he refuses to marry her because whether true or not, Lily's name has been sullied by gossip. When Lily argues that if the gossip is 'not true… doesn't *that* alter the situation?', Rosedale replies 'I believe it does in novels; but I'm certain it don't in real life' (223). Rosedale's sad assurance that it is only in novels that the truth prevails over public opinion taps into the biggest problem for the flirtatious girl trying to navigate the line between good flirting and bad flirting, that ultimately it is how her behaviour is interpreted, wrongly or rightly, that will define her. Regardless of what she does, if men continue to consider her worthy of marriage, she retains the power of choice and the possibility of securing a husband. Yet if these men stop seeing her as an object of value, her power is lost, whether she is guilty of the accusations levied at her or not. Whether Lily is cast in the role of a good or bad flirt is a decision which she cannot make for herself. 'Truth' means nothing in a society which values what people perceive a woman to be like more than how she really is: '[w]hat is truth? Where a woman is concerned, it's the story that's easiest to believe. In this case it's a great deal easier to believe Bertha Dorset's story than mine, because she has a big house and an opera box, and it's convenient to be on good terms with her.' (197). Lily realises these lessons too late, for if she had truly understood the dangerous position her singleness leaves her in, she might have married sooner.

Whether Lily's death at the end of the novel is by suicide or tragic accident has been debated by critics. Generally, critics have sided with the reading that Lily's death is suicide. Shari Benstock, for example, writes that 'Wharton's notes on the novel make clear that Lily does take her own life . . . [a]ny doubt that she took her own life was, for Wharton's contemporaries, rhetorical rather than "real"' (136). However, some critics have read Lily's death more ambiguously. Karin Tolchin writes that 'Lily Bart dies in a scene that might either be interpreted as an accident or a suicide' (85) and Maureen Howard describes it as a

'romantic and ambiguous death' (142). Whichever way her death is read, it seems Lily could have been saved from it had she managed to secure a husband. In her visit to Selden the day before her death, he asks her if she is planning finally to marry, to which she replies: '[y]ou always told me I should have to come to it sooner or later!' (270). It is her failure to 'come to it' which means that Lily breaks the most important rule for women. Even in the last days of her life she makes independent decisions and oversteps the invisible rule which decrees that women only have value as part of the identity of a man. Since she cannot find a husband and society decrees that she cannot retain the independent status afforded to the single female flirt, Lily Bart's death is all but inevitable.

***Alice Adams***

Booth Tarkington is an author who has largely been forgotten. Despite immense popularity in his lifetime and having twice won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction— for *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1919) and *Alice Adams* (1921)—Tarkington has been largely omitted from the critical canon. During his lifetime he consistently appeared in bestseller lists and was named the 'greatest living American author' in *Literary Digest* in 1922, the same year in which *Alice Adams* was deemed the 'best novel of American life' published in the previous year ('Columbia University Honors Booth Tarkington and Others', 69*)*. F.Scott Fitzgerald described Tarkington as writing 'better prose than any other living American' and cited *Seventeen* (1917) as one of his ten favourite books (Tate 385). Yet Tarkington's novels are the subject of almost no recent critical analysis. Most of the critical texts on Tarkington were written over half a century ago, and even these are not numerous. Other than two monographs, James Woodress' *Booth Tarkington: Gentleman from Indiana* (1969) and Keith J. Fennimore's *Booth Tarkington* (1974), most mentions of Tarkington are in anthologies where his corpus gets a brief summary at best.

There have been hints towards a renewed interest in Tarkington's work, or at least investigation into why a twice Pulitzer winning author would fall so quickly out of the literary canon. Adam Sorkin describes Tarkington as 'greatly neglected' (199), and Ruth Ann Gerrard writes that he could be situated 'just outside the mainstream of twentieth century novelists' (96). One more recent advocate for this renewal is Jeremy Beer, the editor for a collection of Tarkington's autobiographical writing published in 2015, *America Moved: Booth Tarkington's Memoirs of Time and Place.* Beer compares Tarkington favourably to Theodore Dreiser as well as other contemporaries including Willa Cather, Sinclair Lewis and Edith Wharton, defending Tarkington as 'someone with whom it is still very much worth spending time with' (vii). [43] In a project on the figure of the flirt, discovering Tarkington's corpus is a literary gold-mine. He revisited the flirt figure repeatedly throughout his writing career, in *The Flirt* (1913), *Seventeen* (1917), *Alice Adams* (1921), *Women* (1925) and *Claire Ambler* (1928), to name just a few. As Fennimore writes, Tarkington 'excelled in his portraits of women' (93), specifically his socially deviant female characters, 'his egotistical flirts, shrewish vixens, and calculating schemers' (90). Though there are many flirtatious heroines to choose from, *Alice Adams* offers the best example of Tarkington's flirt figure struggling to toe the line between 'good' and 'bad' flirtatiousness. Despite winning Tarkington his second Pulitzer prize, criticism on *Alice Adams* is almost non existent. Adam J. Sorkin's 'She Doesn't Last Apparently' (1976) is the most recent full analysis of the novel, describing it as an 'acutely observant' study of 'the affections and posturings of marriageable-aged, flirtatious, all but self-deluding Alice' (186), whom he describes as 'a Daisy Miller without advantages' (187). The lack of critical attention does an injustice to a good book and to a

[43] Furthermore, in 2019 The Library of America published an edited collection of Tarkington's work on the 150th anniversary of his birth. The collection, *Booth Tarkington: Novels & Stories,* includes *The Magnificent Ambersons*, *Alice Adams* and *In the Arena: Stories of Political Life.*

heroine who, like Lily Bart, is ruined by the society that creates her. Taught that her only value lies in finding a man, Alice is then outcast for trying too hard to do so.

Like *The House of Mirth, Alice Adams* opens with its heroine already past the peak of her social popularity. After an initial rush of admiration when she first came out to society, six years later she is struggling for male attention. Of modest means and having already passed the ideal age for marriage, Alice is preoccupied with honing her flirtatious craft in order that she might reverse her unpopularity. At home she carefully practices expressions and gestures to use to catch male attention: 'playing with the mirror's reflections—posturing her arms and her expressions, clasping her hands behind her neck, and tilting back her head to foreshorten the face in a tableau conceived to represent sauciness, then one of smiling weariness, then one of scornful toleration' (9). When she sees her mother in the doorway, she is flustered, shouting to her '[f]or heaven's sake, mama, come clear inside the room and shut the door! *Please* don't leave it open for everybody to look at me!' (10). Though her mother replies that there is no one there to see her, Alice's concern about been 'seen' by anybody while she practices these flirtatious behaviours is a justifiable one. Though flirting is necessary to catch the attention of a suitable man, for a girl to be caught practicing her craft would be to dispel the myth of her passivity in attracting male attention.

Ruth Bernard Yeazell points out that traditional notions of feminine modesty require that even during courtship rituals, where a woman is deliberately positioned 'to be seen, to stand out and to be chosen, she remains subject to the contradictory injunction to keep herself modestly concealed, or at least to avoid any sign of aggressive self-display' (130). Alice's anxiety that people might see her practicing her flirtatious posturing speaks to this cultural expectation that a desirable girl is one who passively waits to be chosen. Though it is important that Alice is selected as an object of male desire, she should not be engaged in this process of selection and certainly should not do anything superficial to make herself more

desirable. The 'double-bind' where women are expected to attract men without trying to be attractive is even reflected in her daydream, where Alice imagines herself as both 'charming and demure' (36). She knows that in order to manage her time as a debutante she must do what she can to attract male attention while acting as if she is retiring from it.

Alice's struggles to navigate the line between socially acceptable flirting and the contrived, manipulative flirting of a deliberate 'flirt', begin when she tries to take her flirtatious charms beyond the protective sphere of her home. Lynne Tillman writes that: '[f]or Lily Bart, leaving rooms and being on the street is hazardous; it's when many of her most devastating and decisive encounters occur'. (137) For the single woman, public spaces become dangerous because it is in these spaces that a woman might be seen by critical onlookers. For Lily, being seen in the street outside Selden's flat or Trenor's house sparks gossip which seals her fate as a perceived fallen woman. In *Alice Adams*, it is not only the street which threatens Alice's reputation, but any attempts to bring the flirtatious charms she has honed into the public sphere. In the safety of her daydreams, or even in her bedroom mirror, Alice may practice flirtatious expressions without fear of recognition, but she learns too late that to bring these techniques into public spaces runs the risk of being caught out and shamed. Mirroring Lily Bart's ill-fated tea with Selden, Alice's social downfall begins with a few minor social missteps which are witnessed by judgemental observers.

Even before the narrative opens, Alice has a reputation as a girl who flirts too much. She is mocked by some of the girls in town because they have noticed how she tries to accentuate her beautiful hands—cruelly described as 'her one good feature' (10) —by adopting a pattern of hand movements in conversation: 'she led a life of gestures, the unkind said to make her lovely hands more memorable' (10). In adopting these slightly flamboyant gestures in her interactions with men, Alice is vulnerable to being noticed, and when she is, is mocked and criticised by those who have spotted this pattern. It is an idea echoed in

Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, with Daisy Buchanan's murmur. Though Nick describes it as 'enchanting' he adds 'I've heard it said that Daisy's murmur was only to make people lean toward her' (8). Both Alice and Daisy make the mistake of making their flirtatious behaviours too conspicuous, and therefore inviting comment. Though Nick suggests that the cruel gossip condemning Daisy does nothing to lessen the charm of this trick, Alice is made more vulnerable by not making her flirting ambiguous enough.

Alice's increasingly negative social reputation does not come from a single mistake but is steadily eroded by a series of misrepresentations. Like the mocking of her hand gestures, though each individual social error may be itself inconsequential, each time Alice is caught out like this, she becomes increasingly vulnerable to being misconstrued as a socially undesirable flirt. In a world where even minor actions are weighed as modest or immodest and might be used to blemish a girl's reputation, Alice takes great pains in choosing how to present herself in public. For example, she is 'continually going to see what Mildred meant to wear, or what some other girl meant to wear' before choosing her own outfits for social events (28). This in itself is an exercise in choosing how to flirt the right way, for dressing correctly may enhance a girl's allure, while dressing unfashionably or outlandishly might leave her open to criticism. Popular American publications in the early twentieth century dedicate pages to new styles of dress, many adverts promising potential customers the romantic benefits of new cuts and fabrics. In one such article, 'Dresses to dance in, to Flirt in, to Talk in', published in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1914, the advert describes a new design as focused on 'short, saucy, little, full skirts which display so alluringly a pretty ankle', emphasising the ways in which this new dress might enhance the flirtatious charms of the wearer (42).

Choosing an 'alluring' outfit may enhance the wearer's flirting skills, though to accidentally choose something too conspicuous carries the opposite danger. Ellen Olenska in

Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* is marked from her debutante ball for her eccentric choice of dress, for '[w]hat can you expect of a girl who was allowed to wear black satin at her coming-out ball?' (33). In *Daisy Miller* Winterbourne repeatedly comments on the showiness of Daisy's appearance, with the growing concern that such conspicuous dress must connote a certain failure of moral character (138). Ultimately Alice's selection of an organdie dress which in her bedroom mirror 'had seemed beautiful', looks out of place next to the 'dozens of brilliant fabrics, fashioned in new ways' worn by the other girls at the dance (54). While she manages to avoid wearing anything that would shock or cause gossip like Ellen or Daisy, Alice makes the mistake of choosing something so inconspicuous and outmoded that she is barely noticed at all. For the single woman, even the simplest act of choosing an outfit is an art with numerous pitfalls where one can easily slip into being too old fashioned and inconspicuous (as Alice is), or too shocking and lacking in feminine modesty (as Ellen and Daisy are).

The danger of a girl becoming conspicuous for flirting is shown early in the novel, when, en route to her friend Mildred's house, Alice practices the charms she has tried out on her bedroom mirror on men she passes in the street. On spotting a well-dressed man walking towards her, she smiles, biting her lip slightly as she does so, and flutters her hand over her heart: 'she had seen an actress use this smile in a play, and it came perfectly to Alice now, without conscious direction, it had been so well acquired; but the pretty hand's little impulse toward the heart was an original bit all her own' (23). She is gratified by his slight pause and admiring gaze as he walks by, and even more exhilarated by the thought that his positive response to her might spread around town. Her momentary success is made bitter, however, when she is passed by a carriage of girls who are clearly unimpressed by her behaviour. Under their judgemental eyes Alice freezes, realising just too late the potential cost of being seen to adopt the airs and graces of manufactured charm:

> Probably all the other girls and women would agree with them and would laugh at her when they got together, and, what might be fatal, would try to make all the men think her a silly pretender. Men were just like sheep, and nothing was easier than for women to set up as shepherds and pen them in a fold. "To keep out outsiders," Alice thought. "And make 'em believe I *am* an outsider" (25)

Alice makes several mistakes even in this short walk which foreshadow her fall in public opinion. She is indiscriminate in choosing the men who she will try out her tricks on. The other girls will never waste their time, but Alice cannot resist any man who will make their admiration clear. The man she charms is described as 'middle aged, substantial, a family man, securely married', in other words offering no real romantic potential (23), and yet Alice engages in this flirtatious play, as she will for any man who makes 'their admiration visible' (24). Furthermore, she makes the mistake of making her flirtatiousness obvious. Both the lip-bite which she has copied from the movies, and the hand gesture she uses are contrived pieces, described as 'pantomime' (23), an apt description of the heavily performative and exaggerated nature of her charms.

The problem for Alice, like Lily before her, is that the rules on how to flirt effectively but discreetly are never made clear. Though making a social misstep in a flirtation can be catastrophic, Alice not only has to avoid making such a misstep, but also must figure out what would constitute a misstep in the first instance. She is often exposed by her lack of knowledge of the secret codes which differentiate good flirting from bad flirting and has varying success trying to learn the rules through books and films. The lip bite she copies from a film is effective. However, she then breaks the rules of making herself too conspicuous by adopting a white cane, which she uses to emphasise her flirtatious hand gestures. Though Alice quickly realises that the cane is attracting attention of the wrong sort, she has already

been seen with it, and this allows her critics to further feed into the rumour that Alice is the kind of girl who will do anything for attention.

Alice's social mistake in adopting the cane is exacerbated when a black child (of around six years old) alerts her to the fact that it is making her conspicuous, remarking as she goes by: 'Lady got cane! Jeez!' (24). Though Alice would like to deem herself socially superior to the child, she cannot help but feel uneasy for 'the sting of a criticism is not necessarily allayed by knowledge of its ignoble source' (24). To have her flirtatious performance criticised by a person she considers 'ignoble' is a further mark of humiliation. The 'unfavourable hint' (24) in the boy's tone echoes the disapproving looks given to her by other passers-by, mainly middle-class women, who 'more than merely glanced, their brows and lips contracting impulsively' (24). Through the child's outburst, Alice is forced to acknowledge that she has made a social slip-up that people of all classes recognise as a mistake. While existing on both sides of a social chasm, both the black child and the middle-class women laugh at Alice's attempts to make herself more attractive, highlighting the fact that she does not belong to either social group.[44] There is a danger in Alice's learning through trial and error for even when she learns her mistake (and passes the cane onto her brother,

[44] Though I have chosen for want of space in this thesis not to give central focus to the idea of race in Tarkington's work, it is noteworthy that Alice's liminal position in her society is reflected in her uncomfortable relationship with the black minority in her community. Alice's family is positioned between the wealthy families she and her mother aspire to join and the lower-class world that Walter steps into through his association with the black community. Ashamed of her brother's willingness to cross this social line and horrified when Arthur discovers Walter playing dice with some black men at Mildred's party, Alice tries to explain it away with a lie that Walter is studying them for artistic purposes: 'we think he'll probably write about them some day. He's rather literary' (89). While Walter has accepted their family's falling social status and despises Alice's wealthy acquaintances, Alice still desperately strives for the life which, as a lower-middle class woman, is almost but not quite within her grasp. Her lies to Arthur that Walter only interacts with the black community for artistic purposes is a desperate attempt to continue the fantasy that her family are of the same social standing as he is. Though not a primary focus of this thesis, the racial tensions in *Alice Adams* and many of Tarkington's other works would certainly offer fertile ground for further study.

Walter), she has already made, and more importantly has been seen to have made, the social faux pas.

Alice mistakenly believes that in studying what is acceptable flirtation in films, or even by watching the behaviour of her peers, that if she copies this, she too will find the perfect line between attracting male attention while avoiding the reputation of an undesirable flirt. Yet she misses the nuance that the rules are not a static construct, but a malleable paradigm which alters according to the one engaging with it. Kent Puckett discusses the role of the social mistake in literature, pointing out the problem with retrospective recognition:

> Analogous to the fluctuating social scenes in which they are recognized as mistakes, handling a bad handkerchief, speaking sharply, and kicking what should have been stabbed are only really registered as mistakes after they have appeared and thus cannot be considered mistakes simply in terms of any fixed principle or prior rules. (18)

As Puckett describes, the rules that inform appropriate flirtatiousness do not adhere to a stable set of rules but fluctuate both according to the social setting, and the person whose behaviour is being scrutinised. The girls who are at the centre of the social nucleus, are almost immune to such fluctuations, protected by their social status and their ability to create the rules. This is apparent in the description of Mildred, the most popular girl in Alice's social group:

> She was a large, fair girl, with a kindness of eye somewhat withheld by an expression of fastidiousness; at first sight of her it was clear that she would never in her life do anything 'incorrect,' or wear anything 'incorrect.' But her correctness was of the finer sort, and had no air of being studied or achieved; conduct would never offer her a problem to be settled from a book of rules, for the rules were so deep within her that she was unconscious of them. (50)

While Alice's precarious social position leaves her behaviour open to negative social interpretation, Mildred is immune to this scrutiny. As one of the creators of social rules, she does not have to worry about making mistakes. Alice, as an outsider to the social group, is more closely scrutinised than those within it, and thus more likely to make a mistake.

Alice is bound by a double social disadvantage: she is both a woman, and of low social status. In her study of 'discretion' in the works of Wharton and James, Jessica Levine explains that '[j]ust as women are held to higher standards of propriety than men, so are socially marginal figures expected to obey the rules more conscientiously than those who make them. Those who are both female and socially handicapped are most at risk' (9). Alice lacks what her mother describes as the 'background' (50): all the markings of social status which as Levine points out, allow a girl slightly more freedom when finding a partner. Notably, Alice is not the only girl who makes the mistake of flirting too obviously. Alice is surprised to see Mildred adopt coy mannerisms with Arthur Russell: 'she halted momentarily, once or twice; and her upward glances to her tall companion's face were of a gentle, almost blushing deference. Never before had Alice seen anything like this in her friend's manner' (60). Yet, while Alice quickly gains a bad reputation for flirting too obviously, Mildred does not suffer the same gossip. As Alice's mother declares, society 'can't do that to a girl like Mildred Palmer because she's got money and family to back her' (128).

Alice's poverty leaves her more vulnerable to criticism over how she interacts with men. Her attempts to navigate the marriage market are doomed from the start because of the family's low social standing. As Sorkin writes, Alice is set up to fail 'not because of who she is but because of what she is' (194). Without the backing of wealth and status she is not considered of marriageable quality. While Alice often naively believes she can overcome her social status with her beauty and charm, her mother is more realistic, angrily telling her father that it is not Alice's fault that a whole month has gone by 'and not a young man come to call

on her', because '[m]oney's at the bottom of it all' (129). Behind Mildred's apparent ease at navigating the narrow line between prudishness and flirtatiousness is 'an even ampler perfection of what Mrs. Adams called "background." The big, rich, simple house was part of it, and Mildred's father and mother were part of it' (50). Mildred's popularity is secured not by what she does, but by the social position of her family, while Alice's lack of success in the marriage market is inevitable because of the business failure of her father.

The social standing of Alice's family does not only inhibit her flirting in terms of financial backing, but also denies her the chance for her parents to guide her through the process of finding a husband. They are conspicuously absent from the social events that young girls would usually be chaperoned to because they are never offered invitations. This forces Alice to attend events without the familial protection a girl of her class would expect, as *A Dictionary of Etiquette* (1904) makes clear in the instruction that mothers 'should attend balls with her daughters, going and returning with them, and if she is not invited, they should decline the invitation' (Green 37). When Alice is forced to attend Mildred's dance without her mother as a chaperone, she cannot help but look longingly at the corner where the mothers of the other girls wait 'to fend and contrive for their offspring; to keep them in countenance through any trial; to lend them diplomacy in the carrying out of all enterprises; to be "background" for them' (55). As Alice's mother is not offered an invitation, Alice is placed in a double bind. If, as she chooses to, she attends unchaperoned then she is vulnerable to attacks on her character, yet if she does as the etiquette guide suggests and refuses the invitation then she cuts off her opportunities to meet eligible men. Either way she risks missing the opportunity to find a good match.

Ironically, Alice is more open to criticism that she is too flirtatious because she does not have enough men interested in her. Yeazell writes that the traditional notions of modesty 'advise women on how best to get themselves chosen, men how best to choose' (33). For a

girl to avoid being seen as desperate, she must be seen to be passive in the selection process, though beneath her cool demeanour must be working hard to ensure that she is indeed chosen. Though all the girls at the dance are engaged in the same flirting process, most of the girls are able to appear as if they are innocent of this by being sought after by men without appearing to put any effort in. Alice, on the other hand, with no mother to work for her and no men already interested in her, must promote her availability, which breaks the unspoken rule that women should be chosen, never the choosers. This process of selection is illustrated in the social space of the dance, where the men are required to choose girls to dance with and the girls themselves are meant to wait passively for their invitations. As one etiquette guide, *The Etiquette of Today* (1902), explains, 'ball-room code makes a woman dependent upon men by forbidding her to cross the floor alone and requiring her not to seek her partner' (Everett 174). Since Alice struggles for male attention, she must deviate from this 'ball-room code' if she is to participate in the dance scene at all. Desperately she tries to appeal to potential dance partners: 'she nodded sunnily to every man whose eye she caught, smiled her smile with the under lip caught between her teeth' (57). Not only are these charms unsuccessful, but in trying so visibly to attract mens' eyes, her behaviour attracts the wrong sort of attention. Her obvious attempts to subvert the code that dictates that a woman should never seek out partners to dance with causes Mrs. Palmer to describe her as 'a pushing sort of girl' and Mildred to deem her 'pushing' and 'pretending' (205).

Alice's existing unpopularity acts as a barrier to her attracting any new male attention and forces her to make decisions which highlight her increasingly desperate attempts to gain a partner. Linda Wagner-Martin writes that appearing 'popular as a teenager and a debutante was a way of ensuring that the woman in question was the right sort of girl, a suitable candidate for marriage' ('Zelda Sayre, Belle' 21). Alice's unpopularity is starkly illustrated when at the dance she is repeatedly left without a partner. Even 'the partnerless young men

who lounged together in the doorways' do not ask her for a dance (68). When Alice is seen struggling to find a partner, other men who may ask her to dance are put off because they attribute low value to women who are not sought after.

Furthermore, her unpopularity forces her to break other social rules. The many etiquette books published in the early twentieth century repeat the rule that girls should not dance too many dances with the same partner. As Emily Holt's 1901 etiquette guide states, for a girl to dance 'too frequently with one young man . . . is both ill-mannered and indiscreet' (152). Yet while expected not to return to the same man several times, girls are still expected to have partners for every dance. Alice's unpopularity places her in a predicament because it forces her to break social rules which further diminish her perceived social value. When she is asked to dance by the widely spurned and unattractive Frank Dowling, she has no choice but to say yes. Then, she must break social convention by dancing several dances with him because she does not have another option. In between these dances, she devises elaborate ruses to mask her lack of popularity. She is practised in 'the art of seeming to have an escort or a partner where there is none' (66). Again, Alice's lack of 'background' hinders her attempts to flirt. She notes that the equally unpopular Ella Dowling is at least able to sit with her mother, which leaves a girl with 'at least the shred of a pretence that you came to sit with your mother as a spectator, and not to offer yourself to be danced with by men who looked you over and rejected you—not for the first time' (68). Unchaperoned, Alice is left exposed in her humiliation.

In many of his novels, Tarkington explores the line drawn by society which suddenly deems a girl too old to flirt. In *The Flirt*, Cora Madison is condemned because her childish and attention seeking flirtatious behaviour is interpreted as adult maliciousness. Though she is still a teenager, and described by a suitor as 'a child in a toy-shop' (122), discarding men like a child discards a toy she is bored with, she is constructed as a femme fatale figure by her

community, who refuse to consider that she might grow out of her selfish behaviour. Claire in *Claire Ambler* is well aware of the fact that she has limited time before her flirtatious charms will stop being successful. She dreads her twenty-fifth birthday, because 'to cross over, unwed and even unbetrothed, into twenty-five, was almost crossing over into definite spinsterhood' (205). Similarly, without warning, Alice finds herself without dance partners and without suitors to pay her visits:

> When she was sixteen 'all the nice boys in town,' as her mother said, crowded the Adams' small veranda and steps, or sat nearby, cross-legged on the lawn, on summer evenings; and at eighteen she had replaced the boys with 'the older men.' By this time most of 'the other girls,' her contemporaries, were away at school or college, and when they came home to stay, they 'came out'—that feeble revival of an ancient custom offering the maiden to the ceremonial inspection of the tribe. Alice neither went away nor 'came out,' and, in contrast with those who did, she may have seemed to lack freshness of lustre—jewels are richest when revealed all new in a white velvet box. And Alice may have been too eager to secure new retainers, too kind in her efforts to keep the old ones. She had been a belle too soon. (67)

Alice's premature debut in society is catastrophic for her chances of finding a husband. Entertaining at sixteen, she is inundated with male attention, yet her parents deem her 'too young' to think about marriage to any of the boys (218). Both Alice and her mother mistakenly believe in an infinite stream of potential suitors, and therefore make little effort to marry Alice off while she has options. As her mother explains, Alice 'never could *bear* to hurt their feelings, and always treated all of them just alike. About half a dozen of them were *bound* to marry her' (218). While her mother thinks the thought of Alice marrying so young is 'ridiculous' (218), because she is out in society so young, by the time she has reached an appropriate age to marry, the men have grown bored of her.

Alice's premature popularity reveals the dangers of a poorly managed entrance into adult society. As Montgomery explains, the period between a young girl coming out to society and her reintegration into the social circle through a marriage is fraught with potential dangers (41). Guided carefully by a mother or other chaperone, the debutante must be careful to flirt only an appropriate amount, to find the best possible partner, without risking the slightest taint to her reputation (41). Given the uniquely precarious state of a girl's reputation in this period between childhood and marriage, explains what Montgomery describes as 'the ritualistic restrictions upon her mobility and public activities' (55). Though Alice's mother wants the best for her daughter, she fails to provide Alice with the necessary guidance and protection. A more socially practiced mother would know not to allow her daughter to enter society without a proper coming out and would have encouraged Alice to secure her engagement to one of suitors who frequent their veranda in the early years of Alice's adulthood. Alice is left to navigate the rules of society on her own and makes innocent mistakes which nevertheless break social codes. With her early rush of suitors, she makes the fatal mistake of flirting without intent. She responds to 'all of them just alike', and, in refusing to reject any men, ends up with none to choose from (218).

Without adequate guidance from a socially skilled mother, Alice is left to navigate how to behave with men in a way which will not make her appear overly eager. She must also try to stay within the female social circle so as not to fall prey to cruel, female gossip which will label her a 'flirt' in order to deter the eligible men the other women want for themselves. Gossip is a powerful weapon in the marriage market when women are cast as rivals for male attention. As Pamela Knights writes, for a debutante, 'even a casual word might blemish a reputation' (227). In this intense social space where girls must find a husband without ending up either single, or with a reputation for promiscuity, men are objects to fight over and competing girls are regarded as threats. Scared that Alice might threaten

their chances of securing a husband, the other girls work together to snub and exclude her from their societal interactions. As Alice's mother tries to explain to her father: [a] crowd of girls like that, when they get a pretty girl like Alice among them, they act just like wild beasts. They'll tear her to pieces, or else they'll chase her and run her out, because they know if she had half a chance she'd outshine 'em (127). Alice's reputation spirals when she becomes the subject of unpleasant gossip started by the girls in the carriage which casts her as a cheap and common coquette. As her mother angrily exclaims to her husband, the other girls have 'done everything on earth they could to drive the young men away from her and belittle her to 'em' (127). In belittling Alice to potential male partners, the other girls ensure that she will not threaten their claim on the most desirable men.

While Alice's reputation suffers from gossip which casts her as a 'pushy' girl, too eager for male company, she can regrasp some power from these gossiping girls through the same means. When speaking to Arthur, she subtly plants doubts in his mind about the desirability of the socially elite Mildred: '[i]n Alice's hands, so dexterous in this work, her statuesque friend was becoming as ridiculous as a fine figure of wax left to the mercies of a satirist' (121). When Mildred, who also likes Arthur, feels his cooled affections toward her, she immediately realises that this must have been the work of another girl, exclaiming to her mother, 'Mama – it was Alice Adams' (205). In a culture where women are valued only for their marriageability, the label of a 'flirt' becomes a social weapon which can reduce female competition for desirable male partners. Both Alice and Mildred, in competition for the same man, try to imply that the other is a common 'flirt' in order to put Arthur off.

Though Alice makes some quantifiable social missteps, the invisible lines she crosses which move her from a popular girl to a woman that men are advised to stay away from are ultimately contingent on male interpretation. Judith Fetterley writes that in *The House of Mirth,* Lily's destruction at the hands of her society demonstrates a culture where 'social

waste is female' (200). This idea of 'waste' is equally true in *Alice Adams.* Mildred and Alice are both in competition for the same man, Arthur Russell. Only one of them can win him and thus one of them will be 'wasted', abandoned and retrospectively cast as the antagonist to the inevitable romance. Alice is able to be labelled a 'flirt' because Arthur chooses to believe it of her. Her fate is sealed, not because of her own social errors but because of Arthur's moral fragility which allows his entire opinion of Alice to be altered by some mean-spirited gossip he hears from Mildred's family: that Alice is 'the sort that "tries for the new man," if she has half a chance' (204). Alice knows that Arthur lacks the integrity to make up his own mind about her and warns him several times to ignore any talk he hears, telling him 'not to mix up the girl you might hear somebody talking about with the me I honestly try to make you see' (138). He responds with offence that her warning 'implies that I'm made of such soft material the slightest breeze will mess me all up' (138). Despite his assurance that he will not be influenced by public opinion, by rejecting Alice after learning of her poor reputation in the community and her father's business stealth, Arthur proves that he is indeed made of 'soft material'. Alice's fate is sealed by Arthur's rejection of her and she becomes another example of the female 'social waste' Fetterley identifies. When it is men who ultimately decide whether a girl will be praised and sought after or denounced as a shameless flirt, the marriage market 'rules' are less a fixed list which can be adhered to than a game of risk where girls gamble their reputation but with little power to interrupt the social judgements that are imposed on them.

What is the fate for a girl who fails to flirt just the right amount to ensure her popularity while not risking her reputation? *Alice Adams* offers a more optimistic ending than *The House of Mirth*. When Lily's reputation ensures that she is no longer considered marriageable, her life is left devoid of meaning. As Carol J Singley writes, by the end of the novel 'Lily has no alternative but to die' (*Matters of Mind and Spirit* 73). When Arthur abandons her, Alice

realises that she too has reached the point where her reputation is so sullied that she can no longer participate in the marriage market. Yet, unlike Lily, she does not equate the end of her marriageability with the end of her life. While Alice's story begins with her walk to Mildred's house, where she practices her flirtatious charms on any man she passes on the street, it closes with another walk through town. This time, though she passes many men in the street, she does not try her charms on them but walks purposefully on, stopping only when she reaches her destination: 'before her was that dark entrance to the wooden stairway leading up to Frincke's Business College—the very doorway she had always looked upon as the end of youth and the end of hope' (262). When Alice decides to enrol in business college, she symbolically closes the door on her marriageable years. Having failed to successfully utilise her time as a debutante, she is left with two choices: find another purpose or give up entirely. While Lily Bart, ill-equipped as she is to work, chooses the latter, Alice accepts a different fate for herself.

By turning away from her previous life, Alice resigns herself to a life of 'bad times' (68). Yet in the final moments of the novel, it seems that there may still be hope for Alice, even in a future where she is unmarried and thus considered socially inferior: 'she went bravely in, under the sign, and began to climb the wooden steps. Half-way up the shadows were heaviest, but after that the place began to seem brighter. There was an open window overhead somewhere, she found; and the steps at the top were gay with sunshine' (263).[45] James MacArthur, a critic for *Harper's Weekly,* wrote in 1905 that Tarkington and Wharton, two of

[45] Sue Bridwell Beckham writes that in American fiction 'the front porch becomes a liminal space – neither sanctified as the hearth nor public as the road' (88). This is true for steps in *Alice Adams.* It is on the steps of her house that she has most of her interactions with Arthur, in the safety away from public judgement but without having to reveal the truth about her family's social status. When she does bring him inside it is a disaster. Steps are used to represent the transitional space for Alice, where she has declared herself ready for marriage but has not yet secured a partner. In her early years as a debutante the steps to her house are 'crowded' with suitors (67). When it is clear that she will never have a future with Arthur she says goodbye to him in this same spot: 'they faced each other for the short moment which both of them knew would be the last of all their veranda moments' (233). Therefore, when Alice walks up the steps to the college, it marks her movement into adulthood. Having left the liminal space of the marriage market, Alice accepts a different future for herself and by walking up these stairs, allows her dream of finding a husband to come to an end.

the most popular and prolific authors of the time, tended to end their novels on opposing moods: 'Mr. Tarkington is, first of all, a romanticist and a genial humorist. Mrs. Wharton is primarily a realist and a master of satire. The effect in Mr. Tarkington is that of a cheerful optimism, in Mrs. Wharton it tends to be a salutary pessimism' (qdt. Tuttleton et al. 118). This analysis proves true in the comparison of the *House of Mirth* and *Alice Adams*. Alice, like Lily, fails to navigate the important social line between flirting enough to be noticed and flirting so much so as to gain a bad reputation. Yet while Lily sees no way to continue living once her chances of marriage have slipped past, the sunlight at the top of the college steps hints at a more optimistic ending for Alice. Her decision to enter business school is a rejection of the narrative that a young woman's only purpose in life is to attract a husband. Realising that she cannot follow the path that she had planned, the end of the novel presents a version of Alice willing and ready to develop herself as a person and not an object of male desirability.

CHAPTER FIVE

## ‘If girls do not pay and pay’: The questionable ‘freedom’ of the flirt in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *The Sun Also Rises.*

The nineteen-twenties was a transformative decade for women in America, a time where, as Judith Mackrell writes, ‘the modern world seemed to be reinventing itself with astonishing speed’ (2). A decade heavily romanticised in popular imagination as a time of excess, glamour, wealth and frivolity, nineteen-twenties gender politics are often symbolically remembered through the new woman figure of the flapper, who challenged the archaic rules of the previous epoch and seemed to promise a new age where women would be free from the lingering social shackles of the nineteenth century. Margaret O’Leary wrote in *The New York Times* in 1922 that the appearance of the flapper divided society into ‘those who delight in her, those who fear her and those who pathetically try and take her as a matter of course’ (49). As O’Leary points out, one might celebrate or resent the new modes of femininity the flapper represents, but it would be impossible to ignore her significance. Jonathan Silverman explains that the flapper as a symbol of nineteen-twenties womanhood ‘called into question traditional forms of feminine behavior’ (547). Among these behaviours he lists the flapper’s reputation for smoking, drinking, cutting their hair short and wearing short skirts (548). Yet he omits one behaviour popularised in this decade which is pertinent to this thesis: the freedom to flirt.

While the flapper has been mythologised as a very specific type of woman, many of the definitions written in the nineteen-twenties suggest that ‘flapper’ was a relatively broad term used to describe many iterations of modern young womanhood. A writer for the short lived journal *The Flapper*, Myrtle Heileman, wrote in 1922 that the term ‘flapper’ is simply

the label by which the modern woman is 'known to the multitude' rather than delineating a clear subset of young women (2). Historian Linda Simon agrees, claiming that while the term 'flapper' originated to describe a very specific set of feminine behaviours, the term ballooned in the nineteen-twenties: '[s]oon, a flapper was any girl or woman who defied convention — girls who balked at being chaperoned, suffragists, women aspiring to a career, and those, as the Boston Globe put it, "expert in the arts of allurement"' (Simon). It is such 'allurement experts' that this chapter will interrogate. For both women who might identify as 'flappers' and those who might not, there is a significant change identified by historians as well as contemporary news sources in this period of American gender history: for the first time, flirting is identified as an acceptable, even desirable part of modern womanhood. Where discussions of female flirtatiousness in works before the nineteen-twenties usually depict flirting as a discouraged, if not downright dangerous activity, literature from this decade explores new conceptions of modern girlhood which declare that women can be the pursuer, rather than only the pursued. In the wake of changing attitudes to flirtatious femininity this chapter will explore how the flirt figure is depicted in a culture where flirtation has apparently entered the mainstream.

One would expect that the flirt would find her home in this decade, finally free to engage in flirtatious behaviour without the fear of social ostracisation of the sort suffered by heroines like Daisy Miller and Lily Bart. To some extent this is accurate. Where Daisy Miller's teasing disregard for feminine codes was met with disdain or even horror fifty years earlier, by the nineteen-twenties, flirtatious female behaviour had been popularised. Ruth Prigozy writes that it was an era characterised 'by the plethora of self-described flappers, "It" girls and baby vamps claiming to modernize femininity' (39). As Prigozy suggests, nineteen-twenties American literature is peppered with heroines who identify themselves as flirts. As well as the three heroines I will discuss in further detail—Hemingway's Brett Ashley in *The*

*Sun Also Rises* (1926) and Anita Loos' Lorelei Lee and Dorothy Shaw in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925) and *But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes* (1927)— the decade was also home to other prominent flirtatious heroines such as Marian Forrester in Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* (1923), Daisy Buchanan in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Claire Ambler in Booth Tarkington's *Claire Ambler* (1928). As Anita Loos writes in her reflective piece 'History of the Preferred Blondes', it is this image of the flirty, frivolous girl who is mythologised as the figure who 'gave color and character to the Twenties' (30). From being a literary anomaly a few decades earlier, flirtatious heroines are plentiful in nineteen-twenties American fiction.

I must pause to clarify that I will refrain from referring to the three heroines as 'flappers', and instead continue to discuss how their identities are constructed as 'flirts', in line with the rest of this thesis. This is for two reasons. First, I wish to avoid obscuring the readings of these complicated female characters by giving them a label like 'flapper', which is so infused with preconceptions that might detract rather than add to my discussion. Furthermore, to label them 'flappers' is to entirely separate these female characters from those in the previous chapters, as if there is suddenly a line drawn where the new women of the twenties exists in isolation from the modern girl of eras gone by. This is inaccurate, not least because, as I outlined in the first chapter, the modern girl is always regarded as unlike any that has been before, no matter where she is in history. Though flapperism may have been unique to the era, the behaviours that are associated with it are not new or contained to the one decade. Several writers for *The Flapper* posited this idea. Both writing in 1922, Myrtle Heileman declares that 'the flapper isn't anything new' because 'there are flappers in every age' (2), while Marie June LaVerne agrees, writing that 'since Eve was vamped by the snake in the garden and the apple tossed by Adam flopped into her hands, flappers have continued to flap throughout the ages' (33). To try and name Brett, Lorelei or Dorothy as flappers or not flappers would not be especially helpful, given that regardless of whether the

characters, or their authors might have identified them as flappers, all three exhibit the flirtatious, transgressive behaviour marked out as a sign of modern womanhood in nineteen-twenties America.

The flirtatious heroines in nineteen-twenties literature experience more success than their literary predecessors. Lorelei, Brett and Dorothy all survive to the end of their narratives and do not experience significant social ostracisation for their behaviour. This is a departure from the novels I have discussed thus far where flirt figures always gain a clear social punishment for their behaviour. Yet, though there might be a teleological trend towards flirtatious femininity becoming more socially acceptable, it is not an overnight transformation. Though, as Eva Boesenberg suggests, the 'Roaring Twenties' are generally regarded as a time where gender roles were 'revolutionised' (225), all of the heroines I will examine still face disapproval for their transgressive behaviour. In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* Lorelei is paid off by her suitor's mother, who bribes her 'not to marry Willie Gwynn for $10,000' (92), and Dorothy is caught up in an elaborate plot where the family of her eventual husband gets her arrested for drugs possession (which they plant in her handbag), in order to dissuade their son from marrying her (237). Despite her popularity with men, Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises* also faces this judgement. For example, she is called 'a species of woman' (28) by an angry concierge and repeatedly named a 'bitch' for hurting the men she has romantically disappointed. Yet inarguably, despite the continuing social judgement of what is deemed female misbehaviour, Lorelei, Dorothy and Brett are able to flirt far more openly than could be imagined in works even a few decades earlier, and even have physical sexual relationships outside of marriage.

How substantial is this progress? Has flirtatious femininity truly become acceptable or is this freedom a mirage? In what ways has the flirt figure shifted in this new American landscape and in what ways does she suffer the same problems as her predecessors? Is the

nineteen-twenties flirtatious heroine remarkably different from the female characters I have discussed thus far, or does she share the same concerns and limitations, simply approaching them wearing flapper dresses and bobbed hair rather than corsets and hairpins? These are all questions that the *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* duology and *The Sun Also Rises* explore. While constraints on women may have loosened slightly, in Hemingway and Loos' works, the social regulation of flirtatious femininity is still ingrained in society. We see this in a metaphor that both novels share, the idea of 'payment' for female social transgressions. Both novels suggest that while their capricious heroines may be freer than their literary predecessors, they are not entirely free from paying for their flirtatious behaviour. In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* Lorelei writes that when calculating the potential of a social misstep, she must be vigilant because 'a gentleman never pays for those things but a girl always pays' (32). This is echoed in *The Sun Also Rises* when Jake observes that men and women continue to face different social experiences because men expect to be relatively free of consequences for their actions, '[n]ot like the woman pays and pays and pays' (128). It is this question of payment that this chapter will address. Does the flirt figure in nineteen-twenties fiction still pay for her flirtatious behaviour, or is she truly as liberated as her society appears to proclaim? Moreover, if she does still 'pay', how does this 'payment' differ and align with how flirt figures of the previous decades suffer for their behaviour?

**Anita Loos' *Blondes* Duology**

Anita Loos' duology, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes*, presents two examples of the flirt figure writ large in nineteen-twenties America. Apparently ditzy and empty-headed, Lorelei Lee and her best friend Dorothy Shaw navigate their way through society with exuberant self-centredness, dashing between places and suitors without apparent thought for anything other than money, clothes and jewellery. Despite the popularity

and praise it received when it was first published, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* has often been ignored by critics, and Loos sidelined in the revival of other popular American women writers (Wharton, Cather and Stein, for example). Eclipsed by the famous film adaptation starring Marilyn Monroe,[46] the novel has been largely forgotten. The primary critical voice thus far has been Susan Hegeman, whose 1995 article, 'Taking Blondes Seriously', continues to be the cornerstone for criticism of Loos' work. Focused on the significance of the market economy and shifting ideas of women's work and sex in nineteen-twenties America, Hegeman positions Lorelei as a heroine of an era where women 'were struggling to accommodate themselves to new definitions of femininity' (544).

Since Hegeman's article there has been a trickle of interest in Loos, though it has tended to be limited in two ways. Firstly, almost all criticism of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* fails to mention the sequel, and this misses the opportunity to analyse Dorothy, who is if anything a more complicated embodiment of gender politics than her blonde best friend. Secondly, criticism of Loos' writing has been curtailed by the superficial readings of Lorelei as a caricature of a morally barren gold-digger. While Lorelei is a character who is both manipulative and manipulated by men in her society, the criticism thus far has tended only to read her as the former. Lori Landay dedicates two sections to Lorelei Lee in her monograph on the female trickster, describing her as an 'economic vampire' (56) whose 'modus operandi' is 'manipulation, deception, and self-objectification' (55). Similarly, while Faye Hammill provides a compelling discussion of how the duology might be considered 'both products and critiques of American popular culture' (75), she reads Lorelei as a one-dimensional figure who is 'usually funny by accident rather than design' (63). Laurie Cella

[46] The 1953 film adaptation of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* deviates significantly from the novel, specifically in removing much of Lorelei and Dorothy's traumatic backstories and the rewriting of the ending so that instead of entering loveless marriages, the heroines are provided with traditional romantic partners and thus granted the 'happy ending' the novel denies them.

offers an excellent reading of confidence games in the novel, but she too ignores the trauma in both Lorelei and Dorothy's pasts and positions them as holding all of the power in the novel, with 'plans to "take advantage" of everyone they meet' (49). The problem with all of these readings is that by assuming that the heroines' flirtatious manipulation of men provides them ultimate power over them, they ignore the fact that they have little choice but to develop this manipulative behaviour in order to survive in a society still working against single women.

Though he does not delve much into Lorelei's traumatic past, nor give sufficient attention to Dorothy, Jonathan Silverman comes closest to identifying the disjunction between the vision of the flirtatious modern woman as a symbol of female emancipation and the limits of this alleged transformation in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. He writes that 'myth serves as a double-edged sword for Lorelei; she uses the rules of society to gain what she wants but is ultimately trapped by these rules, which push her into marriage' (558). Silverman's idea of the 'double edged sword' better captures the power Lorelei gains from flirting. As I will explain, she learns to use flirting as a way to win the upper-hand over men who want to take advantage of her, yet she is also forced to do so by a society that seems to only value women based on the promise of sexual favours. She is not, as Cella suggests, 'in command' of her own fate (49). As for Dorothy, she has all but been omitted from critical dialogue. Hammill refers to Dorothy as the 'brunette friend' (57) and Cella, Lorelei's 'co-conspirator' (49), discussing her only in relation to Lorelei and paying scant attention to Dorothy's story in *But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes*.

The problems in the readings of Loos' duology lie in the assumption that the hold Lorelei and Dorothy gain over men through flirtation means that they are in a position of unchallenged power in the novels. A cursory reading of Loos' works might suggest this. Whereas Alice Adams and Lily Bart are forced to compete in a marriage market where

eligible men are a scarcity and women left unmarried face potentially disastrous consequences, in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* it is men who have become disposable. As Lorelei writes in her diary, a man '[k]issing your hand might make you feel very very good but a diamond and safire bracelet lasts forever' (55).[47] The gold-digging flirt flips the social hierarchy where men hold women as commodities of value, objectify them as pretty bodies and do not treat them as equals. In flirting with men for material goods and then moving on, Lorelei and Dorothy use their charms to objectify men in the way in which women have been objectified in so many of the texts I have already discussed. Yet there are problems in simply applauding the novels as success stories for their flirtatious heroines. Firstly, neither Lorelei nor Dorothy initially choose to be 'flirts'. Both girls' flirtatious identities are chosen by men, adopted to avoid further trauma and sustained in order to navigate a society where single girls are still in a perilous position. The fact that their flirtatiousness is adopted because of abuse they have experienced at the hands of men complicates the notion of power they gain through their capricious behaviour. Secondly, despite proclaiming that men are disposable and that it is jewellery which 'lasts forever', both girls end up unhappily married to men who embody old-world patriarchal values. These are problems which jar with a comfortable reading of the works as celebrating capricious femininity and suggest that the girls' freedoms are not really all that they seem.

It is a discussion formed around a question that Lorelei's stuffy suitor (and eventual husband), Henry Spoffard, asks in anger after watching Dorothy flirt with a series of gentlemen: 'Henry said that when girls like Dorothy do not pay and pay, how are all the moral people going to get their satisfaction out of watching them suffer. And what would happen to Christianity?' (147). Henry's anger that girls like Dorothy are not made to 'suffer'

[47] The *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* series is written in the uneducated hand of Lorelei Lee and is thus riddled with spelling and grammatical errors.

like flirts of eras gone by reflects the social change where female flirtatiousness is no longer as closely monitored or as harshly punished. And yet his statement that women like that do not 'pay and pay' in this new era is more dubious. A close study of Lorelei and Dorothy's flirtatious behaviour reveals that the airy nothingness they live by is less the symbol of female liberation than a protective armour in a world where girls might be free to flirt but are far from free in many other ways.

***Gentlemen Prefer Blondes***

Though I will go on to include Dorothy, I will begin with the work's best known heroine, and narrator, Lorelei Lee. Ditzy, shallow and blonde, Lorelei's overt flirtatiousness mirrors both the changes and lack thereof in societal attitudes to unmarried women in nineteen-twenties America. In Lorelei's world, men are toys to be played with and thrown away when a new one comes along. Keeping count of her suitors is a difficult task. In the first chapter alone, Lorelei mentions six suitors by name: Gus Eisman, Lord Cooksleigh, Mr. Chaplin, Gerald Lamson, Willie Gwynn and Sam (a playwright friend not supplied with a surname). Jumbled together in a series of seemingly inconsequential moments, the male characters blur into a swirling indistinguishable mass. Each is given a convenient tag so they can be quickly categorised and kept track of by the capricious heroine. Sam tells 'riskay stories', Gus is Lorelei's primary source of finance and her 'educator', Willie is a 'sweet boy' who 'never gets anywhere', Lord Cooksleigh never stops talking (13). Against the vivacious Lorelei, her suitors lack distinctive characteristics and she seems to regard men as blank cheques for her lifestyle rather than whole and complicated humans. It is a reversal of much of what I have argued in this thesis, that flirtatious female characters are cast in reductive models of womanhood by male characters who struggle to understand them as complex and feeling individuals. Yet while Lorelei's flirting grants her power to label and discard men in the same

way as women have for so long been labelled and discarded, the question of whether the flirtatious heroines of the nineteen-twenties are truly better off than their literary predecessors is not a simple one.

For Lorelei, flirting is many things: power, entertainment, money and status. The one thing it is never is seduction. She is always disappointed when a suitor falls in love with her, preferring the chase to his commitment. Her travels around Europe are kickstarted by her desire to escape her imminent engagement to the lovesick Gerry, whom she adores right until he declares his wish to marry her. Suddenly he is bothersome and 'never seems to get tired of talking'. While he is occupied at a lecture, Lorelei sneaks away for a trip to Europe (16). Writing for *The New York Times* in 1922, journalist Margaret O'Leary wrote that the modern girl subverts the expectation that men will always be pursuers in a romance: '[i]t is she who must do the choosing, the ordering about, the selecting – in fact, it would appear that we have got back by a circuitous route, to the biological axiom that the male is only incidental' (49). Not only do Dorothy and Lorelei 'choose', 'order about' and 'select', as O'Leary suggests, they also discard. Men in their world are transient sources of fun and money, who are to be kept at arm's length and dropped when a new one comes along, which they always do.

As always, the politics of power permeate discussions of flirting. Do Lorelei and Dorothy have real power over men they flirt with or are they only gaining incremental powers while remaining trapped in a narrative still weighted against women? Cella argues that Lorelei celebrates a 'dramatic shift in the power dynamics of the viewed and the viewer' as she appropriates a desirable but brainless woman who men will fall for (60). According to Cella, Lorelei is completely in control of the situations she finds herself in and that her flirtation should be read as a 'confidence game' where 'she relies on flattery and careful manipulation' to puppeteer the men who desire her (49). Her flirting, in other words, might be read as the sign of Lorelei's absolute power over the men in the novel. Yet this reading

jars with the motives for Lorelei's flirtation. Unlike Daisy Miller or Octavia Burnett, who flirt for fun, Alice Adams who flirts to try and find a husband or Lily Bart, who flirts to try and retain ownership over her own life, Lorelei's motivation for flirting is dark. She flirts, primarily, for self-protection.

Lorelei's flirtatious identity is a persona she adopts to reinvent herself after undergoing trauma. When she did not know the ways of the world, when she believed that men were basically good and that innocence would protect her from harm, she is taken advantage of and abused: 'when I left Little Rock I thought that all of the gentlemen did not want to do anything but protect we girls and by the time I found out that they did not want to protect us so much, it was too late' (93). It is only when she finally develops bad behaviour of her own—spectacularly established when she turns a gun on the abusive Mr. Jennings—that she is able to protect herself. When she realises that society is 'full of gentlemen who were nothing but wolfs in sheeps clothes, that did nothing but take advantadge of all we girls' (92), she herself moves from being a sheep, who can be abused, to a wolf, who uses the facade of girlish innocence and helplessness to manipulate those who try to manipulate her. She writes 'I always seem to think that when a girl really enjoys being with a gentleman, it puts her to quite a disadvantage and no real good can come of it' (42). Stupidity, frivolity and foolishness are girls' self-protection. It is an idea which is echoed in other works of the decade, for example in *The Great Gatsby* when Daisy Buchanan tells Nick Carraway that she hopes her daughter 'be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool' (17). Flirting ensures that Lorelei might never be in a position of less power than the man she tries to charm.

Lorelei's psychological shift from innocent victim to establishing her own manipulative power is reflected in the changing of her name after her trial for shooting Mr. Jennings. The judge suggests that her 'name ought to be Lorelei which is the name of a girl

who became famous for sitting on a rock in Germany' (26). The reference that Lorelei comically simplifies is to the German folklore attributed to Clemens Brentano, of the siren who waits on Lorelei Rock on the Rhine River, luring sailors to their destruction in revenge against her unfaithful lover. Though Lorelei misses the nuances of the myth, the judges' choice of folklore is appropriate because for both women, their seemingly heartless treatment of men is rooted in their experiences of abuse at the hands of a man they trusted. We never learn what her original name was. It is easy to overlook that this new vixen-like identity is not one which Lorelei comes up with herself but is chosen for her by the male judge. The judge selects not only her new name, but the mythology which goes with it. She can never be free from men because her whole identity is selected by a man and the persona she adopts is based on a myth she has only heard second hand. When Lorelei is critiqued as a man-eating figure or celebrated as a feminist one, it is important to remember that the power she develops in manipulating men is created on the instruction of an older man when she was at her most vulnerable. Lorelei Lee is a fictionalised, male-created version of the girl she was before her name change. Even when her siren-like behaviour seems to afford her a certain power, this is complicated by the fact that her power exists only within a narrative constructed for her by a male authority figure.

It is no coincidence that Lorelei's identity change coincides with the birth of her desire to be an actress. In recovering from the abuse in her past she hides behind her new persona, leaving behind her authentic naivety for a life defined by pretence. In the place of her innocent readiness to trust men, she develops skills in flirtation, which, by offering no solid promise or commitment, allows her freedom to flee from men she no longer wants to see. She plays at romance without surrendering power and she charms men with displays of weakness when in fact her tears are pretend. She inhabits the role of a helpless ingenue only in pretence, and when she is threatened or otherwise unhappy, uses the wit and experience

she has gained to manipulate situations in her favour. In her acting career she chooses roles where she is helpless, innocent and in need of rescue. She cares little about the content of her film 'as long as it was full of plenty of cute scenes where the leading man would chase me around the trunk of a tree and I would peer out at him, like Lilian Gish' (128). In reality, Lorelei is never in need of rescue by a man; she always defends herself, whether it is against jewel thieves, social scandal or Mr. Jennings. But there is a strange mirroring of the way that Lorelei allows men to create and direct her identity. She becomes the savvy Lorelei Lee on the instruction of the judge, a man who uses an existing myth to shape her character, and then in her acting career she seeks out male directors who will cast her in character roles that reflect the girl she was before her assault, but certainly bears little resemblance to anymore.

Lorelei's ease with inhabiting different roles both mimics and is mimicked by her flirtatious relationships with men. Landay identifies that '[i]n her alternating pursuit of and withdrawal from the rich Henry Spoffard, Lorelei changes her feminine public self from a diamond covered flapper to a marriageable "old fashioned girl" – and back again – several times' (60). As Landay observes, Lorelei appropriates different social identities as she flirts, shaping herself into a character Henry will like when she desires him, and altering this role when she wants to deter him. This chameleon-like role play is not limited only to Henry but is reflected in all of her relationships with male characters, where with each new man she becomes a slightly different iteration of herself. For Mr. Eisman she plays the role of cultural enthusiast yearning for education, although in reality she is scathing of and bored by the cultural highlights of her trip. With the jewel thieves she presents herself as a ditzy and careless rich girl, waving her tiara in front of them as if oblivious to their gaze, when in fact it is a fake tiara she carries, explicitly brought to bait and confuse them. For men who find her expensive tastes endearing, she plays a heightened version of a big spender and in front of Henry she denounces this gold-digger stereotype and declares 'I really felt just like his

mother about all of the flappers because I am just an old fashioned girl' (79). While the men still see what they want to see, it is a shift from works like *The House of Mirth* where, as Carol Baker Sapora observes, the men in the novel do not see the 'real Lily Bart, but rather reflections of their own ideals of womanhood' (372). Lorelei is frozen in similar poses as Lily. She is objectified by her beauty, her sexual attractiveness and her ingenue status. Yet, unlike Lily, Lorelei is fully aware that the men she flirts with are seeing her through these fixed stereotypes and thus plays these roles deliberately. A successful performance can win her what she wants (be it wealth, protection or entertainment) while also protecting her from becoming truly vulnerable to a man who might hurt her.

Lorelei's desire to act professionally contributes to the strength of her acting in real life. As Landay writes, while Dorothy is sceptical of Lorelei's acting prowess, 'Lorelei has been acting with her gentlemen all along' (61). The link between flirting and acting is far from being unique to her but can be traced back through many texts depicting similarly transgressive female characters. Carrie Meeber in *Sister Carrie* (1900) and Sophy Viner in Edith Wharton's *The Reef* (1913), for example, are both shown to transfer their flirting skills to acting on stage. Meanwhile in Booth Tarkington's *Seventeen* (1917), it is the flirtatious Lola Pratt's 'dream' to be an actress, to which the besotted William Baxter anxiously responds by asking her how actors and actresses can fake being in love on stage: '[d]o you think they have to really feel it, or do they just pretend', he asks her, 'how can they pretend like that. Don't you think love is a sacred thing?' (64). William is deeply concerned with the idea that love is something that might be faked, and that the girl he loves wants to be like these actresses who can imitate affection. It is a concern which reflects the ties between flirting and acting, or, put more harshly, flirting and lying, which permeates many of these texts. Sophy Viner's affiliation with the theatre calls her trustworthiness into question. Carrie's decision to enter into the profession is aligned with her moral decline and her

increasing promiscuity. Likewise, when Lorelei proclaims to love acting, she implicitly admits to her use of acting in her real life. In flirting she fulfils William Baxter's fear that if actresses might so convincingly play at being in love then the sanctity of romance is threatened. While flirting, Lorelei, like all of these female characters before her, is able to 'try out' multiple different social identities without committing to just one. Yet whether this is empowering or not remains a question. On one hand, adopting her flirtatious alter ego along with her new name allows Lorelei to retain self-agency. Yet, on the other hand, the very fact that she must 'act' in order to not be taken advantage of is damning of her society.

Lorelei's flirtatiousness allows her to gain benefits from men (namely money and jewellery), without having to endure too much of their company. It also functions as a barrier between her public identity and her private one. In public she is the fabulously carefree and siren-like Lorelei Lee. Yet the picture we glimpse of her private life reveals the girl beneath the persona, a girl traumatised by her past and unhappy with her daily life. 'I seem to be quite depressed this morning' she writes in her diary on April 2nd, 'I always am when there is nothing to put my mind to' (13). On April 3rd she writes 'Lulu tried to teach me to play mah-jong, but I really could not keep my mind on it because I was so depressed' (14). '[S]ome way I still seem to be depressed', she comments on April 4th, 'I mean I really could not sleep all night' (15). On April 5th she remarks that 'I always think a lot of talk is depressing and worries your brain with things you never even think of when you are busy' (16). Even days of celebration prove disappointing, as she laments: 'my birthday has come and gone but it was really quite depressing' (7). In choosing to flirt with many men rather than settle with one, Lorelei refuses to repeat her mistake of trusting the abusive Mr. Jennings and offers to the world only the one-dimensional image of herself she is willing to share.

Unlike some of her literary predecessors, Lorelei largely flirts without social repercussions. She is not socially ostracised like Alice Adams or Octavia Bassett and she

certainly is in no danger of dying for her flirtatious transgressions like Lily Bart or Daisy Miller. Yet while she is able to use flirtation to manipulate what she wants out of men, it is problematic to read this simply as empowering, when in order to gain this power she must infantilise herself. Rather than fight against the sexist expectations of men, she plays into them, making herself appear more ditzy and vulnerable than she is. Knowing that men will be threatened if she reveals herself as too capable, she carefully alters everything from her behaviour to her dress in order to construct an image of girlish helplessness—what Faye Hammill calls her 'calculatedly childlike behaviour' (31)—even instructing Dorothy on how to dress the part. At first Dorothy's penchant for wearing red causes her to be spurned by male society because 'gentlemen knew at a glance she was not the kind of girl that needs any ade. For red may make gentlemen look, but nothing holds their interest like pink or blue' (182). By inhabiting the role of the helpless female, Lorelei can manipulate men desperate to perform traditional masculine roles of protector, educator and advisor. Her flirting both erodes and supports notions of traditional gender relations. She undermines them by playing into men's preconceptions in order to get what she wants but cannot help implicitly reinforcing these preconceptions as a result. Beneath her apparently carefree attitude, Lorelei is aware of the need to play men so that they will stay on her side. In spite of the increased female freedom in the wake of flapper culture, she knows that ultimately, if she manages these flirtatious relationships inartistically, it will be she who suffers for it. As she observes in her diary, 'a gentleman never pays for those things but a girl always pays' (32).

### *But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes*

In a letter to Loos in 1925, William Faulkner wrote his 'envious congratulations on Dorothy', concluding that 'I wish I had thought of Dorothy first' (32). Dismissing Lorelei as 'an elegant moron of a cornflower' it is Dorothy Shaw who prompted Faulkner to reach out with his

congratulations to Loos (32). Yet, while Faulkner considered her the novel's superior heroine, contemporary criticism has paid little to no attention to her other than as a comic sidekick to Lorelei. Unquestionably, Dorothy is a character worthy of study in her own right, and her story in *But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes* offers an even darker reflection on the motivations behind excessive female flirtatiousness in nineteen-twenties America.

Dorothy's story begins in her childhood, where she is brought up within a circus family after being abandoned by her parents. Like Lorelei, Dorothy learns to flirt out of necessity, both for protection from violence and exploitation, as well as for basic economic survival. Though best of friends, there is some snobbery in Lorelei's account of Dorothy's story. She regards Dorothy as less refined than herself, and often declares her friend's attempts to flirt vulgar, whereas she justifies her own. Yet she reveals the importance of flirting for an unprotected girl's survival when she explains 'I almost have to shudder when I think of poor Dorothy starting out all alone for a large city full of cuter girls than she was, with less than $1000 in her pocket and practically the wrong ideas about everything'(181). In a story where her friend is almost raped, attacked twice and left homeless and orphaned, the thing that fills Lorelei with horror is the idea that Dorothy entered New York without being the 'cutest' girl there and without 'a single gentleman acquaintance' (182). This is a world where flirting is the means to protection, finance and social progress; it is not optional but essential.

Susan Hegeman addresses the question of power in the novel, writing that, 'Lorelei's problematic relationship to agency is made explicit: is she a sexual predator, or is she an innocent party; does she coax men into recklessness, or is she the passive object of their dangerous passions?' (534). Though Hegeman speaks only of Lorelei here, her questions are equally applicable to Dorothy, who, like Lorelei, must learn how to flirt to protect herself from men trying to take advantage of her. Before she develops skills in manipulating men

through flirtation, she is repeatedly a victim of what Hegeman calls men's 'dangerous passions' (534). At the circus she is raised in, Dorothy is sexually appraised by older men who find her innocence sexually desirable. Her innocent friendship with her childhood friend, Curley, is spoiled when he is told by the Deputy Sheriff at the circus that 'he ought to be ashamed to be constantly seen with a young girl who was just beginning to unblossom, because it was putting Evil thoughts into everybody's mind' (158), an admission of his own sexual thoughts towards her, even though she is still a child. Her first kiss is coerced from her by the Sheriff, in a deeply uncomfortable scene, where Dorothy 'gritted her teeth' and passively accepts his kiss, feeling 'like a little boy who had just found out that Santy Clause was the Sunday School Superintendent' (162). Far from a sexual awakening, Dorothy's first sexual experience is one of disappointment. Like a child discovering that the magic of Christmas is make-believe, Dorothy is unnerved and saddened by the truth of adult life she has discovered.

While perhaps the social punishment for these transgressions is less brutal than the texts I have discussed in previous chapters, the fact remains that women are disproportionately blamed for any hint of sexual activity, even if they are entirely innocent. Though Dorothy does not suddenly die of Roman Fever like Daisy Miller, judgemental attitudes towards female sexuality are still strong. After her non-consensual kiss from the Deputy Sheriff, it is Dorothy who is punished for it. First, she is spurned by Curley who tells her that he believes her innocence is a sham, for 'how any girl could hold such an innacent conversation with him about "Life" in the morning, and then go for the Depity Sherif the way Dorothy went for him the very same night' (164). Later, at school she is blamed for corrupting the minds of innocent girls and told that she will be expelled if 'pure girls from Christian homes have their thoughts contaminated' (171). The assumption by both Curley and the teacher is that Dorothy must be responsible for her sexual knowledge and therefore

can be punished for it. The stain on Dorothy's reputation is only forgotten by her school when 'one of the girls took a false step with a visiting football team and Dorothy lost her novelty' (171). The social judgement for sexual misdemeanours shifts from girl to girl but never touches the men who instigate or even force these sexual encounters. There is no concern for Dorothy's own wellbeing, only that she does not contaminate others with her transgressive behaviour. This lack of concern for individual girls is articulated by Henry Spoffard, who 'really does not mind what a girl has been through, as long as she does not enjoy herself at the finish' (147). He does not care what Dorothy has suffered, so long as she is not made into a desirable figure that other girls will want to mimic. Even fifty years after the publication of *Daisy Miller* and *A Fair Barbarian*, it is still the case that authentic innocence is valued less than sham innocence. When Dorothy is truly innocent and childlike, she is told off and chastised. When she learns, like Lorelei, to fake girlish innocence she is rewarded. As her teacher tells her it is the 'appearance of Evil' which is 'to be avoided' (170).

Ironically, Dorothy is punished for being too interested in sex when actually she is repulsed by it, a repulsion exacerbated by the fact that her first sexual experiences are with men whom she has no attraction to. She is disgusted at finding her best friend Curley harbours romantic feelings towards her. The thought 'almost made Dorothy sick to her stomach' (167). She is almost raped by the Sheriff, escaping only on account of his timely collapse. Even when Dorothy meets Frederick Morgan, the first man she is actually attracted to, while she enjoys flirtatious banter with him, speculating that 'all of the things the Deputy Sherif had tried on her, that only made her squirm, would be a horse of a different color with that leading man in the role' (174), when their romance stops being hypothetical, she is left unhappy. In the most overtly sexual moment in the novel, Frederick asks her whether 'she would like to go home, or take off her things and stay a while. So Dorothy took off her

things' (177). This ends a chapter, leaving Frederick and Dorothy's interaction to the reader's imagination. The next day we find Dorothy depressed. Just as with every other disappointing sexual experience she has had, even with a man she proclaimed to like, she is left feeling low. The problem is, Lorelei writes, 'that learning about Life did not turn out to be so enjoyable to her after all' (178).

For both Lorelei and Dorothy, flirting provides them with a way of escaping something neither seem to want: sex. Markedly different to the film of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes,* where Lorelei and Dorothy are made into sex symbols, in the books they are childlike, almost asexual. This asexual but sexualised figure is one not uncommon in turn-of-the-century American fiction. In Laura Hapke's study of the prostitute figure in American literature, she details how authors writing about prostitutes at the start of the twentieth century tend to present these women as completely unaware of their sexuality. In separating their characters' psyches completely from the physicality of their profession, authors were able to escape censorship and win sympathy for their sexually fallen characters who seem oddly unconscious of their own sexual behaviour (3). Because Lorelei and Dorothy proclaim to be knowledgeable on what they call 'the subject of love', critics have tended to overlook the void between how the girls talk about sex and use hints of sex to gain what they want, and their attitudes to the actual, physical act. Critics like Patricia Raub have pointed to Dorothy and Lorelei as the exceptional examples of women being able to enjoy sex on their own terms, noting in her study of heroines in American women's fiction that Loos' 'more sexually liberated heroine was the exception rather than the rule in fiction written by popular women novelists in the Twenties' (119). In fact, if Dorothy and Lorelei are examples of the liberated side of the spectrum then it is a depressing picture, for while they are able to have sex outside of marriage, it is never something which they enjoy.

In Loos' works, it is those who seem to proclaim sexual freedom who are the least sexually interested, and those who promote chastity who are obsessed and driven by an inner sexual frenzy. This phenomenon is strongly apparent in two male characters, Lorelei's suitor and eventual husband, Henry Spoffard, and Dorothy's undesired mentor, the Sheriff. The former is a farcical embodiment of sexual obsession masked as a concerned interest in morality: what Daniel Tracy describes as 'sex-obsessed prudishness' (136). Henry works in censorship, a thinly veiled excuse to spend his time thinking about sex under the guise of protecting others from doing so. 'Mr. Spoffard spends all of his time looking at things that spoil peoples morals' Lorelei declares, and then adds that he 'really must have very very strong morals or else all the things that spoil other peoples morals would spoil his morals' (78). Despite his outward show of rejecting the flood of sexual images in the film industry, through every conversation about his work seeps Henry's fascination with the illicit material he is preventing others from seeing.

Flirting, and the attempts to regulate female flirtatiousness is never only about the act, it is also about power. Henry's zeal for all things pure is only matched by the Deputy Sheriff in *But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes,* who sickens Dorothy with his sleazy advances in the name of protecting her innocence, culminating in his attempted rape of her in her school dormitory: 'the Deputy Sheriff decided to tuck her in, and sit on the bedside and talk about the purity of Girlhood. But his actions started to belie his words' (173). His lecture on girlish purity only functions to give him an excuse to come near Dorothy's bed. Whereas Henry and the Sheriff position themselves as the moral guardians of Dorothy's and Lorelei's sexual purity, they are much more sexually driven than the girls they supposedly wish to cleanse. Loos' novels present a world where sex is controlled by men and flirting is the sphere of women. Flirting is less the vehicle by which women can control their own sexuality, than a way in which they can delay the actual act by whetting their suitors' sexual expectations

without fulfilling them. *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* presents sex and flirtation as a power struggle, where the male characters try to 'teach' Lorelei and Dorothy about sex while the girls use flirtatious hints towards sex to avoid actually being 'taught'.

Erin Holliday-Karre suggests that the move towards increased sexual freedom for women in this period is often overly simplified, where the nineteen-twenties woman is remembered as 'having some kind of vague sexual prowess' (323). Instead, Holliday-Karre suggests that we should examine not only when women engage in sexual acts, but when they deploy their sexual power in ways that don't end in sex, for it is through this seduction without sex that 'women are able to reverse the logic of productive masculine discourse' (332). She points to the flawed readings of Lorelei to support her argument, highlighting the problem of linking 'Lorelei's economic and social acquisitions with sexual liberation' (334). This reading, she argues, suggests that female power in sex can only be realised in the exchange of sexual favours. Lorelei is such a rich study because she wields her power in 'the play of seduction' (Holliday-Karre 335), where she uses her sexual allure to influence men around her without necessarily translating this into realised sexual acts. On the surface, given their relative sexual freedom, it might seem as though Lorelei and Dorothy are far removed from the heroines I have discussed in previous chapters. Yet, when we shift the focus from sexual power realised through 'sexual favours' to power realised through 'the play of seduction' then what becomes apparent is that the nineteen-twenties flirt is stripped of her power in a very similar way to her predecessors. The fact that Lorelei and Dorothy both have sex does not make them particularly transgressive heroines, because they are still in a position where the men they sleep with hold most of the power and thus reinforce the existing patriarchal hierarchy. Their subversion of social norms and structures stems instead from the times that they flirt without the goal of sex in mind.

The distinction between flirtation and sex creates a gender power struggle, where Lorelei and Dorothy fight to continue flirting without consummating their relationships and the men they flirt with try to move from flirting to sex. While much of the time the girls' ability to discard men they have no further interest in seems to empower them, it is also not so much their choice to always discard as it is necessary in order for them to retain their autonomy. While they are both keen to flirt for as long as possible without any commitment, the men they flirt with usually want the opposite, often proposing marriage days after they are acquainted. In order to keep their independence the women must move quickly between men and not risk staying too long with any one suitor lest he latch himself onto them too firmly.

In some ways Lorelei and Dorothy are modern heroines, afforded freedoms that could hardly be imagined for female flirts of an earlier era. Lorelei and Dorothy are able to flirt fairly brazenly, and even engage in premarital sex, without ruining their reputations or being socially ostracised. Significantly, despite being labelled as 'flirts', both Lorelei and Dorothy go on to marry. This differs from many of the previous texts, where heroines like Lily Bart and Alice Adams are prevented from participating in the marriage market after being deemed to have flirted too much. Yet, the question of whether the nineteen-twenties flirtatious heroine is better off than her literary predecessors is a complex one. While Lorelei and Dorothy might not be punished for their flirtatious behaviour by being denied the opportunity to marry, for Loos' heroines, marriage itself becomes a form of punishment. Lorelei in particular is clear about her fear of being obfuscated by a husband, which she thinks would 'sink her identity' (144). She proclaims that she will keep her name because she does not want 'the name of my husband to crush me' (145). Her fear of taking on a man's name lest it should 'crush' her identity mirrors her fear that developing a stable relationship with a man would be to give up the autonomy found in flirting and commit to a life of dreary nothingness where she will 'be nothing else but a wife and mother' (137). Though at times Lorelei seems

to hold a goal of securing a rich partner, her reluctance to be 'crushed' by a husband suggests that this notion of an advantageous marriage falls second to her primary goal: to continue flirting (and thus deferring the compromises of marriage) for as long as possible. The fact that neither Lorelei nor Dorothy are allowed to continue flirting indefinitely, but instead end up married to men who try to control and silence them, suggests that despite more social acceptance of their flirtatious behaviour, to some extent they are still seen to embody a type of dangerous and unstable femininity which must be resolved.

Indeed, Lorelei's and Dorothy's fears about marriage do come true. Their independence and their magnetic power over men is curtailed when they marry. Silverman argues that though Lorelei is a modernised version of 'the fairy-tale princess' she still has the same end goal, to find a husband: '[i]f indeed Lorelei represents the modern woman, Loos then believed that the 1920s had given women more freedom, but not complete freedom' (558). Even in the nineteen-twenties, the idea of flirting as a transitional stage, delaying but not eradicating conventional patriarchal relationships, is strongly apparent. In flirting Lorelei and Dorothy both gain temporary powers; but though this might go on for far longer than some of their predecessors, they still both eventually find themselves in conventional marriages. The last-second marriage in order to retrospectively contain disruptive flirtatious behaviour in a more stable paradigm would have been a recognisable trope for Loos' contemporary audience. Even of the texts this thesis discusses there are two other examples of this trope of the unexpected fiancé coming to save the heroine from gaining a bad reputation or causing further social chaos. Octavia in Burnett's *A Fair Barbarian* has a fiancé who is revealed only at the last moment to save Octavia's honour when it seems that her bad behaviour has finally gone too far. Similarly, Amy March in Alcott's *Little Women* is saved from her reputation as a heartless flirt by her sudden marriage to Laurie, her long-standing family friend and neighbour.

Like Amy, Octavia and many other flirt figures before them, Lorelei and Dorothy find their flirtatious freedom curtailed as they are pushed into respectable but unhappy marriages. Yet, like many similar endings for female characters, their marriages have been read optimistically by critics. Rhonda Pettit describes the end of the novel as a 'classic romantic ending: poor girl marries a rich man' (77). Landay skims over the uncomfortable ending of the novel by focusing not on Lorelei's marriage, but her entry into the film industry through her husband (61). Heike Paul, meanwhile, describes Lorelei as a 'Cinderella' type: a 'provincial girl, marrying into high society' (399). To read the heroines' marriages positively is to ignore the fact that both Lorelei and Dorothy lose their only real power through marriage. Where flirting affords them at least a certain level of autonomy and influence, the brief descriptions of both girls after their weddings shows a power balance which has shifted. The last glimpse we have of Dorothy she is silent and 'refined', with her husband 'ordering her about' (243). Lorelei is forced to give up her film career by Henry, who becomes increasingly controlling after their marriage and wants her to 'stay at home' (137). For both women, the freedom they gained through flirtatiousness proves to be only a brief respite before they are subdued into conventional, powerless roles as wives and mothers.

### *The Sun Also Rises*

*The Sun Also Rises* almost opened very differently. The first full draft of the novel reveals two additional opening chapters detailing Lady Brett Ashley's backstory and positioning her as the heroine of the novel. The early drafts begin: 'This is a novel about a lady. Her name is Lady Ashley and when the story begins she is living in Paris and it is Spring' ('Unpublished Opening' 5). After advice from Hemingway's close confidante, F. Scott Fitzgerald, these chapters were cut before publication. Brett Ashley has been the subject of reductive and miscalculated readings, where her flirtatious behaviour is acknowledged only in relation to

the responses of male characters rather than as revealing anything significant about her. Yet far from depicting Brett as a two-dimensional 'bitch' figure who merely functions as a catalyst for the male characters, this cut opening establishes her importance in her own right. Ian Crouch comments on the unpublished opening in an article for *The New Yorker*, claiming that: '[i]t is diverting to consider how the novel would have been different if Brett were indeed the main character and the heroine—if it really were a story about a lady, rather than about the various men who loved her, or couldn't'. Crouch assumes that because this chapter was cut, it proves that taking Brett seriously as anything other than a disappointing love interest is unnecessary. Yet to write off the discarded opening as irrelevant because it failed to make it to the final publication is problematic, not least because elements of Brett's backstory detailed in the drafts seep into the later chapters. Whether published or not, the longer backstory is not eradicated but is evidently still in Hemingway's mind in the final version of the novel. This creates what Lesley Blume ascribes to the 'iceberg theory' (14), where we are left to infer from the final manuscript the more expansive characterisation of Brett that appears in the earlier drafts. The absence of the definitive line '[t]his is a novel about a lady' in the final draft does not prove that the novel is not 'about' Brett, but rather leaves the novel's hero ambiguous. For too long critical focus has been given to the men who experience Brett's transient romantic attention. I will focus instead on what her flirtatious behaviour tells us about her.

If the heroines of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* have been deemed heartless by critics, it is nothing compared to the backlash against Brett. Examining Brett is to battle against a critical consensus which construes her as a destructive character because of her chaotic relationships with men. While some of the harshest judgements of Brett, like James Nagel's declaration that she is 'pathetically juvenile' (98) and John Aldrige's description of her as a 'compulsive bitch' (24), have been challenged, even two decades after Linda Patterson

Miller's assertion that 'Brett continues to be judged more than understood by critics' (296), new critical pieces are written to condemn Brett as a fundamentally 'bad' character. Mark Spilka reads her as a dangerous, 'freewheeling' and unwomanly figure who embodies the 'distortion of sexual roles which seems to characterize the period' (36). William Cain describes her as 'a woman who does what she wants. Her preoccupation with her own needs and interests absolves her, as she expects others to recognize, from having to do what she pledges she will do' (158). Rachel Willis remarks that we should read Brett's promiscuity and reminders of Jake's castration as a form of the 'violence in the way she treats Jake' (49). Peter Hays suggests we should read Brett as a 'colonial overlord', controlling and conquering the men in the novel with her sexuality (238). Madeline Ilana Gottlieb describes Brett as following a disastrous pattern of abandoning relationships 'when she meets someone newer and "prettier"' (75) and criticises her 'measly excuse for not wanting to fully commit herself to Jake' (76).

There have, of course, been some more sympathetic readings. Linda Wagner points out that Brett is a character 'Hemingway had never intended to be an affront; she was to have gained readers' sympathy and admiration' (242), while Lorie Watkins Fulton defends Brett 'as a character worthy of Jake's devotion' (75). Yet even among the critics who afford Brett full personhood, many remain critical of her moral standards. Though Crystal Gorham Doss rightly argues that too much critical focus has been placed 'on how male characters react' to women, rather than considering these women 'as worthy of consideration in and of themselves' (129), she still goes on to criticise Brett for her complete compulsiveness (138). Other critics defend Brett, but only by medicalising her behaviour. Charles J. Nolan does not condemn Brett for her series of 'disastrous relationships' (114) but he does use them to support his diagnosis that she suffers from borderline personality disorder (112). Similarly, Aaron Shaheen, who persuasively argues against the critical tendency 'to frame all of Brett's

psychological dimensions within the general terms of bitchiness' (159), explains Brett's capriciousness in the context of her having 'the clinical profile of a hysteric' (161).

The readings of Brett as a destructive character stem from a fundamental problem with how critics have tended to approach Brett's flirtatiousness. The critics who simply declare Brett a 'bitch' fail to pause on what might drive Brett's behaviour and focus instead on the male response to her capriciousness. To do this is to ignore Brett's complexities as well as to assume that the male responses to their disappointed desires are always reasonable ones. In exploring the roots of Brett's fickle flirtatiousness and examining whether the male responses to her are justified or an expression of archaic preconceptions about women, I seek to demonstrate how even an apparently liberated woman like Brett is constrained by how male characters interpret her behaviour. Like Lorelei and Dorothy in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, moving focus away from the wounded male ego to what social factors inspire female flirtatiousness suggests that the power these flirtatious women are afforded is more complex than first appears.[48]

'Flirtatious' is a term which has not often been used to characterise Brett's behaviour. Yet it is a helpful one to understand Brett's refusal to commit to one man, her reluctance to send her past lovers away and her changeable affections. The chaos Brett's behaviour causes is not only because she is physically promiscuous. Georgette causes no such upset although, as a prostitute, she is much more sexually active than Brett. Most of the anger directed at Brett both by characters and critics is that she offers and withdraws more than the promise of sex but the promise of love. It is her imitations of lasting love that prompt the men around her to behave so badly, for they fall for the hints of a hypothetical future that Brett is unwilling to

[48] According to Kenneth Schyler Lynn, Hemingway read *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* at the peak of its popularity, but unlike his contemporaries deemed it 'second rate' (317). It is ironic given the notable similarities between Lorelei and Brett. Both are feisty, strong women who have flipped traditional gender expectations, relentlessly pursuing men as they are also pursued by them. Both are survivors of abusive relationships and both mask their psychological trauma behind facades of frivolous enjoyment.

commit to. In *On Flirtation*, Adam Phillips defines flirting as a chaotic form of romantic behaviour because while 'descriptions of sexuality are tyrannized by various stories of committed purpose. . . flirtation puts in disarray our sense of an ending' (ii). It is not Brett's physical liaisons with the men in the novel which cause disorder, but the uncertainty and ambiguity of her relationships and the lack of what Phillips describes as a 'committed purpose' to her flirtatious interactions. Even with the men she is certain she will never commit to, she delays the conversations that will allow them to move on. Instead, by continuing to offer her fleeting attention or affection, they are kept in a state of unrequited devotion with no clear end. When Jake suggests that 'I suppose you like to add them up', Brett does not disagree, replying 'well. What if I do?' (19). She allows Robert Cohn to follow her around for months after deciding that she does not care for him; and though she refuses to commit to Jake, she also refuses to break with him entirely. When Jake tells her that '[w]e'd better keep away from each other' she tells him 'darling, I have to see you' (23). When he asks if she will even just commit to living with him, she replies 'I don't think so. I'd just tromper you with everybody' (48). Neither committing to being with Jake nor allowing him to avoid her, Brett's continued flirtation with him prevents closure and keeps their relationship in a suspended state of possibility without fulfilment, a pattern which is repeated in most of her male relationships.

Brett's apparent control over the men in the novel reflects social anxieties in nineteen-twenties America about the emergence of modern models of femininity which seemed to threaten traditional ideas of masculine power. Guy Reynolds describes nineteen-twenties American fiction as reflecting a deep sense of 'male discomfort' (52), while Eva Boesenberg argues that the popularisation 'of the flapper and independent women' rekindled 'the fear that masculine (White-Anglosaxon) hegemony might be imperiled' (225). Much of the concern about the modern woman was situated in her behaviour towards men, specifically what it

meant for patriarchal power when women had the freedom to choose and to pursue men rather than wait to be chosen. When Brett flirts with and then rejects men, she is afforded what Tom Onderdonk describes as 'a frighteningly personal power to wound' (76). Yet Brett does not have unchallenged power in the novel, nor is she free from being 'wounded' herself. It is not always Brett who is granted control through flirting. Brett's flirtatiousness both grants her power and robs her of it. Whether her flirtatiousness empowers her in the long term or not is a complex question, as there is a constant tension between the freedoms flirting and promiscuity grant her and the limits of these freedoms. In flirting she becomes both more autonomous and more depersonalised: when she uses her power to reject men, she also loses control over her own image.

This tension between empowerment and depersonalisation is apparent from Brett's first appearance:

> She stood holding the glass and I saw Robert Cohn looking at her. He looked a great deal as his compatriot must have looked when he saw the promised land. Cohn, of course, was much younger. But he had that look of eager, deserving expectation.
>
> Brett was damned good-looking. She wore a slipover jersey sweater and a tweed skirt, and her hair was brushed back like a boy's. She started all that. She was built with curves like the hull of a racing yacht, and you missed none of it with that wool jersey. (19)

On one hand Brett is clearly aware of her influence over men, and styles herself carefully. She wears a jersey that emphasises her curves, styles her hair and carries with her a confidence that she can gain the attention of any man she wants. Yet on the other hand she only has power over her own image up to a point. Under Robert's hungry gaze, Brett's power to control how she is seen already falters. While Brett's fashion choices and haircut indicate a level of control over how she presents herself, this autonomy weakens under Robert's

objectifying glance. He not only admires her, he feels as if he deserves her, that she has been given to him as indicated by the image of her as the 'promised land'. It is this sense of 'deserving expectation' which lies at the heart of the misconceptions of Brett's flirtatiousness. When she rejects men with whom she has previously flirted, or slept with, men are angry and bitter because they feel entitled to her attention. It is this sense that men 'deserve' Brett that drives their aggression and bitterness, not Brett's behaviour itself. Like Lorelei and Dorothy who are the victims of sexual violence at the hands of men who believe the girls have tempted them, Brett may flirt, or sleep with men without the intent of continuing a relationship, but she cannot escape the men's sense of ownership over her and their anger when these desires are not fulfilled in the way they feel entitled to.

Brett's flirtatiousness negotiates a space between the freedoms women have gained in the post-war years and the freedoms still far from being achieved. Her outward appearance declares liberation and she has some power traditionally associated with men – for example she drinks, smokes, enjoys sex on her own terms and moves around as she pleases. Yet inwardly she harbours a deep-rooted unhappiness which could not jar more starkly with the image she projects to the world. In moments alone with Jake we glimpse the Brett beneath her carefully constructed social persona: a woman who is harbouring personal loss and far from being free from society's preconceptions of women. Her flirting offers fleeting distraction from her inner unhappiness and is necessary for gaining protection, money and social position in a world where women are still economically and socially dependent on men. In the taxi on the way back from the bar with Jake – after an evening where she 'smiles', 'dances' and 'laughs' – almost as soon as the door has closed, she declares 'darling, I've been so miserable' (21).

Just as for the men in the novel who fought at the front, Brett's struggles can be traced back to her experiences of war, and it is this trauma which informs her flirtatious behaviour.

Working in a hospital for wounded soldiers Brett sees plenty of the horror of war, becoming a nurse after '[h]er own true love had just kicked off with the dysentery' (34). Her 'own true love' is never mentioned again, nor given a name, and yet is a key part of Brett's backstory, which hints at an explanation for her noncommittal approach to romantic relationships. The other characters' experiences of war all push them into cyclical searches for what they have lost in the conflict. Mike loses his sense of purpose and spends the novel trying to regain this. Jake loses part of his masculine identity when he is injured and constantly attempts to recover from his emasculation but becomes trapped in what Michael Von Cannon describes as a 'static and circular relationship' with Brett (67). There is a sense that each character lives in their own sphere of déjà vu, reliving their frustrations over and over again. As Jake says following another romantic disappointment: 'I had the feeling as in a nightmare of it all being something repeated, something I had been through and that now I must go through again' (56). It follows that Brett, whose primary loss in the war was that of her one 'true love', would fall into a spiral of trying to replicate this lost love, but with unsuitable partners. It is the death of Brett's lover that pushes her into the rebound relationship with Lord Ashley and much of her apparently callous flirtatious behaviour could be explained in her fear of committing to, and perhaps losing, another man about whom she cares. Brett's identity as a flirt is not created out of nowhere but develops as a self-protective front after suffering through trauma.

Many of Brett's critics have read her flirtatiousness as proof that she is fundamentally lacking the ability to love. For example, Jingnan Shen states that Brett does not 'know what love is', she can 'only relate to having sex' (1732). Shen's analysis uses Brett's refusal to commit to one man as evidence that she cannot love, instead of considering why she may have *chosen* to disassociate sex from love. As Brett's backstory in the drafts of the novel makes clear, her romantic capriciousness is not a sign that she cannot love, but a reaction to

having loved and lost. In his study of flirting as a social behaviour, Sage Anderson reads flirtation as a 'safe' form of romance, which allows the individual to 'skirt commitment to any would-be relationship, deferring vulnerability' (116). After Brett loses the man she wishes to marry, she uses flirtation to put off commitment which would risk a repeated heartbreak.

The unpublished opening chapter of the novel offers clarity on the trauma in Brett's life, detailing more about her two failed marriages, and revealing the existence of a child she bore with her second husband. It also provides more information on the lost lover: 'She should have known better, she said, but she had sent the one man she had wanted to marry off to Mesopotamia so he would last out the war, and he had died of some very unromantic form of dysentery' ('Unpublished Opening' 5). The draft makes clear the significance of this unnamed lover. He is the 'one man she had wanted to marry' (5). Though she contemplates marriage with many other men after, it is never with this same level of certainty. Ironically, in trying to protect the man she loves, Brett inadvertently sends him to his death. Crystal Gorham Doss reads Brett as compulsive and unable to 'control herself in any area' (138). Yet though her flirtatious behaviour seems uncontrolled, Brett's preference of flitting between multiple men after the loss of the one man she loves could suggest the opposite. Flirting allows her to keep herself emotionally distanced from men. This is a doubly protective action, both preventing her from experiencing romantic disillusionment and limiting her influence over men she interacts with. In refusing to commit to one man, Brett refuses the power which might allow her to send another man to his death.

Beneath Brett's apparently cavalier attitude to romance is a woman who fears the repetition of the hurt in her past. As Jake perceives, while her gaze seems steely and unyielding, 'really she was afraid of so many things'. She is too scared to properly love, declaring to Jake 'I don't want to go through that hell again' (23), and counters his suggestion

that to love is ‘an enjoyable feeling’, arguing that ‘I think it’s hell on earth’ (22). José Antonio Gurpegui Palacios agrees, writing that Brett ‘senses the reality of existence, its futility and insubstantiality’ and is therefore afraid to start a relationship with Jake because she knows ‘what awaits her’ (93). Yet Brett’s fear of the potential pain that comes with loss influences not only her relationship with Jake but colours every relationship she has. After the trauma of her lost ‘true love’, her subsequent relationships fall into two categories: those with men she does not love (her two husbands, Cohn, Mike), and those with men that she cannot love (Jake, because of his sexual incapacity, Romero, because of her fear of spoiling him). She selects men she knows she will not be with forever, either because she does not want to be, or because there is an obvious and impenetrable barrier to their love. In sabotaging her relationships before they begin, she pre-emptively defends herself from the heartbreak of a romance falling prey to life’s random and cruel movements. Flirting, by comparison, carries few of the risks of a committed relationship. Her dissociation of feelings from relationships is made clear, for example, in her declaration about Mike: ‘“I'm going to marry him,” Brett said. “Funny. I haven't thought about him for a week”’ (55). While her love for the man she wanted to marry before he died was all consuming, when it comes to Mike, the man she proclaims she will marry, the meagreness of her emotional investment is such that he scarcely makes an impression on her conscious thought.

Ironically, Jake’s injury, which makes him an impossible hero for a seduction narrative, makes him the ideal hero for a flirtation narrative and a perfect romantic interest for Brett. David Tomkins writes that Brett’s wish to ‘continually seek satisfaction without hope of achieving it’, means that she ‘values Jake’s war-torn body precisely for its failure to satisfy her sexually’ (756). Knowing that they will never be able to consummate their relationship, Brett can pursue Jake indefinitely without the fear that their relationship will ever cross from hypothetical to realised, providing her with a pseudo-romance without the demand that she

must become wholly vulnerable and thus open herself up to a repetition of her first heartbreak. When she does fail to keep this distance and falls in love with Romero, her fears of becoming vulnerable prove justified. She describes love as 'tearing her up inside' (159) and when she sends him away, for fear of 'ruining' him, she is distraught: 'I saw she was crying. I could feel her crying. Shaking and crying' (213). Loving renders Brett susceptible to emotional injury. She begs Jake 'don't let's ever talk about it" (213), and resolves to return to Mike, a man whom she is not in love with but who will therefore never hurt her as Romero or her dead lover did. Even with Romero, she is afraid of the implications of being trapped in a relationship: '[h]e really wanted to marry me. So I couldn't go away from him, he said. He wanted to make it sure I could never go away from him' (212). Her repeated refrain that if she had stayed with Romero that she 'could never go away from him' hints at Brett's biggest fears. She does not want to be vulnerable, to be trapped or to have too much power to inflict harm on someone else, so she avoids these issues by stopping their relationship from developing further.

While critics tend to focus on the harm that Brett's flirtatious insincerity causes to men, Brett, like Lorelei and Dorothy in Loos' duology, has endured far more trauma at the hands of men than she has inflicted. Her marriage to Lord Ashley was deeply unhappy, culminating in physical and emotional abuse when he returned traumatised from the front: 'he wouldn't sleep in a bed. Always made Brett sleep on the floor. Finally, when he got really bad, he used to tell her he'd kill her' (176). Brett's 'abuse' of the male characters is merely the disappointment of their romantic desires. And yet this is given more weight and significance in criticism than the abuse she has suffered through at the hands of a physically and emotionally abusive partner.[49] Both *The Sun Also Rises* and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*

[49] In a letter to Hemingway, Scribner editor Maxwell Perkins explains his concern that without the chapter on Brett's backstory which provided extensive justification for her capricious behaviour, readers do 'not seem to understand Brett' (Donaldson 708*)*. Yet even without the additional

depict a society where the suffering of male egos and romantic sensibilities are persistently valued more than a woman's suffering of physical, sexual and emotional violence.

Though Brett may not be condemned for her flirtatiousness, and even her physical sexuality in the same way as heroines in the work from previous decades, she is far from free of suffering for her behaviour. Jake remarks that there is a difference between how society treats men and women. As a man, he expects that his behaviour will have set and reasonable outcomes. If he does something bad, he expects the implications of this to be proportionate, 'an equal exchange of values . . . Not like the woman pays and pays and pays' (128). This idea that Brett is made to 'pay' more than her male counterparts echoes Lorelei Lee's claim that it is always the girl who 'pays' (Loos 32). Even when women are permitted to flirt, their behaviour is still harshly judged.

Though Brett may have liberties that girls like Lily Bart could only have dreamt of, she is far from free of 'paying' for her flirtatious femininity. This manifests in a number of ways, firstly in her own self-loathing. In being held responsible for the hurt she causes men, Brett firmly believes that she is a bad person. I have criticised some critics for naming Brett a 'bitch', and while I would retain that this is a reductive way to approach her character reading, they might quickly point out that Brett refers to herself as a bitch several times in the novel; six times to be precise. Each time she uses this term, it is directly referring to her tendency to lead men on, until she decides 'I won't be one of those bitches' and sends Romero away from her at the end of the novel (213). As Clancy Sigal writes, 'Brett is a 'free' woman who pays the price in guilt, shame, and self reproach' (62). Like Lorelei and Dorothy in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Brett has the marks of freedom (she smokes, drinks, uses her sexuality to gain power) without being free. Though her appearance and public behaviour

information given in the cut chapter, there is plenty of detail about Brett's trauma in the final version of the novel should we choose to pay attention to it.

might appear as if society has discarded old models of femininity, Brett is still deeply limited by the archaic gender politics which declare that female sexuality is 'bitchy', especially if a woman dares reject a man and cause him heartbreak. Brett is not free from self-hatred for her fickle attitudes to romance, nor is she free from misinterpretation and misrepresentation by others in her community. Brett's flirtatiousness is not judged objectively by other characters but used as a reason to place blame on her for other societal problems that have little to do with her. If she does not 'pay' for her flirtatiousness in being socially ostracised, then she is certainly made to 'pay' in other ways. Primarily, Brett's insincere affections allow the male characters in the novel to use her as a channel to vent their various disappointments with life. She becomes a scapegoat whereby rejecting men after flirting with them allows them to use her rejection as a reason to blame her for all their other troubles.

'"He calls her Circe," Mike said. "He claims she turns men into swine. Damn good. I wish I were one of these literary chaps"' (125). Robert Cohn's comparison of Brett to Circe (the enchantress in Homer's *Odyssey*) is met with approval from Mike and the others. Yet the metaphor is not as 'damn good' as Mike suggests, for the comparison of Brett to Circe shows only the male responses to Brett's behaviour, rather than anything about Brett herself. In *The Odyssey*, Circe is described as a 'great and cunning goddess'. She dazzles men with her siren-like charms and lures them in with her beauty. She feeds the unsuspecting men a meal spiked with poisons and 'she turned them into pigs by the stroke of her wand, and shut them up in her pig styes' (107). It is clear why the comparison of Brett to Circe is met with such approval by the male audience, because it simultaneously positions Brett's flirtatiousness as wicked and absolves the men who are charmed by her of any responsibility. Robert's metaphor assumes that Brett harms men deliberately, that her flirting is always premeditated and that the men who are caught in her 'web' are defenceless against her powers. Yet, while Circe acquires her victims carefully and deliberately, Brett's acquirement of new lovers often

seems passive. When Jake spots Robert Cohn staring at Brett from across the bar, he tells her that she has 'made a new one there', to which she tells him not to 'talk about it. Poor chap. I never knew it till just now' (19). When she does deliberately seek out a new man, she is plagued by guilt and self-loathing. Peter Hays argues that Brett should be read as a colonising figure or 'imperial force', working to control the men like 'territories' (239). To read Brett as such a tyrannical figure cannot be substantiated in the text. When she does deliberately seek out a new man, she does not celebrate at the chance for further conquest, instead she is plagued by guilt and self-loathing. On admitting to Jake that she wishes to pursue Romero she pleads: 'I don't say it's right. It is right though for me. God knows, I've never felt such a bitch' (160). She is not the deliberately manipulative or seductive figure Cohn suggests.

Just as Brett is not the heartless and cold siren that Circe is, the men who she makes 'swine' are not the same helpless victims as Odysseus' men. In rushing to name Brett a 'bitch', critics have too quickly fallen for Robert's reading of Brett as a Circe-like figure and have missed the nuance that Brett's love-sick admirers also have agency over their own fates. For example, James Nagel rests all the blame for the outbreak of male violence in the second half of the novel on Brett's shoulders, writing that 'Jake, Mike, Robert and Pedro have all been injured by Brett's desire for a young man half her age' and that '[a] great deal of violence, of all kinds, results from Brett's conquest of Pedro' (98). While it may be fair to place some of the emotional injuries the men have received on Brett's fickle affections, it is not this that Nagel refers to but the physical injuries that the men receive when their competition for Brett turns into physical altercations. In placing responsibility for the men's violence on Brett, rather than the male characters, Nagel plays into the 'Brett as Circe' dynamic, suggesting that the men's violence is inevitable in the case of unfulfilled flirtation rather than questioning whether the choices the men make are reasonable ones.

Though Mike, Jake and Robert all claim to be helplessly in love with Brett, there is an element of choice in their fates. They wallow in their sadness, their unrequited love and their broken hearts, but do not move to try and overcome them. There is a sense of self-sabotage in all of their lives which is absent from Circe's men. Robert Cohn in particular appears determined not to get over Brett for 'somehow he seemed to be enjoying it. The childish drunken heroics of it' (154). Though Brett makes clear that she does not want him, he continues to act 'ready to do battle for his lady love' (155), determined to play the part of the wounded but heroic lover despite his feelings being clearly unreciprocated. When Mike asks him why he does not 'know you're not wanted' (123), Brett says nothing to contradict him and yet Robert continues to follow her around. Later Brett is directly hostile to him, telling him '[f]or God's sake, go off somewhere. Can't you see Jake and I want to talk?' (157). Yet even this direct instruction is ignored and Brett exasperatedly remarks that he is 'probably waiting just outside the door now' (157). Robert does know that Brett does not love him, but he refuses to give up on her, just as Jake knows Brett will never commit to him and yet continues to follow her everywhere she goes. There is an immaturity and self-delusion to their behaviour which few critics have accounted for, though William Adair comes close in his reading of male characters who 'act like boys' (202) and Brett as a mothering figure 'whose children each want her exclusive attention' (204). If Brett's flirtatious behaviour makes the men in the novel into 'swine', it is only because to some extent they play into this role. She could not be clearer that her temporary affections towards them does not mean she wants to commit to them. She does not hide the fact that she likes the superficial attention of many men rather than the commitment of one and even signs her card to Jake with '[l]ove to all the chaps' (61).

Throughout this thesis I have argued that women are always held responsible for flirtation, even though flirting always includes at least two parties. In 'An Apology for Flirts'

published in *The New York Times* in 1875, the writer suggests that it is often the result of male ego that a woman gets branded as a flirt. When a proud man is confronted with rejection he must protect his self-confidence by finding fault with the woman rather than admit it in himself: 'he gets a decided 'no' and immediately rushes forth to join the noble army of howlers who have been calling 'flirt, flirt' at her ever since she was a 'rosebud of society'(4). An article in *The Washington Post* in 1904 warned that a spurned suitor 'will not hesitate to brand the girl as a flirt' ('A Thing or Two about the Wiles and the Ways of the Coquette' 3) and 'The Art of Flirtation' in *The New York Times* in 1911 remarks that spurned men will likely call out a girl as a flirt because 'the victims of their own vanity find it more consoling to call her a flirt than to acknowledge that they had been weighed in the balance and found wanting'(7). The male characters in *The Sun Also Rises* fall into this pattern of male disappointment being translated into female wrongdoing when it is easier to present Brett as a wicked sorceress than admit that it is the male characters who fall short.

The comparison of Brett to Circe mimics the similar mythologising of other flirt figures in early-twentieth-century American fiction. In Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby,* Daisy Buchanan is compared to a Siren.[50] In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* Lorelei Lee's namesake is a river goddess who lures men in by her charms only to cause their deaths (26). Cora Madison in Tarkington's *The Flirt* is compared to an Undine, the name of a sprite who cannot gain a soul until she is married (29). In *The Custom of the Country,* Edith Wharton goes so far as to name her capricious heroine Undine Spragg. This list is by no means exhaustive, indeed it is harder to find an example of a flirt figure at the turn of the century who is not at least once compared to a mythological seductress. In situating flirtatious women within mythical imagery, male characters who have been romantically disappointed may protect their egos by presenting the woman who has disappointed them as a monster whose one power is to reject.

[50] An idea discussed in detail in Glenn Settle's article 'The Siren's Voice' (1985).

It is a trope which offers a protective escape for men who can explain their romantic disappointment on a dark, unnatural power, rather than being forced to confront their own shortcomings. Where Nagel reads the male violence in the novel as the inevitable result of bad femininity, this is a reading which reveals more about the critical bias in approaching transgressive femininity than it does about Brett herself.

The blame Brett is assigned for the male response to her flirtatious behaviour undermines the idea that the flirt figure in nineteen-twenties fiction is free from misinterpretation or social judgement. Why is it that Jake directs his anger at Brett rather than the war that caused his injury? Why does Robert blame Brett for ruining men (like Circe), when the issues of fragile masculinity extend far beyond their small social circle? The answer lies in the illustration used in the fiesta, when Brett wants to join in the dance but is told that they do not want her to, for they want her as an '[i]mage to dance around' (124). This phrase provides a clue to why Brett is regarded by many characters as an expression of their problems rather than a human with problems of her own. While Brett wants to join in at the dance she is told that she cannot because they need an image to focus on. Similarly, the men in the novel seem to use Brett as a symbolic image of all they have lost in the post-war world, whether their faith, their certainty or their masculinity, and project their wider disappointments which they struggle to articulate, onto her flirtatiousness. Their romantic disappointment becomes a metaphor for all that has been lost, and Brett, as the one who has rejected them, takes the brunt of this disappointment.

As a flirt, Brett becomes a convenient image through which the male characters may come to terms with their personal problems, which are only incidentally connected to Brett. This is never more apparent than in Jake and Brett's relationship, where Jake turns all of his anger at the war and his devastating injury onto the woman he cannot be with. He equates his injury with his inability to be with Brett, and focuses his disappointment squarely on her, the

woman who is denied to him, rather than the war, the tragedy which caused her to be denied to him. His transference of his anger at the war into anger at Brett is born in his belief that 'I never would have had any trouble if I hadn't run into Brett when they shipped me to England' (27). Instead of being angry at the war that has caused his impotence, he directs his vitriol at the woman who makes him wish he were not impotent. His belief that he would not have minded his injury were it not for Brett seems far-fetched, yet again and again his frustration with his wound comes back to Brett, and not to the war. Filled with angst and disillusionment with the world, Jake uses Brett as a vessel through which to express his disappointments. As expressed in Mike's comparison of her to Circe, who is warned of in *The Odyssey* as a monster who 'will unman you and make you fit for nothing', Jake's anger is redirected from the war which physically 'unmanned' him, to Brett, the woman who reminds him that he has been 'unmanned' (Homer 108). His angry outbursts at her: '[t]o hell with women, anyway. To hell with you, Brett Ashley' (128) masks the fact that not once does Jake curse the war that caused his emasculating injury in the first place.

Brett's ongoing flirtation with Jake, although she cannot ever be intimate with him, is 'hell' for both of them. And yet it is Jake's torment that has been the focus of criticism while Brett's is forgotten in the rush to name her a femme fatale figure who, as Harold Bloom writes, uses 'one man after another as stepping stones' for her own selfish gain (3). The truth is that neither is responsible for their frustrated romance. We should not read Brett as Jake's tormentor any more than we should read Jake as deliberately tormenting Brett, though both readings have been posited by critics.[51] Both are victims of a war which has torn their futures away. Brett is heartbroken and changed forever by the premature death of her beloved and Jake is left emasculated and frustrated by the constant thoughts of what could have been and

[51] See for example how Bertram Sarason claims that Brett is deliberately 'castrating' Jake while other critics like Nina Schwartz claim the opposite, writing that Jake uses his impotency to gain power over Brett 'by effecting her castration in imitation of his own' (58).

his broken masculine identity. That the blame for Jake's heartbreak is shifted from the war onto Brett is indicative of the tendency for transgressive femininity to be held solely responsible for consequences that can be traced to a variety of causes. Even if Brett was to commit to Jake entirely the problem of Jake's injury would not be solved. Brett is not the destructive force in the novel, but she is a convenient scapegoat for the wider problems of the post-war world. For Jake, expressing anger at the world proves beyond him, thus he redirects his aggression to the woman in front of him who has misbehaved by refusing to commit to him.

While Brett may not die at the end of the narrative or suffer total ostracisation like the flirtatious heroines of earlier texts, she certainly faces criticism both by characters in the novel and critics outside it for her capricious behaviour. The problem of women being made to 'pay and pay' for their flirtatious behaviour is still true even in the supposed liberation of the nineteen-twenties. *The Sun Also Rises* presents a world where women still have little choice over how they are represented, and often risk being judged as manipulative seducers even if they have little choice but to flirt with men. This lack of autonomy over her own behaviour is explained by Bram Dijkstra, who writes that when 'Brett turns men into swine, she doesn't mean to; if she destroys men's lives, it is because she is no different from the bulls at the fiesta in Pamplona, blindly gouging all those who get in her way – she destroys men not because she wants to, but because she has to' (374). As Elizabeth Ammons defends Undine Spragg in *The Custom of the Country* as 'no more exploitative than the culture which produced her' (338), or Charles Harris defends Carrie Meeber in *Sister Carrie* as being a product of 'the standards of the society she finds herself in' (65), Dijkstra defends Brett by arguing that her 'bad' behaviour is the result of factors beyond her control. Like the bulls, she is trapped in a paradigm where she has little choice but to behave as she does (374). For a

woman traumatised by the loss of her true love and her marriage to an abusive man, but without means to support herself, Brett has little choice but to flirt.

Throughout this chapter I have addressed the question of whether the flirtatious heroine of nineteen-twenties American literature should be read as empowered or not. A close reading of Lorelei Lee, Dorothy Shaw and Lady Brett Ashley suggests not. All three heroines are caught in a liminal position where they do not fully submit to male authority but cannot entirely escape from it. Their flirtatious behaviour to some extent subverts the traditional power hierarchy. Referring to literature prior to 1900, Richard Kaye suggests it is only men who are permitted to select and pursue in courtship while women must wait passively to be selected (47). This no longer seems to be true in these texts, as all three women are granted the power to choose men instead of simply waiting to be chosen. Yet there are limits to the power afforded through flirtatiousness. While the heroines might be able to reject men, they cannot escape from being misrepresented by them, nor can they avoid taking the weight of blame for male disappointment.

Fundamentally, there is a distinction between individual men and men as a group. The nineteen-twenties flirtatious heroine is able to frustrate, tease and reject individual men without necessarily gaining immediate social judgement. Yet what they cannot do is be without a man altogether. Lorelei, Dorothy and Brett are caught between freedom and limitation, where they might gain transient power by choosing to flirt with or reject men, but ultimately they do not have the necessary social opportunities to be properly autonomous. For protection from predatory men and often simply for economic support, the single woman has little choice but to flirt if she is to navigate society. The novels thus grapple with a social contradiction: just as women gain the ability to flirt without horrific social or moral repercussions, they seem to lose just as valuable a freedom, the freedom *not* to flirt. Lorelei, Dorothy and Brett are all self-confessed flirts. They are often deliberately manipulative and

are clearly aware of their power to charm men. This has led them both to be celebrated as examples of the new totally autonomous women or denounced as ‘bitches’. Neither reading is accurate. In the end, it seems that the flirt of the nineteen-twenties is less a transformation of old problems facing female characters, than a reconstruction of them in a different pattern. Lorelei, Dorothy and Brett escape from the need to submit to the authority of any one man, but they cannot escape the authority of men in society at large. No matter how many men they reject, they must always find another man to flirt with.

## Conclusion

The treatment of flirtatious heroines across late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century American fiction reveals deep-rooted cultural anxieties about transgressive femininity. Though what might constitute unacceptably flirtatious behaviour shifts over the decades, the flirt is a figure of as much consternation in works in the nineteen-twenties as in *Daisy Miller*, published half a century before. Girlish and yet threatening, seemingly innocent but sexually aware, charming but not seductive, the flirt is a contradictory figure. She resists straightforward classification which would like to categorise women as either 'good' or 'bad'.

In this thesis I have sought to correct the critical oversight which has tended to homogenise the American flirt figure with other better known female character types such as the fallen woman, innocent ingenue, manipulative coquette or gold-digger. Not only is the flirt a figure distinct from these other types, she also has a distinct literary lineage. This is important for two reasons. First, the flirt illustrates a specific kind of resistance to the strict social rules that governed women's behaviour in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century America. By deferring decisions concerning marriage and having children, flirtatious heroines are able to extend the brief period of autonomy afforded to women in the space between childhood and wifehood and disrupt expectations for how female-led narratives will play out. Second, the flirt shows the limits of this autonomy in a society which is still inherently patriarchal. Again and again flirtatious heroines are made to 'pay' for their transgressive behaviour. Whether this is with pleas for forgiveness (Brett Ashley and Alice Adams), a hasty, unsatisfying marriage (Lorelei Lee and Dorothy Shaw) or even with their

lives (Daisy Miller and Lily Bart), women who use flirting as a means to subvert the patriarchal order can only do so for so long. The hypocrisies and double standards which demand that women must flirt enough to gain advantageous marriages but not so much as to call their purity into question reveal the perilous social position of women who are at the mercy of public opinion. Where this opinion turns negative and a woman is deemed a socially menacing 'flirt', she can be ruined. As Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* so accurately declares: 'the truth about any girl is that once she's talked about she's done for; and the more she explains her case the worse it looks' (197).

At the heart of the persecution of the flirt is the fear that women who use noncommittal hints towards romance to manipulate men, or to defer or avoid traditional womanly paths of marriage and motherhood, pose a threat to the stability of society. This anxiety often stems from a fear of ambiguity surrounding female behaviour and the lack of language and measures to clearly delineate the 'good woman', who, through motherhood, will be used to pass the values onto the next generation of Americans, from the 'bad woman', who should be expelled from society altogether. Marty Gould writes that nineteenth-century periodicals struggle to encapsulate the flirt because despite 'an elaborate scheme of classification and description', she still failed to neatly align with 'the categorical systems that structured the Victorian world' (275). The expectation that women will fit into easily decipherable models of good or bad femininity is a commonly identified trope in mid-to-late-nineteenth-century American literature. Yet, as I have demonstrated, it is an expectation which lingers well into twentieth-century depictions of women in American fiction. The most recent heroines this thesis discusses, Lady Brett Ashley, Lorelei Lee and Dorothy Shaw, are still commonly misread both by characters within the novel and by literary critics who mistakenly assume these flirtatious women must be either victims or victimisers, when in fact, they are both.

In this thesis I have sought not to stress a heavy-handed teleological progression where the flirt figure becomes socially accepted over time, but instead have attempted to highlight the issues the flirt exposes. By focusing on children's literature from the late nineteenth century, I demonstrated how didactic messages against flirtatious behaviour aimed to move discussions about morality and female behaviour from a fictional realm into the real world. My reading of *Daisy Miller* and *A Fair Barbarian* explained how the flirtatious heroine questions American innocence mythology by challenging the idea that to be 'innocent', a woman must be entirely ignorant of the world. Bringing Wharton's *The House of Mirth* into discussion with Tarkington's largely forgotten novel *Alice Adams* revealed the implicit double-standards and hypocrisies which informed the marriage market in early-twentieth-century America, where women were encouraged to flirt in order to secure their social status and then punished for doing so. Finally, through a close reading of the *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* duology and *The Sun Also Rises*, I challenged the narrative which suggests that the nineteen-twenties should be read as a decade of liberation for American women, when flirtatious heroines are still made to pay so heavily for their behaviour. In drawing links between these diverse texts, it becomes clear not only that the flirt figure is a specifically rebellious and often problematic character type, but that she can be used as a lens through which to examine gendered social codes and ideas about female behaviour in turn-of-the-century America. Through my close readings, I have sought to reclaim the female voices which have been overpowered by male-led narratives which deem women heartless flirts for rejecting men without considering whether their behaviour or the harm it supposedly causes is deliberate or not.

Though I have chosen to pinpoint a moment in American history where flirting was seen as particularly taboo and thus the flirt was depicted as an exaggeratedly threatening figure, it is evident that some of the anxieties surrounding the flirt have echoed through the

years and into the twenty-first century. The #MeToo movement has reawakened many awkward questions about how flirtatiousness is regarded: both how flirting might be used as an excuse for more sinister behaviour and how women who flirt with men who go on to harass and abuse them are often blamed for having started it. When presenting papers on the flirt figures this thesis addresses, a question I have repeatedly been asked is how recognisable are the tropes this fiction discusses in modern society. Is the misjudgement of female flirtatiousness, the attempts of certain groups to control female behaviour, and the double standards which allow the same behaviour from men to go unchallenged while women are made to pay for it just as true in the twenty-first century? My answer is always the same and necessarily depressing.

Though nineteenth-century fiction might seem a world away from today's social issues, my research suggests not. A crime survey carried out in 2014 showed that forty-four percent of respondents felt that a woman could be at least 'partially' blamed if she was to be raped or assaulted if she was flirting with the attacker beforehand. One in eleven respondents went as far as to say that a woman in that instance would be 'completely' or 'mostly' responsible for her own sexual assault ('Violent Crime and Sexual Offences'). How different is this from Gus Trenor's threat to rape Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* when he tells her that 'there's such a thing as fair play' and that having made him believe that her flirtatious affection towards him was serious, she has 'got to pay up' (129). In reports of why women do not report sexual assault, the most commonly cited reasons given combine a sense of guilt and shame (Binder 437). How different is this from Dorothy Shaw in *But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes,* who is kissed against her will by a much older man, then is punished and rejected by people around her who claim that such a thing would never have happened unless she had wanted it and that 'she should try to do better in the future' (170)? Even now, women who

are deemed to be 'flirts' are often criticised for their behaviour, blamed for male responses to it and made to 'pay' for it.

How these texts might be studied in the wake of the MeToo era is an interesting question, and certainly one worthy of further study. Several academics have commented on the difficulties of teaching texts with flirtatious heroines because they are almost instantly deemed unlikeable by students. Anne Boyd Rioux comments that students in her classes on *Little Women* tend to take an instant dislike to Meg March when she acts flirtatiously (144). Similarly, Warren Rosenberg's compelling essay on teaching *Daisy Miller* in an all-male college, points out the prejudices that male students had to let go of about Daisy before they were able to properly engage with the complexities of the text:

> In every initial class discussion, one student, with the supposed protection of the all-male classroom and with a sidelong, challenging look at me, will call Daisy a "bitch". There is some embarrassment at this, some looks at me, and then a tirade of stories about women who lead one on, who play games. Hostility toward Daisy as the symbol of every woman who ever rejected my students fills the room. (152)

Year after year, Rosenberg found the hostilities towards Daisy within the novel were replicated in the twenty-first-century classroom. Only once he had instructed his students to read past their personal prejudices and examine the social factors which determine Daisy's behaviour as 'bad' could the students engage fully with the text.

Though my research has pinpointed a certain period of American literary history, the flirtatious heroine reappears in important American novels throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century, and continues, in her various iterations, to be a subversive and controversial figure. Scarlett O'Hara in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) derives power from her flirtatious prowess but is also punished for it. Willing to 'gladly play the flirt and be more empty-headed' in order to gain what she wants from men (112), like

heroines before her, Scarlett's flirtatiousness both frees her from cultural bonds and reinforces a feminised notion of power which can only come from faux-seduction. In John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (1937), Curley's wife (who is never given her own name) is imagined as an Eve figure whose flirtatiousness destroys the dreams of the male characters, resulting in both her own death and the death of Lennie, who inadvertently kills her when trying to stroke her hair. As for many of the texts I have discussed in this thesis, Steinbeck's novel illustrates how female flirtatiousness is blamed for far-reaching consequences. Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) is a particularly controversial example of how male violence is blamed on female flirtatiousness, where Humbert Humbert is able to justify his horrifying actions to himself with the excuse that it is twelve-year-old Lolita who begins flirting with him and not the other way around. The ambiguity of flirtation and the possibility of female behaviour being misinterpreted as flirtatious takes a dark turn in Humbert's narrative, which positions Lolita as a femme-fatale figure instead of an abused innocent. Lux Lisbon in the first half of Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides* (1993) drives the neighbourhood boys wild with her hints of sexual desire. Even though she later engages in sexual activity, even before this she is described by one of the boys as 'the most naked person with clothes on he had ever seen' (79). Enticing but inaccessible, she is the epitome of female mystery, fuelling the narrative of herself and her sisters as ideals of masculine fantasy, offering glimpses into their lives without allowing access and gaining self-autonomy only through death. As just a few examples of the many reoccurrences of flirtatious heroines in American fiction in the past century, it is clear that flirtatiousness remains a controversial and problematic behaviour long after the texts I have focused on in this thesis. Though the boundaries of acceptable female conduct might shift over time, flirtatiousness is still regarded as an especially transgressive, chaotic and interpretatively unstable behaviour which poses a challenge to accepted power structures. The flirt remains both a uniquely disruptive and

vulnerable figure: disruptive because she is naturally a subversive character who undermines notions of order and certainty, vulnerable because she faces concern, anger and punishment for doing so.

## Works Cited


‘A Thing or Two of the Wiles and the Ways of the Coquette.’ *The Washington Post,* 2 Oct. 1904, p.3. *Proquest.* https://search.proquest.com/docview/144515302?accountid=10673.

Achilles, Jochen and Ina Bergmann. ‘“Betwixt and Between”: Boundary Crossings in American, Canadian, and British Short Fiction’. *Liminality and the Short Story: Boundary Crossings in American, Canadian, and British Writing*, edited by Jochen Achilles and Ina Bergmann, Taylor & Francis, 2014, pp. 3-35.

Adair, William. ‘“The Sun Also Rises”*:* Mother Brett.’ *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2010, pp. 189-208.

Alcott, Louisa. *An Old Fashioned Girl.* Salfield, c 1928.

---. *Little Men & Jo’s Boys.* Wordsworth Classics, 2009.

---. *Little Women.* Puffin, 2008.

---. ‘Poppies and Wheat’. *Garland for Girls.* Louisa May Alcott. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1897.

Alden, Isabella MacDonald. *The Chautauqua Girls at Home.* D. Lothrop, 1877.

Aldridge, John W. *After the Lost Generation: A Critical Study of the Writers of Two Wars.* McGraw Hill, 1951.

Ammons, Elizabeth. ‘The Business of Marriage in Edith Wharton’s “The Custom of the Country.”’ *Criticism*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1974, pp. 326–338.

‘An Apology for Flirts’. *The New York Times,* 17 Jan. 1875, pp. 4-5. *ProQuest* proquest.com/docview/93491094/citation/D0FFEC0D0B8443D6PQ/1.

Anderson, Sage. ‘Wartime Love Affairs and Deathly Flirtation’. *Flirtations: Rhetoric and aesthetics this side of seduction*, edited by Hoffman-Schwartz et al., Fordham University Press, 2015, pp. 106-115.

Ang, Susan. *The Widening World of Children's Literature.* New York: St Martin's Press, 2000.

Auchincloss, Louis. *Edith Wharton: A Woman in Her Time.* Viking, 1971.

Auerbach, Nina. 'The Rise of the Fallen Woman.' *Nineteenth-Century Fiction,* vol. 35, no. 1, 1980, pp. 29-52.

Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*. Penguin, 2005.

---. *Pride and Prejudice.* Random House, 2014.

Avery, Gillian. *Behold the Child.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

---. 'Home and Family'. *Stories and Society: Children's Literature in its Social Context.* MacMillan, 1991, pp. 37-49.

Ball, Molly. 'The Liminal Time of Friendship: Narrative Delay in Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette'*. *Liminality, Hybridity, and American Women's Literature: Thresholds in Women's Writing*, edited by Kristin J. Jacobson et al., Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 57-76.

Barnett, Louise K. 'Jamesian Feminism: Women in *Daisy Miller*.' *Studies in Short Fiction*, vol. 16, 1979, pp. 281–87.

Bartlett, Alison., et al. *Flirting in the Era of #MeToo: Negotiating Intimacy*. Springer International, 2019.

Beckham, Sue Bridwell. 'The American Front Porch: Women's Liminal Space'. *Housing and Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern Domestic Architecture*, edited by Barbara Miller Lane, Routledge, 2006, pp. 86-94.

Bedell, Madelon. 'Introduction to Little Women'. *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, Modern Library College Edition, Modern Library, 1983, pp. ix-iv.

Beer, Janet, and Elizabeth Nolan. Introduction. *The House of Mirth*, by Edith Wharton, edited by Beer and Nolan, Broadview Press, 2005, pp. 9-27.

Beer, Jeremy. Introduction. *America Moved: Booth Tarkington's Memoirs of Time and Place, 1869-1928*. Wipf and Stock, 2015.

Benstock, Shari. 'The word which made all clear: The silent close of "The House of Mirth"'. *The House of Mirth: A Casebook,* edited by Carol J. Singley. Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 131-162.

Bentley, Nancy. 'Edith Wharton and the Science of Manners.' *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*, edited by Millicent Bell, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 47–67.

Bender, Bert. *The Descent of Love: Darwin and the Theory of Sexual Selection in American Fiction, 1871-1926.* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.

Binder, R. L. 'Why Women Don't Report Sexual Assault.' *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, vol. 42, no. 11, Nov. 1981, pp. 437–38. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/7298584.

Blackford, Holly. 'Chasing Amy: Mephistopheles, the Laurence Boy, and Louisa May Alcott's Punishment of Female Ambition.' *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2011, pp. 1–40.

Bloom, Harold. Introduction. *Brett Ashley*, edited by Harold Bloom. Chelsea House Publishers, 1991, pp. 1-3.

Blume, Leslie. *Everybody Behaves Badly: The True Story behind Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises.* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016.

Boesenberg, Eva. *Money and Gender in the American Novel, 1850-2000.* University of Heidelberg Press, 2010.

Braddon, Mary. E. *Lady Audley's Secret*. Oxford University Press, 1987.

Braunschneider, Theresa. *Our Coquettes: Capacious Desire in the Eighteenth Century.* University of Virginia Press, 2009.

Brazil, Angela. *The Madcap of the School.* Blackie, 1972.

Burnett, Frances Hodgson. *A Fair Barbarian.* 1st World Publishing, 2006.

Burton, Rolph. 'Gentlemen May Marry Brunettes, but Blondes Make Lighter Reading.' *New York Times*, May 20, 1928, p. 56.

Cain, William E. 'Going Nowhere: Desire and Love in *The Sun Also Rises*.' *South Carolina Review*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2016, pp. 154–167.

Cather, Willa. *O Pioneers!* Houghton Mifflin, 1913.

---. *Sapphira and the Slave Girl.* University of Nebraska Press, 2009.

Cella, Laurie J. C. 'Narrative "Confidence Games": Framing the Blonde Spectacle in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" (1925) and "Nights at the Circus" (1984)'. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2004, pp. 47–62.

Chambers, Dianne. *Feminist Readings of Edith Wharton: From Silence to Speech*. Springer, 2009.

Champney, Elizabeth W. *Three Vassar Girls Abroad*. Estes and Lauriat, 1883. *Haithitrust*. https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/005777334.

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. H. S. Stone, 1899.

Ciment, James. *Encyclopaedia of the Jazz Age: From the End of World War I to the Great Crash.* Routledge, 2015.

Clark, Beverly Lyon. *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

---. *The Afterlife of Little Women.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014.

'Columbia University Honors Booth Tarkington and Others'. *Current Opinion*, vol. 1, 1922, p. 69.

Coolidge, Susan. *What Katy Did at School/What Katy Did Next.* Wordsworth Editions, 2001.

Coulson, Victoria. *Henry James, Women, and Realism*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Crosland, Thomas William Hodgson. 'Women and Men: Daisy and Dodo'. *Harper's Bazaar*, vol. 27, no. 32, Aug 11, 1894, pp. 634-635. *ProQuest*, https://search.proquest.com/docview/1860667210?accountid=10673.

Crouch, Ian. 'Hemingway's Hidden Metafictions.' *The New Yorker*. 7 Aug. 2014, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/hemingways-hidden-metafictions.

Daly-Galeano, Marlowe. ‘Louisa May Alcott’s Theatre of Time’. *Girls’ Series Fiction and American Popular Culture*, edited by LuElla D’Amico. Lexington Books, 2016, pp. 1-22.

Davidson, Cathy N. Introduction. *The Coquette,* by Hannah Webster Foster, Oxford University Press, 1987.

Dembry, R. Emmet. ‘Flirts and their Ways’. *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science,* vol. 13, no. 5, 1874, pp. 629. *ProQuest,* search.proquest.com/docview/135596269?accountid=10673.

D'Emilio, John, and Estelle B. Freedman. *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*. University of Chicago Press, 1997.

DiCicco, Lorraine. ‘The Enfreakment of America’s Jeune Fille à Marier: Lily Bart to Carrie Bradshaw.’ *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2010, pp. 78–98.

Dickinson, Asa Don. *Booth Tarkington – A Biographical and Bibliographical Sketch*. Doubleday Page, 1926.

Dimock, Wai Chee. ‘Debasing Exchange: Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*’. *The House of Mirth a Casebook,* edited by Carol J. Singley, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 63-84.

Donaldson, Scott. ‘The Wooing of Ernest Hemingway.’ *American Literature*, vol. 53, no. 4, 1982, pp. 691–710.

Doss, Crystal Gorham. ‘Hemingway and the Modern Woman: Brett Ashley and the Flapper Tradition’. *Teaching Hemingway and Gender,* edited by Verna Kale, The Kent State University Press, 2016, pp.129-141.

Douglas, Ann. ‘Introduction to Little Women’. *Little Women and the Feminist Imagination: Criticism, Controversy, Personal Essays,* edited by Janice M Alberghene and Beverly Lyon Clark. Garland, 1999, pp. 43-62.

Douglas, Amanda Minnie. *A Little Girl of Long Ago: Or, Hannah Ann.* The Floating Press, 2015.

Dreiser, Theodore. *Sister Carrie*. World Pub. Co, 1946.

‘Dresses to Dance in, and Flirt in, and Talk in Dresses to Sit in, and Stand in, and Walk In.’ *Harper's Bazaar,* vol. 49, no. 11, 1914, pp. 42–43.

Drizou, Myrto. ‘On Edith Wharton’. *Critical Insights: Edith Wharton,* edited by Myrto Drizou. Salem Press, 2017. pp. xv-xxix.

DuBow, Wendy M. ‘The Businesswoman in Edith Wharton.’ *Edith Wharton Review*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1991, pp. 11–18.

Dunbar, Viola R. ‘The Revision of Daisy Miller.’ *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 65, no. 5, 1950, pp. 311–317.

Elbert, Sarah. *A Hunger for Home: Louisa May Alcott’s Place in American Culture.* Rutgers University Press, 1987.

Erlich, Gloria Chasson. ‘Deadly Innocence: Hawthorne's Dark Women.’ *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 2, 1968, pp. 163–179.

Eugenides, Jeffrey. *The Virgin Suicides*. HarperCollins UK, 2013.

Everett, Marshall. *The Etiquette of Today.* Thompson & Thomas, 1902. *HaithiTrust,* https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=chi.36283262&view=1up&seq=184.

Faulkner, William. *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, edited by Joseph Leo Blotner, Vintage Books, 1978.

Fennimore, Keith J. *Booth Tarkington.* Twayne Publishers, 1974.

Fetterley, Judith. ‘Little Women: Alcott’s Civil War’. *Little Women and the Feminist Imagination: Criticism, Controversy, Personal Essays,* edited by Janice M Alberghene and Beverly Lyon Clark, Garland, 1999, pp. 27-42.

---. ‘The Temptation to Be a Beautiful Object: Double Standard and Double Bind in *The House of Mirth.*’ *Studies in American Fiction*, vol. 5, 1977, pp. 199–211.

Fiedler, Leslie A. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. J. Cape, 1967.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Simon and Schuster, 2003.

---. *Tender Is the Night*. Penguin, 1982.

Fleming, Paul. 'The Art of Flirtation: Simmel's Coquetry without End'. *Flirtations: Rhetoric and Aesthetics This Side of Seduction,* edited by Hoffman-Schwartz et al., Fordham University Press, 2015, pp. 13-18.

Flint, Kate. 'The American Girl and the New Woman'. *Women's Writing*, vol. 3, no. 3, Jan. 1996, pp. 217–29.

'Flirt'. *Oxford Dictionary of English,* edited by Angus Stevenson. 3rd edition, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 670.

'Flirts and Flirtation.' *Every Saturday: A Journal of Choice Reading*, vol. 1, no. 22, May 1874, p. 609, *Proquest.* search.proquest.com/docview/125225052/abstract/61213F629C9404CPQ/1.

Forgacs, David. 'Sex in the Cinema: Regulation and Transgression in Italian Films, 1930-1943'. *Re-viewing Fascism: Italian Cinema, 1922-1943,* edited by Jacqueline Reich and Piero Garofalo, Indiana University Press, 2002, pp. 141-172.

Foster, Shirley and Judy. Simons. *What Katy Read: Feminist Re-Readings of Classic Stories for Girls.* University of Iowa Press, 1995.

Fryer, Judith. *The Faces of Eve: Women in the Nineteenth Century American Novel.* Oxford UP, 1976.

Fulton, Lorie Watkins. 'Reading Around Jake's Narration: Brett Ashley and *The Sun Also Rises*.' *The Hemingway Review,* vol. 24, no. 1, 2004, pp. 61-80.

Gerrard, Ruth Ann. 'Recommended: Booth Tarkington.' *The English Journal*, vol. 73, no. 2, 1984, pp. 95–96.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Herland*. London: Woman's, 1979. Print.

Gottlieb, Madeline Ilana. 'The "Pretty" Lost Generation in Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises.' *The Explicator*, vol. 76, no. 2, 2018, pp. 75-77.

Goodwyn, Janet Beer. *Edith Wharton: Traveller in the Land of Letters.* Macmillan, 1990.

Gorsky, Susan. 'The Gentle Doubters: Images of Women in Englishwomen's Novels 1840-1920'. *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, edited by Susan Koppelman Cornillon, Bowling Green, 1973, pp. 28-54.

Gould, Marty. 'Flirting with Disaster: Sexual Play in the Victorian Periodical', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2004, pp. 273–88.

Green, Walter Cox. *A Dictionary of Etiquette:A Guide to Polite Usage for All Social Functions* . Brentano's, 1904, *Haithitrust,* http://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.rsm9av.

Hall, Jeffrey et al. 'Accurately Detecting Flirting: Error Management Theory, the Traditional Sexual Script, and Flirting Base Rate.' *Communication Research,* vol. 42, no.7, 2015, pp. 939–958.

Hamilton-Honey, Emily. *Turning the Pages of American Girlhood: The Evolution of Girls' Series Fiction, 1865-1930.* McFarland, 2013.

Hammill, Faye. *Women, Celebrity, and Literary Culture Between the Wars*. University of Texas Press, 2009.

Hapke, Laura. *Girls Who Went Wrong: Prostitutes in American Fiction, 1885-1917.* Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989.

Hartley, Florence. *The Ladies' Book of Etiquette, and Manual of Politeness*. CreateSpace, 2017.

Hassan, Ihab Habib. *Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel.* Princeton University Press, 1961.

Harris, Charles. *Contemporary American Novelists of the Absurd.* Rowman & Littlefield, 1972.

Hawks, Howard. *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. 20th Century Fox, 1953.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Marble Faun, Or, The Romance of Monte Beni*. Penguin, 1990.

---. *The Scarlet Letter*. Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1950.

Hays, Peter L. 'Imperial Brett in *The Sun Also Rises*.' *ANQ*, vol. 23. No.4, 2010, pp. 238-242.

Haytock, Jennifer Anne. *Edith Wharton and the Conventions of Literary Modernism.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Hedgecock, Jennifer. *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature: The Danger and the Sexual Threat.* Cambria Press, 2008.

Hegeman, Susan. 'Taking Blondes Seriously.' *American Literary History*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1995, pp. 535–54.

Heileman, Myrtle . 'The Modern Riddle.' *The Flapper*, Nov. 1922, p. 2, http://www.oldmagazinearticles.com/flapper_article_in_praise-of-FLAPPERS-pdf.

Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. Random House, 1994.

---. 'The Unpublished Opening of "The Sun Also Rises".' *Antaeus*, edited by Daniel Halpern, vol. 33, no. 1, 1979, pp. 7–14.

Henningsen, David Dryden. 'Flirting with Meaning: An Examination of Miscommunication in Flirting Interactions.' *Sex Roles*, vol. 50, no.7, 2004, pp. 481–489.

'Henry James's "Daisy Miller".' *Scribner's Monthly*, no. 4, 1879, p. 609. *Proquest*, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/docview/125527972?accountid=10673.

Hocker, Arne. 'Playing with Yourself: On the Self-Reference of Flirtation' *Flirtations: Rhetoric and Aesthetics This Side of Seduction*, edited by Hoffman-Schwartz, et al., Fordham University Press, 2015, pp. 51 -60.

Hoffman-Schwartz, Daniel, et al. Introduction. *Flirtations: Rhetoric and Aesthetics This Side of Seduction*. Fordham University Press, 2015. pp.1-10.

Holliday, Robert Cortes. *Booth Tarkington: A Critical Appraisal.* Doubleday, 1918

Holliday-Karre, Erin. '"Dr. Froyd Seemed to Think That I Was Quite a Famous Case": Sexual Discourse in 1920's Feminism and Fiction.' *Women's Studies*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2016, pp. 323-340.

Hollinger, Karen, and Teresa Winterhalter. 'A Feminist Romance: Adapting *Little Women* to the Screen.' *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1999, pp. 173–192.

Holt, Emily. *Encyclopaedia of Etiquette: What to Write, What to Do, What to Wear, What to Say. A Book of Manners for Everyday Use.* McClure, Phillips & Co., 1901. *Internet Archives,* https://archive.org/details/cu31924014097301.

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Prestwick House Inc, 2006.

Hovet, Grace Ann. *Tableaux Vivants: Female Identity Development Through Everyday Performance.* Xlibris, 2009.

Howard, Maureen. '*The House of Mirth*: The Bachelor and the Baby'. *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton,* edited by Millicent Bell. Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 137-156.

Howe, Irving. *Thomas Hardy.* Macmillan, 1967.

Howells, William Dean. *Heroines of Fiction.* Harper and Brothers, 1901.

'Is the Younger Generation in Peril'. *Literary Digest.* 14 May, 1921, pp. 9-12.

Jacobs, Lea. *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942.* University of Wisconsin Press, 1991.

James, Henry. *Daisy Miller and Other Stories.* Penguin Modern Classics, 1983.

---. *Daisy Miller: A Comedy in Three Acts.* Houghton Mifflin, c.1883. *Internet Archive.* https://archive.org/details/daisymiller00jamerich/page/n11.

--- .'Daisy Miller', *The Novels and Tales of Henry James Volume 18.* Scribner, 1909, pp. 8-94. *Internet Archive.* https://archive.org/details/novelsandtalesh19unkngoog/page/n71.

---. *Henry James: Selected letters,* edited by Leon Edel, Harvard University Press, 1987.

---**.** *The Portrait of a Lady.* Oxford University Press, 2009.

Jenkins, Carrie. 'The Philosophy of Flirting'. *Dating - Philosophy for Everyone: Flirting With Big Ideas,* edited by Kristie Miller and Marlene Clark, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, pp.11-18.

Jung, Yonjae. 'The New Americanist Intervention into the Canon.' *American Studies International,* vol. 42, no. 2, 2004, pp. 213–225.

Kar, Annette. ‘Archetypes of American Innocence: Lydia Blood and Daisy Miller.’ *American Quarterly*, vol. 5, 1953, pp. 31–38.

Kaye, Richard A. *The Flirt’s Tragedy: Desire Without End in Victorian and Edwardian Fiction*. University of Virginia Press, 2002.

Keyser, Elizabeth Lennox. *Little Women a Family Romance*. Twayne Publishers, 1999.

Kinder, Marsha. *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain*. University of California Press, 1993.

King, Shelley, and Yaël Rachel Schlick. *Refiguring the Coquette: Essays on Culture and Coquetry*. Associated University Press, 2008.

Knights, Pamela. ‘The Marriage Market’. *Edith Wharton in Context*, edited by Laura Rattray. Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 223 - 233.

Koeppel, Liana B, et al. *Interpersonal Communication: Evolving Interpersonal Relationships*, edited by Pamela Kalbfleisch. Psychology Press, 2013, pp. 13-32.

Lambert, Deborah G. ‘The House of Mirth: Readers Respond.’ *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1985, pp. 69-82.

Landay, Lori. *Madcaps, Screwballs, and Con Women: The Female Trickster in American Culture*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.

Langan, Emily. ‘Good Girls Don’t, but Boys Don’t Either: Toward a Conservative Position on Male Flirting’. *Dating – Philosophy for Everyone: Flirting with Big Ideas*, edited by Kristie Miller and Marlene Clark, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, pp.19-36.

LaVerne, Marie June. ‘Flappers Flapped in Grandmother’s Time.’ *The Flapper*, June 1922, p. 33. *Old Magazine Articles.* http://www.oldmagazinearticles.com/draw_pdf.php?filename=Flappers_Flapped.pdf.

Ledger, Sally. *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin De Siècle*. Manchester University Press, 1997.

Lennox, Charlotte. *The Life of Harriot Stuart, Written by Herself*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997.

Leuchtenburg, William. *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932*. University of Chicago Press, 2010

Levine, Jessica. *Delicate Pursuit: Discretion in Henry James and Edith Wharton.* Routledge, 2002.

Lewis, R. W. B. *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century.* University of Chicago, 1955.

Lidoff, Joan. 'Another Sleeping Beauty: Narcissism in *The House of Mirth*'. *The House of Mirth a Casebook,* edited by Carol J. Singley, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 181-209.

Limerick, Patricia Nelson. *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West.* Norton, 1987.

Loebel, Thomas. 'Beyond Her Self'. *New Essays on 'The House of Mirth',* edited by Deborah Esch, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 107-132.

'Little Girls'. *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine*, vol. 53, no. 9, 1856, pp. 250. *ProQuest*, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/docview/126085914?accountid=10673.

Loos, Anita. 'History of the Preferred Blondes'. *Fate Keeps on Happening: Adventures of Lorelei Lee and Other Writings*. Edited by Ray Pierre Corsini. G.Harrap & Co Ltd, 1985, pp. 30-34.

---. *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes: The Illuminating Diary of a Professional Lady; and, But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes*. Penguin, 1998.

Lukacs, Paul. 'Unambiguous Ambiguity: The International Theme of Daisy Miller.' *Studies in American Fiction*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1988, pp. 209–216.

Lupold, Eva. 'Queering the Katy Series: Disability, Emotion, and Imagination in the Novels of Susan Coolidge'. *Girls' Series Fiction and American Popular Culture*, edited by LuElla D'Amico, Lexington Books, 2016. 23-46.

Lynn, Kenneth Schuyler. *Hemingway*. Harvard University Press, 1995.

Mackrell, Judith. *Flappers: Six Women of a Dangerous Generation*. Pan Macmillan, 2013.

MacLeod, Anne Scott. *A Moral Tale: Children's Fiction and American Culture 1820 - 1860.* Archon Books, 1975.

---. *American Childhood: Essays on Children's Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.* The University of Georgia Press, 1994.

Mahoney, Erin. '*The House of Mirth* and the Realistic Fairy Tale.' *The Explicator*, vol. 68, no. 1, 2009, pp. 36–38.

Marsh, Sarah. 'Malaria and the Revision of "Daisy Miller"' *Literature and Medicine,* vol. 30 no. 2, 2012, pp. 217-240.

McCrum, Robert. 'The 100 Best Novels: No 49 – *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* by Anita Loos (1925).' *The Guardian,* Aug 25. 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/aug/25/100-best-novels-gentlemen-prefer-blondes-anita-loos-robert-mccrum.

McDonald, Gail. *American Literature and Culture 1900-1960.* Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

McPartland, John. 'Our Changing Sexual Code.' *Coronet,* Aug. 1955, pp. 146–51.

Merish, Lori. 'Engendering Naturalism:Narrative Form and Commodity Spectacle in U.S Naturalist Fiction'. '*The House of Mirth': A Casebook,* edited by Carol J. Singley, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 229-270.

Miller, Linda Patterson. 'In love with Papa'.*Hemingway and Women: Female Critics and the Female Voice*, edited by Lawrence R. Broer and Gloria Holland, University of Alabama Press, 2002, pp. 3-22.

Mitchell, Margaret. *Gone with the Wind.* Simon and Schuster, 2007.

'Modern Flirtation.' *The Albion, A Journal of News, Politics and Literature,* vol. 47, no.19, May 8, 1869, p. 250. *ProQuest*, https://search.proquest.com/docview/89562781?accountid=10673.

Montgomery, Maureen E. *Displaying Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith Wharton's New York.* Routledge, 1998.

Moody, Winfield Scott. 'Daisy Miller and the Gibson Girl'. *Ladies' Home Journal,* vol 21, no. 10, 1904, p. 17. *Proquest,* https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/docview/1715409804?accountid=10673&rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3Aprimo.

Moore, Kathleen. 'Edith Wharton's Lily Bart and the Subject of Agency.' *Edith Wharton Review,* vol. 19, no. 1, 2003, pp. 8–15.

Moruzi, Kristine, and Michelle J. Smith. *Girls' School Stories, 1749-1929.* Routledge, 2014. Vol 1.

Mueller, Monika. *George Eliot U.S.: Transatlantic Literary and Cultural Perspectives.* Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005.

Murphy, Ann B. 'The Borders of Ethical, Erotic, and Artistic Possibilities in *Little Women*'. *Signs,* vol. 15, no. 3, 1990, pp. 562-585.

Murray, Gail Schmunk. *American Children's Literature and the Construction of Childhood.* Twayne Publishers, 1998.

Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lolita*. Penguin, 2012.

Nagel, Barbara Natalie. 'Three Terrors of Flirtation. *Flirtations: Rhetoric and aesthetics this side of seduction,* edited by Hoffman-Schwartz, et al., Fordham University Press, 2015, pp. 101-105.

Nagel, James. 'Brett and the Other Women in *The Sun Also Rises*', *The Cambridge Companion to Hemingway,* edited by Scott Donaldson, Cambridge University Press, 1996. pp. 87-108.

Najarian, James. 'The Victorian Novel in the Material World.' *Studies in the Novel*, vol 37, no 2 , 2005, pp. 223-31.

'New Books'. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,* vol. 126, no. 765, 1879, pp. 88-107. *Proquest,* https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/docview/6558473?accountid=10673.

'New Books and Old.' *The Bookman*, vol. 45, no. 265, Oct. 1913, pp. 48–50. *Proquest.* https://search-proquest-

com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/docview/3053739?accountid=10673&rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3Aprimo&imgSeq=1.

Nikolajeva, Maria. *Aesthetic Approaches to Children's Literature.* Scarecrow Press, 2005.

Nolan, Charles J. '"A Little Crazy": Psychiatric Diagnoses of Three Hemingway Women Characters.' *The Hemingway Review,* vol. 28, no. 2, 2009, pp. 105 -120.

Noonan, Mark J. 'The Campaign for Realism in the New Periodical Press.' *The Oxford Handbook of American Literature,* edited by Keith Newlin, Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 287–303.

Nyquist, Mary. 'Determining Influences: Resistance and Mentorship in "The House of Mirth" and the Anglo-American Realist Tradition'. *New Essays on The House of Mirth,* edited by Deborah Esch, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp.43-106.

O'Leary Margaret. 'More Ado About the Flapper.' *New York Times,* Apr 16. 1922, p. 49. *The New York Times Archives.* https://www.nytimes.com/1922/04/16/archives/more-ado-about-the-flapper.html.

Onderdonk, Todd. '"Bitched": Feminization, Identity, and the Hemingwayesque in "The Sun Also Rises."' *Twentieth Century Literature,* vol. 52, no. 1, 2006, pp. 61–91.

Orlando, Emily J. *Edith Wharton and the Visual Arts.* University of Alabama Press, 2007.

Palacios, José Antonio Gurpegui. *Hemingway and Existentialism.* Universitat de València, 2014.

Pattee, Amy. 'Considering Popular Fiction and Library Practices of Recommendation: The Literary Status of "The Clique" and Its Historical Progenitors.' *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy,* vol. 78, no. 1, 2008, pp. 71–98.

Paul, Heike. *The Myths That Made America: An Introduction to American Studies*. Transcript Verlag, 2014.

Pennell, Melissa McFarland. *Student Companion to Edith Wharton*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003.

Person, Leland S. *Henry James and the Suspense of Masculinity*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.

Pettit, Rhonda S. *The Critical Waltz: Essays on the Work of Dorothy Parker*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005.

Petty, Leslie. '"If You've Had Your Woman, I've Had . . . My Man": May Bartram's Ambivalence in "The Beast in the Jungle"'. *Transforming Henry James,* edited by Anna De Biasio et al. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, pp. 242-256.

Phillips, Adam. *On Flirtation*. Harvard University Press, 1994.

Phillips, Anne K and Greg Eiselein. 'The Varieties of Adolescent Experience: Coming of Age in Alcott's *Little Women'. Coming of Age in American Fiction,* edited by Kent Baxter, Salem Press, 2003, pp.149-166.

Phillips, Lynn. *Flirting with Danger*. NYU Press, 2000.

Pratt, Linda Ray. 'The Abuse of Eve by the New World Adam.' *Images of Women in Literature: Feminist Perspectives,* edited by Susan Koppelman Cornillon, Bowling Green University Press, 1972, pp. 155-174.

Price, Alan. 'Lily Bart and Carrie Meeber: Cultural Sisters.' *American Literary Realism,* vol. 13, no. 2, 1980, pp. 238–245.

Prigozy, Ruth. *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

'Proposals for Female Clubs'. *Godey's Lady's Book,* vol. 8, 1832, pp. 77, *Proquest,* https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/docview/126100244?accountid=10673.

Puckett, James A. '"Sex Explains It All": Male Performance, Evolution, and Sexual Selection in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises.*' *Studies in American Naturalism,* vol. 8, no. 2, 2013, pp. 125–149.

Puckett, Kent. *Bad Form: Social Mistakes and the Nineteenth-Century Novel*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Randall, John H. 'The Genteel Reader and Daisy Miller.' *American Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1965, pp. 568–581.

Rattray, Laura. *Edith Wharton in Context.* Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Raub, Patricia. 'A New Woman or an Old-Fashioned Girl? The Portrayal of the Heroine in Popular Women's Novels of the Twenties.' *American Studies*, vol. 35, no. 1, 1994, pp. 109–30.

'Recent Fiction.' *The Dial*; vol. 647, 1913, p. 462. *Proquest.* https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/docview/89670960?accountid=10673

Restuccia, Frances L. 'The Name of the Lily: Edith Wharton's Feminism(s).' *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 28, no. 2, 1987, pp. 223–238.

'Review 1 -- no title'. *Outlook,* Apr. 5. 1913, pp. 778-780. *Proquest.* https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/docview/136631331?accountid=10673

Reynolds, Guy. *Twentieth-Century American Women's Fiction: A Critical Introduction*. St. Martin's, 1999.

Richardson, Abby Sage. 'Daisy Millerism.' *Christian Union*, vol. 21, no. 8, Feb 25. 1880, p. 184. *ProQuest*, https://search.proquest.com/docview/136717663?accountid=10673.

Rioux, Anne Boyd. *Meg, Jo, Beth, Amy: The Story of 'Little Women' and Why It Still Matters*. W. W. Norton, 2018.

Robinson, Jenny. 'How Katy Lied: Pictures of Joy and Pain in *What Katy Did* and Other American Girls' Stories'. *Radiant Hour: Versions of Youth in American Culture,* edited by Neil Campbell, University of Exeter Press, 2000, pp. 88-114.

Rosenberg, Warren. Making Masculinity Visible; Teaching 'Daisy Miller' at an All-Male College. *Approaches to Teaching Henry James's Daisy Miller and The Turn of the Screw.* Edited by Kimberly C. Reed and Peter G. Beidler. The Modern Language Association of America, 2005.

Rowbotham, Judith. *Good Girls Make Good Wives.* Basil Blackwell, 1989.

Rowland, Helen. *Reflections of a Bachelor Girl*. Dodge Pub, 1909.

Russ, Joanna. 'What can a heroine do? Or why can't women write?' *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, edited by Susan Koppelman Cornillon, Bowling Green University Press, 1973, pp. 3-22.

Samp, Jennifer, and Andrew Cohen. 'Love for Sale: Dating as a Calculated Exchange'. *Dating – Philosophy for Everyone: Flirting With Big Ideas*, edited by Kristie Miller and Marlene Clark, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, pp. 37-48.

Sapora, Carol Baker. 'Female Doubling: The Other Lily Bart in Edith Wharton's "The House of Mirth."' *Papers on Language & Literature*, vol. 29, no. 4,1993, p. 371-395.

Sarason, Bertram D. 'Lady Brett Ashley and Lady Duff Twysden'. *Brett Ashley*, edited and with an introduction by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, c1991, pp. 86-95.

Saunders, Judith. *Reading Edith Wharton Through a Darwinian Lens: Evolutionary Biological Issues in Her Fiction.* McFarland, 2009.

Schwartz, Nina. 'Lovers' Discourse in "The Sun Also Rises": A Cock and Bull Story.' *Criticism*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1984, pp. 49–69.

Schiller, Emily. 'The Choice of Innocence: Hilda in *The Marble Faun*.' *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1994, pp. 372–91.

Schlesinger, Arthur Meier. *Learning How to Behave: A Historical Study of American Etiquette Books.* Cooper Square Publishers, 1968.

Seelye, John. *Jane Eyre's American Daughters: From 'The Wide, Wide World' to 'Anne of Green Gables': A Study of Marginalized Maidens and What They Mean*. University of Delaware Press, 2005.

Settle, Glenn. 'Fitzgerald's Daisy: The Siren Voice.' *American Literature*, vol. 57, no. 1, 1985, pp. 115–24.

Shaheen, Aaron. 'Straight, Pure, and Natural: Spiritualization and Penile Prostheses in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*.' *Modern Fiction Studies,* vol. 65, no. 1, 2019, pp. 152-172.

Shen, Jingnan. 'Different Themes Rendered with Similar Approaches -A Comparison Between 'The Sun Also Rises' and 'The Great Gatsby'.' *Theory and Practice in Language Studies,* vol. 2, no. 8, Aug. 2012, pp. 1728–1732, doi:10.4304/tpls.2.8.1728-1732.

Shizuko, Lauren Stone. 'Staging Appeal, Performing Ambivalence'. *Flirtations: Rhetoric and Aesthetics This Side of Seduction,* edited by Hoffman-Schwartz at al., Fordham University Press, 2015, pp. 61-64.

Showalter, Elaine. 'The Death of the Lady (Novelist)'. '*The House of Mirth': A Casebook,* edited by Carol. J. Singley, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 39-61.

---. 'Towards a Feminist Poetics'. *Feminist Literary Theory,* edited by Mary Eagleton, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp. 222-225.

---. 'Spragg: The Art of the Deal.' *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton,* edited by Millicent Bell, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 87–97.

Shumaker, Scott. '*The House of Mirth* and the Desert of the Real: Edith Wharton and Hyperreality.' *The Explicator,* vol. 73, no. 4, 2015, pp. 316–319.

Sigal, Clancy. *Hemingway Lives: Why Reading Ernest Hemingway Matters Today*. OR Books, 2013.

Silverman, Jonathan. 'Lorelei's Doomed Performance: Anita Loos and the American Dream.' *Prospects,* vol. 27, 2002, pp. 547–568.

Simon, Caroline. *Bringing Sex into Focus: The Quest for Sexual Integrity.* IVP Books, 2012.

Simon, Linda. 'Flappers Took the Country by Storm, but Did They Ever Truly Go Away.' *Smithsonian,* September, 2017, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/flappers-took-country-storm-ever-go-away-180964412/.

Sims, Sue, and Hilary Clare. Introduction. *The Encyclopaedia of Girls' School Stories,* edited by Sims and Clare. Taylor and Francis, 2000, pp. 1-18.

Singley, Carol J. *Edith Wharton: Matters of Mind and Spirit*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.

---. Introduction. '*The House of Mirth': A Casebook,* edited by Carol J. Singley, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 3-27.

Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. 'Discourses of Sexuality and Subjectivity: The New Woman 1870-1936'. *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past,* edited by Martin Duberman et al. New American Library, 1989, pp. 264-81.

---. *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*. Oxford University Press, 1986.

Sorkin, Adam J. '"She Doesn't Last, Apparently": A Reconsideration of Booth Tarkington's Alice Adams.' *American Literature*, vol. 46, no. 2, 1974, pp. 182–99.

Soto, Michael. *The Modernist Nation: Generation, Renaissance, and Twentieth-Century American Literature*. University of Alabama Press, 2004.

Stafford, William T., and Henry James. *James's Daisy Miller: The Story, the Play, the Critics*. Scribner, 1963.

Steinbeck, John. *Of Mice and Men.* Penguin UK, 2000.

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula.* Ignatius Press, 2012.

Stoneley, Peter. *Consumerism and American Girls' Literature, 1860–1940.* Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Stover, Deanna. 'American Woman: Feminine Speech and the Reformation of National Identity Through Female Community in Louisa May Alcott's An Old-Fashioned Girl.' *Women's Writing*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2018, pp. 80–94.

Tally, Robert, Jr. 'A Utopia of the In-Between'. *Landscapes of Liminality: Between Space and Place*, edited by Dara Downey et al., Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, pp. ix-xv.

Tate, Mary Jo. *Critical Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Life and Work.* Critical Companion, 2007.

Tarkington, Booth. *Alice Adams.* New York: Random House LLC, 2014.

---. *Claire Ambler.* Doubleday, 1928.

---. *The Flirt.* New York: Grosset & Dunlap Publishers, c.1913.

---. *Women.* London: W.Heinemann, 1926.

---. *Seventeen.* New York: Buccaneer Books, 1983.

'The American Girl.' *New York Times*, Sep 24. 1906, p. 6. *ProQuest*, https://search.proquest.com/docview/96631713?accountid=10673.

'The Art of Flirtation.' *New York Times*, 1911, p. X7, *Proquest*, https://search.proquest.com/docview/97166425/abstract/D2884FF3ABF04A48PQ/1.

'The Flirt.' *Harper's Bazaar,* vol. 9, no. 38, September. 1876, p. 594, *Proquest*, https://search.proquest.com/docview/125667087/abstract/77FA1B

'The Innocent Girls' *The Albion; A Journal of News, Politics and Literature,* vol 52, no. 43, 1876, p.9.

'The Song of the Flirt.' *The Washington Post*, Jan. 12. 1887, p. 2. *Proquest Historical Newspapers,* https://search.proquest.com/docview/138116144?accountid=10673.

Thomas, Kate. *Postal Pleasures: Sex, Scandal, and Victorian Letters.* Oxford University Press, 2012.

'Those Fluttering Flappers.' *Evening World*, Apr. 20, 1920, p.1, *Historic American Newspapers*, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030193/1920-04-20/ed-1/seq-21/.

Tillman, Lynne. 'Edith Wharton: A Mole in the House of the Modern.' *Conjunction*s, vol. 29, 1997, pp. 122–125.

Timlow, Elizabeth Weston. *A Nest of Girls; or, Boarding-school days.* New York: E.P. Dutton, c1901. *LOC, Online Archive,* http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gdc/scd0001.00025668339. 20th March 2019.

--- *The Opportunity of the Teacher.* E.P. Dutton, 1910. *LOC Online Archive,* https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t3kw5w485.

Tischleder, Bärbel. 'The Deep Surface of Lily Bart: Visual Economies and Commodity Culture in Wharton and Dreiser.' *American Studies*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2009, pp. 59–78.

Tolchin, Karen R. *Part Blood, Part Ketchup: Coming of Age in American Literature and Film.* Lexington Books, 2007.

Tomkins, David. 'The "Lost Generation" and the Generation of Loss: Ernest Hemingway's Materiality of Absence and *The Sun Also Rises*.' *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 54, no. 4, 2008, pp. 744–65.

Town, Caren J. 'The House of Mirrors: Carrie, Lily and the Reflected Self.' *Modern Language Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3, 1994, pp. 44–54.

Tracy, Daniel. 'From Vernacular Humor to Middlebrow Modernism: Gentlemen Prefer Blondes and the Creation of Literary Value.' *Arizona Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 1, Mar. 2010, pp. 115–43.

Trites, Roberta Seelinger. 'Queer Performances – Lesbian Politics in Little Women'. *Little Women and the Feminist Imagination: Criticism, Controversy, Personal Essays,* edited by Janice M Alberghene and Beverly Lyon Clark, Garland, 1999, pp. 139-160.

Turner, Victor. 'Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage'. *Betwixt and Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation*, edited by Louise Carus Mahdi et al., Open Court, 1987, pp. 3-22.

---. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Routledge, 1969.

Tuttleton, James W., et al. *Edith Wharton: The Contemporary Reviews.* Cambridge University Press, 1992.

'Two Minor Novels'. *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art,* vol. 51, 1881, pp. 376–377. *Proquest,* https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/docview/9655154?accountid=10673.

Vallone, Lynne. *Disciplines of Virtue: Girls' Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.* Yale University Press, 1995.

Valverde, Mariana. 'The Love of Finery: Fashion and the Fallen Woman in Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse.' *Victorian Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1989, pp. 169-188.

Vinken, Barbara. 'Frill and Flirtation: Femininity in the Public Space'. *Flirtations: Rhetoric and Aesthetics This Side of Seduction*, edited by Hoffman-Schwartz et al., Fordham University Press, 2015, pp. 82-90

'Violent Crime and Sexual Offences – Intimate Personal Violence and Serious Sexual Assault'. *Office for National Statistics*. https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/compendium/focusonviolentcrimeandsexualoffences/2015-02-12/chapter4violentcrimeandsexualoffencesintimatepersonalviolenceandserioussexualassault.

Von Cannon, Michael. 'Traumatizing Arcadia: Postwar Pastoral in The Sun Also Rises.' *The Hemingway Review*, vol. 32, no.1, 2012, pp. 57-71. *Project Muse*, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/497560.

Wagner, Linda W. 'Proud and Friendly and Gently: Women in Hemingway's Early Fiction.' *College Literature*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1980, pp. 239–247. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25111345.

Wagner-Martin, Linda. '*The House of Mirth': A Novel of Admonition*. Twayne, 1990.

---. 'Zelda Sayre, Belle.' *Southern Cultures*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2004, pp. 19–49.

Wall, Barbara. *The Narrator's Voice: The Dilemma of Children's Fiction*. St Martin's Press, 1991.

Wardley, Lynn. 'Reassembling *Daisy Miller*.' *American Literary History*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1991, pp. 232–54.

Warner, Charles Dudley. *A Library of the World's Best Literature.* Cosimo, 2009.

Warren, Joyce. *The American Narcissus and the Woman as a Non-person: A Study in Nineteenth-Century American Literature.* Columbia University Press, 1981.

Wershoven, Carol. *The Female Intruder in the Novels of Edith Wharton.* Fairleigh Dickinson Univ Press, 1982.

West, Elliott and Paula Petrik. Introduction. *Small Worlds: Children & Adolescents in America, 1850-1950,* edited by Elliott West and Paula Petrik, University Press of Kansas, 1992, pp. 1-8.

Wharton, Edith. *The House of Mirth.* Wordsworth Classics, 2002

---. *A Backward Glance*. Wildhern Press, 2008.

---. *The Age of Innocence.* VIVI Books: London, 2014.

---. *The Reef*. New York: Syndicate publishing co, 1912

---. *The Custom of the Country.* Oxford University Press, 2000.

---. *Roman Fever and Other Stories,* edited by Cynthia Griffin Wolff, Scribner, 2013,

Wilcox, Ella Wheeler. 'The Fettered Flirts'. *The Washington Post,* Dec 17. 1893, p. 18. *Proquest,* https://search.proquest.com/docview/138910563/abstract/544175E265C942A6PQ/1?accountid=10673.

Willis, Rachel. 'Defusing Violence: Manoeuvring Confrontation in *The Sun Also Rises*.' *James Dickey Review,* vol. 29, no. 1, 2012, pp. 47–57.

Winchell, Mark Royden. *Too Good to be True: The Life and Work of Leslie Fiedler.* University of Missouri Press, 2002

Woodress, James Leslie. *Booth Tarkington, Gentleman from Indiana*. Greenwood Press, 1969.

Wortman, W. A. 'The Interminable Dramatic *Daisy Miller*'. *The Henry James Review,* vol. 28 no. 3, 2007, pp. 281-291.

Wray, Matt, and Annalee Newitz. *White Trash: Race and Class in America.* Routledge: New York, 1997.

Yeazell, Ruth Bernard. *Fictions of Modesty: Women and Courtship in the English Novel.* University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Zimring, Rishona. *Social Dance and the Modernist Imagination in Interwar Britain*. Routledge, 2016.